Interview

General tips include these:

* [Research.](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/07/01/10-ways-to-use-nytimes-com-for-research/) Read and obtain background information about the subject, source or topic at hand before interviewing so that you can ask informed questions.
* [Ask simple questions.](http://37signals.com/svn/archives2/john_sawatsky_and_the_power_of_simple_questions.php) Keep your questions short, to the point and focused. Otherwise you risk distracting or confusing your subject, or allowing him or her to answer only part of a complex question. Break down complicated questions into shorter, simpler questions.
* [Limit closed-ended questions; use mostly open-ended questions.](http://www.mediacollege.com/journalism/interviews/open-ended-questions.html) Closed-ended questions are yes-or-no questions or those that invite very basic, one-word answers. Open-ended questions often begin with “Why?” and “How?” or phrases such as “Tell me about … ” or “How does that make you feel?” They invite longer, more insightful responses.
* [Ask follow-up questions.](http://www.concernedjournalists.org/follow-questions) An inexperienced interviewer asks a question, notes the response then moves on to the next question. Don’t stick to the script — listen to the answers and probe further before moving on to your prepared questions. Often it is during a follow-up question that the right quote falls into your lap. “Following up” can also involve a non-question, like a sympathetic response or a gesture of surprise or admiration.
* [Take notes.](http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=3752516) While having an audio recorder is helpful, always keep a notebook handy and use it to jot down quotes, statistics or facts that strike you. You might also want to write down physical details about your environment and your subject’s appearance, facial expressions and voice. But be sure to look up from your notebook and maintain eye contact.
* [Be conversational without having a conversation.](http://www.bravenewtraveler.com/2007/03/26/13-simple-journalist-techniques-for-effective-interviews/) Keep the interview informal and casual, not overly scripted, and go with the flow, allowing your subject to switch directions –- as long as you remain in control of the interview and are prepared to steer it back to your topic as needed.

**INTERVIEW: RELATED RESOURCES**

**From The Learning Network**

* [Resources: Teaching and Learning About Journalism](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/11/13/teaching-and-learning-about-journalism/)
* [Campus Weblines: Interviewing Techniques](http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/specials/weblines/461.html)

**From NYTimes.com**

* [“Questions For” Column Archive](http://topics.nytimes.com/topics/features/magazine/columns/questions_for/index.html)
* [Public Editor: Discuss Questions and Answers, in No Particular Order](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/14/opinion/14pubed.html)
* [The Saturday Profile Archive](http://query.nytimes.com/search/sitesearch?query=The+Saturday+Profile&more=date_all)

**Around the Web**

* [American Journalism Review: The Question Man](http://www.ajr.org/article.asp?id=676)
* [Tools of the Trade: The Question](http://www.poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=5075)
* [HighSchoolJournalism.org: Interviewing Lesson Plans](http://www.hsj.org/modules/lesson_plans/archive.cfm?menu_id=6&submenu_id=&module_id=2)

Related resources include those in the list above as well as [Interviewing Principles](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/journalism/isaacs/edit/MencherIntv1.html) by veteran journalism educator Melvin Mencher, and the NPR story [“The Art of the Interview, ESPN-Style”](http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5625218) and the video [“Anatomy of a Question”](http://vimeo.com/7726310) both about “The Question Man,” John Sawatsky.