

Conducting Interviews - from [Using Primary Sources | Thoughtful Learning](#)

By interviewing an expert, you can ask questions and find answers you may have difficulty finding anywhere else. Carefully chosen quotations from an expert can also add authority to your research report. Types of interviews:

Live: Whether in person or by video conference, phone, or text chat, a live interview allows you to adapt questions and lines of inquiry as you go.

Correspondence: An interview by mail or email is less spontaneous than a live interview, but it provides a record of questions and answers.

Before the interview . . .

Do basic research. Learn as much as possible about your topic. Don't waste the interviewee's time with basic questions.

Prepare a list of questions. The better the questions, the better the answers. Write open-ended questions that invite extensive answers.

Identify possible experts. Refer to your basic research to determine good candidates for an interview.

Arrange for an interview. Contact one or more people from your list, identify yourself and your purpose, and politely ask for an interview. Schedule it at your interviewee's convenience.

During the interview . . .

Be polite. Remember that the interviewee is doing you a favor. Experts are often very busy people, and taking time for an interview is a kindness.

Ask permission to record and quote. While most interviewees won't mind, never assume that is the case. Always ask for permission.

Pay attention. In a live interview, listen carefully and take notes. In a correspondence interview, carefully consider the person's answers. In either case, ask for clarification if needed.

Be prepared to reword a question if the interviewee doesn't understand. Also ask follow-up questions if you need more information.

Review your notes before ending the interview. Make sure that they are accurate and that you haven't forgotten anything.

Ask for recommendations of other sources of good information.

Thank your interviewee for his or her help.

After the interview . .

Send a thank-you note to the interviewee.

Review your notes and politely follow up with any further questions.

Consider offering a copy of your finished work to the interviewee.

