Research, Write, Publish | Narrative Writing

Interview Questions

**Key Concept**

How can you understand another person’s point of view? One good way is to ask questions. What kinds of things affect a person’s point of view? What questions would give you important information about those things?

When you ask a person a series of questions, you conduct an *interview*. Imagine you could interview anyone who ever lived. Whose point of view would you most want to understand? Can you interview a person who is no longer living? How about a character in a novel or the subject of a work of art? Yes you can! You can guess how a person would answer your interview questions. But how can you make sure your guesses are accurate? You need to do your research.

The first step to a good interview is to develop questions that you would like to ask the main character in your fictional narrative. Effective interview questions help you understand your character’s point of view. Later, you use your questions to conduct research about your main character and the event the character experienced. Then, you answer the interview questions yourself by using what you learned to imagine that you are the main character.

**Look Ahead**

**Task:** Write some questions to help you understand the main character in your narrative.

**Goal:** Ask questions that will help you tell an interesting and meaningful story about the character.

You may want to review an example of *interview questions* before you begin.

**See the example:** Interview Question Example
Vocabulary

Words to Remember
This page gives basic definitions for some important terms that can help you learn about creating interview questions. You can get a more complete definition of each term from Fact Monster*.

New Words
Interview: Meet or talk with another person to gather information by asking questions.

Open-ended: A type of question that allows for several different, detailed answers.

Relevant: Provide important information about a particular topic.

Review Words
Character: A person in a story who can be identified by particular looks or behavior.

First Person: A type of writing that tells a story by using pronouns that refer to the author of the story, such as I and we.

Narrative: A type of writing that tells a story about events that someone experiences.

Plot: The important events that an author describes in a story.

Point of View: The way a person tends to think about people, places, and events based on individual experiences.

Setting: The time and place in which a story happens.

Theme: The main idea or message expressed throughout a story.

Third Person: A type of writing that tells a story by using pronouns that refer to a character or characters in the story, such as he, she, or they.
Exploration

Learning from the Web
You can learn how to ask effective questions by reading or listening to some interviews. Explore some Web sites with good examples of interviews. Learn how to ask questions that require detailed responses.

While you explore the following Web sites, think about the guiding questions. You may want to take notes to help you answer the questions. If you think of other questions about interviewing techniques, keep those in mind too.

Guiding Questions

- What do the questions in these interviews have in common?
- What kinds of questions get the most detailed answers?
- What questions could be relevant to the main character in your fictional narrative?

Web Sites

History and Current Events

- An Interview with Thomas Jefferson* from Harcourt*
- Meet Melba Beals (Civil Rights Pioneer)* from PBS Kids*
- Interview with Rachel Robinson (Wife of Jackie Robinson)* from Scholastic*
- Meet Famous Latinos* from Scholastic*
- Public Service* from the Academy of Achievement*

Literature and Art

- Meet a Musician* from PBS Kids*
- Meet J. K. Rowling (Harry Potter Author)* from Scholastic*
- Burning Questions with Author Lemony Snicket* from National Geographic Kids*
- The Arts* from the Academy of Achievement*
Information

What to Know
This page summarizes some of the information from the Web sites you explored. This information helps you learn what you need to know for this activity about interviewing techniques. You may want to take notes to help you remember the most important points. You can return to the Web sites for more exploration if you want to learn more.

Interviews
Before you write a fictional narrative, you must learn about the main character. You need to know about the character’s life leading up to the event and role in the event itself. An interview is a great way to get to know how a person thinks about people, places, and events.

To create good interview questions, you should usually start by getting background information about the person. Background information includes facts about the person’s home, education, and work. Good interview questions dig beneath the surface. They help you understand not only what the person thinks and does, but why.

Effective Interview Questions
An effective question is relevant. The answer to a relevant question gives you important information about the person. You need details to help you write a good fictional narrative. Many topics might be relevant to your fictional narrative.

Here are some topics you may want to ask about:

- Important experiences (good and bad) in the person’s life
- Other people who have had an influence (good and bad) on the person
- Specific likes and dislikes
- What the person might do differently if an experience could be repeated

An effective interview question is also open-ended. If a question can be answered with a yes or a no then it is not effective. How much can you learn from a yes or no? A good question could have many different answers.

Here are some examples of open-ended interview questions:

- What was your role in _____________?
- What inspired you to ____________?
- How did you feel when ________________?
- Why did you make the choice to ___________?
Task

What to Do
Complete the following task to show what you have learned about interviewing. While you work through the task, think about whether you are achieving the goal. You may want to review an example of interview questions before you begin.

**Task:** Write some questions to help you understand the main character in your narrative.

**Goal:** Ask questions that will help you tell an interesting and meaningful story about the character.

**See the example:** [Interview Question Example](#)

1. Start a new word processing document. Always remember to type your name and the date at the top of the document.

2. Type a title, such as *Interview Questions*, for the document.

3. Think of at least four questions you would ask your main character. What do you need to know to understand the character’s point of view?

4. Use the cut, copy, and paste tools of your word processing application to put your questions into a logical order.

5. Save your document and exchange interview questions with another student, your peer.

6. Read your peer’s interview questions. Make at least one suggestion for improving a question or adding a new question. You may use the comments feature of your word processing application.

7. Revise your questions based on your peer’s comments.

8. Check the spelling and grammar of your questions.

9. Double-check your work by reading the document carefully one more time.

10. Review the checklist and revise your interview questions to make sure they are complete.

11. Save your document.

12. Share your questions.

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Task Example

Student Name

Date

Tsunami 2004: Interview Questions

1. Why did you go to Sri Lanka?
2. Do you think you were in Sri Lanka when the Tsunami hit for a reason?
3. Describe what happened during the tsunami.
4. Were you able to help others with the relief effort?
5. Is there something you might have done differently?
6. What did you learn from your experience?
7. Do you think there was a reason you survived and others didn’t?
Tsunami 2004: Interview Questions

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