



Conducting Successful Interviews

Presented by
Vincent F. DeMiero

Instructor/Adviser

Mountlake Terrace High School

Philosophy & Purpose

- Why do we do interviews in journalism?
- Why is gathering source information via “interview, not internet” so important?
(Thanks to Fern Valentine for the quote)
- What’s the value of primary source information in news stories?
- Get the *right info* from the *right people* at the *right time* in the *right way*.

Preparation

- The incredible importance of being prepared – even when you think you can't be
- Two cautionary tales...
 - Brock Adams
 - “The Dennis Erickson Show”

Preparation, cont.

- Have a clear concept of the story and all major angles.
- Identify *who* should be interviewed.
 - Primary sources are critical to successful news writing
 - Who will your audience expect to be quoted?
 - Avoid interviewing anyone based on convenience

Preparation, cont.

- Get as much background material as possible
 - Less in, less out
 - Unless you educate yourself, how will you inform your readers?
- Prepare your interviewing style
 - Practice parroting and paraphrasing
 - Practice note-taking looking up

Preparation, cont.

- Prepare your interviewing notes
 - Make sure to ask the basics:
 - Name, middle initial, nicknames
 - Pronouns
 - Age
 - Correct / relevant title
 - Other pertinent information
 - Form a working outline and list key 5W 1H 1A 1C questions
 - Make sure your questions are appropriate

ADVANCED INFO

Preparation, cont.

- Know the culture, jargon and etiquette
- Know answers to your key questions *
- Know exactly how “it” works *
 - Understand the organization, process, person, technology, etc.

Preparation, cont.

- In person interviews (best):
 - Set an appointment and confirm that you are calling at a good time
 - Plan for an appropriate interview setting
 - Confirm your meeting
 - Be on time
 - Don't be late and don't be too early

Preparation, cont.

- Have the right tools:
 - Note pad, reporter's notebook
 - Pencils
 - Your best shorthand
 - Optional – a digital recorder
- **NOTE:** *Be sure that your equipment is completely ready, too. Never let technology defeat a great interview.*

The Interview

- **ALL HSM STAFF MUST DO THIS**
- **Important disclaimer:**
 - *Before you do anything, clearly introduce yourself*
 - *Identify who you represent*
 - *Inform your source that the information from this interview may be used in a story for publication in your paper or yearbook, or broadcast on your station*

The Interview, cont.

- You **must** be there to tell the story
 - Go to the game, event, meeting, etc.
- There's no news in the news room
 - It's very obvious when you read a paper, read a yearbook, listen to a radio broadcast or watch a TV news program whether the writer really did any reporting

The Interview, cont.

- Take good care of the basics early in the interview (see above)
- Set the tone and establish your focus
- Ask all those great questions you prepared
- Listen to understand
- Allow answers to trigger new questions or modify other quotes

The Interview, cont.

ADVANCED INFO

- Interview people in the place where they do what you're going to write about
- Find common ground early
- If you get your source to talk about *something*, he or she will talk about *anything* *

The Interview, cont.

ADVANCED INFO

- Reiterate key points and allow clarification and/or elaboration
- Consider asking your sources the following two questions:
 - How do you know that?
 - Who else should I talk to about this?

The Interview, cont.

ADVANCED INFO

If appropriate, consider asking the following questions: *

- What was the exact chronology of events?
- Could you give me a list of people who were involved?
- When somebody spends money in this organization, where is that written down? *
- When somebody makes a mistake in this organization, where is that written down? *

The Interview, cont.

- Avoid ending an interview with a question still in your mind
- **DeMiero's Theorem No. 1:** Last question you ask: "Is there anything else you'd like to add?" Be prepared!
- Do not accept anything "off the record" or "on background"
- Thank your source and find out how / when to contact him / her later for clarification

Post-Interview

- Organize all your information
- Analyze your information
 - Are there any holes?
 - Do you need to follow up with a source?
 - Do you need to contact other sources?
- What information needs to be confirmed?

Post-Interview, cont.

- Do you need to meet with your editor?
- Do you need to meet with your adviser?
- Read your notes and begin writing
 - Don't worry about precise organization at first
 - Get the key information and quotes down
 - Read your story *out loud* to be sure it's what you want your audience to *hear*
 - Get an objective critique of your story by a fellow writer or editor

Post-Interview, cont.

ADVANCED INFO

Other considerations:

- What kind of graphic elements will best support this story?
- How will this story be most effective online? On a smartphone?
- Communicate effectively and consistently with your editor throughout the process
- Consider re-writing your lead to emphasize the most recent developments

Post-Publication

ADVANCED INFO

- Check back...
 - After the story runs, call, email or meet with your sources and get their reactions
 - *Can help you improve your reporting*
 - *Maintains contact with sources*
 - *Oftentimes, additional stories will develop*

Notes & Thanks

- Thanks to all of my mentors who have helped me become a better interviewer
- Thanks to my students who teach me something new just about every day about journalism
- If you spotted an * asterisk along the way, odds are I stole that idea from two-time Pulitzer Prize winning investigative journalist Eric Nalder who is now retired

Contact Information

- Vincent F. DeMiero
 - Mountlake Terrace High School
21801 - 44th Avenue West
Mountlake Terrace, WA 98043
 - 425-431-7770
 - www.TeachFreeSpeech.com
 - DeMieroV@edmonds.wednet.edu

