

Interviewing: The Art of Asking Questions



Introduction

This guide will help students develop strong interview skills and learn the art of asking questions by generating news story ideas from their own lives and learn how news develops from people's natural curiosity about the people, places, events and situations of daily life.

Materials

Make copies of this **worksheet (Annex 1)** for each team. Note that there are 8 different case studies.

Each team gets one case study to work on collaboratively.

Group Class Activity - Warm Up

Ask students:

What's your favorite scary movie? or When do you feel really afraid?

Explain to students that the interview process can seem intimidating, but today's lesson will give them the tools they need to be successful.

Explain to students that part of a reporter's job is to interview people they don't know for stories. **Ask:** Have you ever called someone you didn't know? What did you like and dislike about it?

Students share stories of their experiences, if they have them.

Cold-calling is the practice of calling someone you don't know to get information from them. **Ask:** Why might cold-calling seem scary or uncomfortable for some people?

Students generate reasons and share their feelings. Acknowledge these fears. Learning to make cold calls takes practice. People get better at it with practice.



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Main Class Activity

Practice Cold-Call Interviewing

Instructions

In this role-playing activity, divide the class into groups of three.

- Give them a worksheet that provides a scenario with a hypothetical reporter and source.
- Two team members role-play an interview while the third team member, the evaluator, offers coaching and suggestions as they practice.

Pass out copies of the worksheet (Annex 1) so that each team receives one of the eight different cases.

- One person will be the journalist
- One will be the source
- Third person will serve as an evaluator for both participants.

Read aloud the directions and encourage students to work together as a team to generate ideas and practice role-playing.

Because some students are pretending to be experts and others are pretending to be journalists, give students the opportunity to use the Internet to gather information to make their role-playing more credible. This will also help to make their performances less silly and more realistic. Encourage them to use creativity and imagination along with good research to create a strong cold-calling simulation.

Time to Practice

- Before beginning, review the advice provided on the worksheet for both the journalist and source.
- Students should explain, in their own words, why this advice makes sense and encourage them to make notes of their own that are relevant to the topic they are interviewing about or are the interviewee.

Monitor students as they work and answer any questions they may have. Encourage them to practice a couple of times so they're comfortable.

For advanced learners, you may want to encourage the source to vary their answers at each rehearsal, so that the reporter really has to think on their feet!

Time for Performance

Each team performs their cold calls. Encourage evaluators from other teams to offer "warm" and "cool" feedback.

- Warm feedback is positive and acknowledges strengths.
- Cool feedback offers comments and suggestions to help the learner reflect and improve.

Monitor students as they work and answer any questions they may have. Encourage them to practice a couple of times so they're comfortable.

Leaving a Message

If you call a source and they are not available you might have to leave a message. In this message you should identify yourself, your school or affiliation, your reason for calling and a way for your source to contact you.

See Annex 2 for a script template.



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Emailing, Tweeting and Other Forms of Communication

Students might not be calling their sources, they might reach out via email or Twitter. Have students practice composing an email to an expert. Give them the following writing prompt:

- You are doing a story about water quality in your community. You would like to interview the head of the water authority. You've gone to the website and found the contact. What do you do next?

Have the students work in pairs to compose an email introducing themselves and requesting an interview. Have students read their emails out loud and offer warm and cool feedback.

Have the students look up their mayor's Twitter feed. Ask them how they would send out a tweet to ask the mayor for an interview. Have them check their own Twitter feeds to see whether there is any embarrassing content. If so, have the class brainstorm options (they could send the mayor a tweet through their news organizations official Twitter handle). This is also an opportunity to have the students reflect on the language they use, the pictures they post and the image their social media profiles project of them. These profiles will follow them into adulthood and their future careers. This is a great "life lesson" about creating an online identity that will help them rather than haunt them in the future.

Reflect

Ask: What did you learn from working on this project? What did you like best about it? What did you dislike and why?

Ask: How might cold-calling be useful in your life right now? In the future?



Worksheet 1 - Interviewing and the Art of Asking Questions

ANNEX 01

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CASE STUDY #11:

Journalist: You are an education reporter for the local TV news channel who is doing a story on a group of people who are protesting the high-stakes tests that students in public schools have to take in elementary school before they enter high school.

Source: You are an educational consultant who helped to create the test.

Evaluator: Use the criteria below to help your team members be successful. Offer feedback after each rehearsal to help both be successful.

