

Some Interview Questions

Intro to Public Relations

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Practitioner's Name:

Professional Job Title:

- Education?
- Professional background?
- Where has he/she worked?
- Current responsibilities?
- Why did he/she get into Public Relations?
- Most important skills needed?
- Does he/she have a specialty?
- What do you tell a client during an initial planning session?
- What role do you play on planning team?
- Do you work with (IMC) advertising professionals?
- Is it what he/she expected?
- What is a normal day like?
- What projects has he/she worked on and considered to have been successful?
- What projects has he/she worked on and considered to have been a “disaster”?
- Is there a project he/she worked on that interviewee wished he/she hadn't?
- Are there any routine frustrations?
- What changes has he/she seen over the years?
- Where does he/she expect to go from here?
- What other job possibilities might there be?
- Would he/she recommend a Public Relations career? (If yes, why; if no, why not?)
- Does he/she know of any internships?

[There are many more questions one can ask. The above are suggested only to give students a starting point.]

(See Page 2)

How to Conduct an Effective Interview

Some suggestions on conducting a one-on-one interview, whether in person or by phone.

- Always inform the person you are interviewing who you are, whom you represent, and the purpose of the interview.
- Put yourself at ease. The more common advice is to put the interviewee at ease, but if you are calm, show you are prepared and know what you are doing, the other person will feel more comfortable.
- Use a tape recorder when possible, but also take notes. Do not hide the recorder. Ask the interviewee if it is okay to use the recorder. They will always say yes, because it guarantees an accurate representation of what was said.
- Even with the tape recorder, take notes. This will help you find where on the tape to search for a statement, and will also help you to remember significant facts you might otherwise overlook when you write your story.
- Be prepared. Know something more than just the name and title of the person you are interviewing. The interview should cover a range of topics, not only, "Tell me about your job."
- Have a number of questions ready. You may not ask all of them, but have a list handy to refer to so you will not have any embarrassing silences. This will also give you time to regroup and think what more you need from the interview. Whenever you have "dead air" during a phone interview, always tell the interviewee that you are taking down some notes. This gives you time to gather your thoughts, and it also lets the person you are interviewing realize that you are paying close attention to what he or she is saying. And you probably are actually writing down notes.
- Pay attention to the person you are interviewing. They may say something which gets your attention, and you can veer off from what you may have wanted to ask next onto another topic. But have your list of questions available so you can get back to your original purpose.
- This is not a conversation. It is business. You are not chatting with a friend, you are conducting an interview. And you are in charge of the interview. Do not let the interviewee take over. If it appears that that is happening, say something like, "I'd like to get back to something we were talking about before." Always be polite, but be firm. It is your interview.
- Remember, everything is out of context, and as a writer it is your job to put things in context so the reader understands what has happened. No interviewer

is so perfect that they begin with Question No. 1 and progress smoothly through Question No. 20. Do not be afraid to jump to another topic. You will be getting all of this on tape or writing it down, and will put it in an orderly perspective when you sit down to write the story.

- Ask questions; do not make statements. Do not be afraid to just say, “Really?” or “Tell me a little more about that.” It shows the interviewee you have been paying attention. Do not play games, such as giving a word or a name and asking for a comment. Ask questions.
- Do not let the interviewee put you off. When you schedule the interview, tell the person you may need at least 30 minutes. If they tell you something like another engagement has come up, be polite but ask if there would be a better time for the interview. You have a busy schedule, too, and the interviewee should have cleared this time when you arranged the interview. On the phone, ask the person when you can get back to them to complete the interview. If they say they will get back to you, ask when, and hold them to that time. If you do not hear from them, you make the call. Be polite, but say something like you were on the phone and thought that the other person may have gotten a busy signal when they called. Always be polite, because you need that person for the interview, but be firm.
- Make sure you get all the information you need for your story. You may not be able to get back to the interviewee to follow-up, and that also shows that you were not completely prepared. Get what you need before you leave or hang up.
- Always thank the person you have interviewed for their time. You never know if you will need to deal with that person again, and this first interview should create a favorable impression.

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