Journalist	Source
1. Do Your Homework. Before you pick up the phone, do some research on your topic. Learn about the issue before you attempt to reach out to a source.	1. Get Your Expertise On. Before you talk to a journalist, make sure you can talk like an expert. Gather some key facts that you think a reporter will want to know.
2. Explain Your Reason for Calling. Be able to state our purpose for reaching out to this person within the first minute of the call.	2. No Jargon. Even though you're an expert, if you want your message to get across, you will need to explain ideas accurately, clearly and simply.
3. Flatter Your Source. Explain why you consider this person a valuable source. Show that you care about the topic.	3. Stay Calm and Confident. You're the expert. Don't display nervousness and use vocal energy to hold your listener's attention.
4. Plan Some Questions in Advance. If it helps, write the questions that you want to ask down. Use them as a reference when you're talking with the source.	4. Use Vivid Examples. Make your ideas come alive by offering examples and specific information. Don't just speak in generalities.
5. Listen and Take Notes. Be an active listener and ask questions if you don't understand something. Ask your source to repeat themselves if necessary so you can write down the information. (But never audiotape a conversation without asking permission first.)	5. Short and Sweet. Experts who drone on and on make life difficult for reporters. Be aware that the reporter is trying to take notes while you talk. Pause after important ideas and new information so that the reporter has time to process it.



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CASE STUDY #2:

Journalist: It's Opening Day for the local professional baseball team and you are a reporter who's been assigned to cover the festivities. The team won the World Series last year and has made a very important change to try and repeat this year: they've signed the off-season's most coveted free agent: a dominating pitcher who won 25 games and the Cy Young award last year.

Source: You are the new pitcher.

Evaluator: Use the criteria below to help your team members be successful. Offer feedback after each rehearsal to help both be successful.

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CASE STUDY #3:

Journalist: The television show American Idol is holding auditions at the local concert hall. Thousands of people in search of their big break have been lining up for days to have their chance to shine. Among them is a young woman who was the winner of an annual local talent contest. You have been assigned to cover the Idol tryouts and to tell this young woman's story.

Source: You are the local Idol contestant.

Evaluator: Use the criteria below to help your team members be successful. Offer feedback after each rehearsal to help both be successful.

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CASE STUDY #4:

Journalist: You are filling in for the White House reporter at your television station and have been assigned to cover the Daily Briefing today. At today's briefing, the White House press secretary talks about the corruption charges that have been filed against the Chief of Staff. You find out later that the Press Secretary recommended the Chief of Staff, a longtime friend, for the job.

Source: You are the White House Press Secretary.

Evaluator: Use the criteria below to help your team members be successful. Offer feedback after each rehearsal to help both be successful.

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CASE STUDY #5:

Journalist: You are a reporter assigned to cover the case of a soldier who has just returned from Afghanistan to find that he and his family are about to lose their home. Why? Because while he was away, his wife missed a 100 Homeowner's Association dues payment and the association has moved to foreclose on their home to get their money.

Source: You are the returning soldier.

Evaluator: Use the criteria below to help your team members be successful. Offer feedback after each rehearsal to help both be successful.

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CASE STUDY #6:

Journalist: Jay- is in town. He is doing a concert that night, but is also doing a charity fundraiser for a local group. You have been assigned to cover this story and to find out how this local charity has managed to get on the schedule for this international star.

Source: You are the Executive Director of the local charity.

Evaluator: Use the criteria below to help your team members be successful. Offer feedback after each rehearsal to help both be successful.

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CASE STUDY #7:

Journalist: After months of trying to convince the editor of your news magazine that this would be a great story, you have been sent to Pakistan to interview a pro-Western mayor who is under fire from the Taliban. Before he and his parents decided to return to Pakistan, this man had not only gone to high school with you, but was also your college roommate at a university in the United States.

Sources: You are the Pakistani mayor.

Evaluator: Use the criteria below to help your team members be successful. Offer feedback after each rehearsal to help both be successful.

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1. Do Your Homework. Before you pick up the phone, do some research on your topic. Learn about the issue before you attempt to reach out to a source.	1. Get Your Expertise On. Before you talk to a journalist, make sure you can talk like an expert. Gather some key facts that you think a reporter will want to know.
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CASE STUDY #8:

Journalist: You are a reporter who has been assigned to talk to a professor at your local college about his latest research in which he answers a question that has been on the minds of many for decades: Which came first, the chicken or the egg? Because he has found the answer to this very important question and he is local, your editor wants you to get it before the word gets out to the rest of the world.

Sources: You are the professor, and you are a little annoyed by all of the reporters who have been calling and interrupting your chicken and egg research.

Evaluator: Use the criteria below to help your team members be successful. Offer feedback after each rehearsal to help both be successful.

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Script For Leaving A Message

Instructions: Use this script as a template when you need to leave a message for a source.

Student:

Hello, I'm a high school student at (fill in your school's name) working on a report for our Student Reporting project.

I'm calling for (your source's name) to get their perspective on (your topic or theme).

If you get this message and have a moment, please give me a call at (your contact number) or send me an email at (your email address).

I will try to reach you again on (provide a date and time in which you will call back). Thank you for your time, have a great day.

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Standards Addressed

Common Core

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.4 Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with pertinent descriptions, facts, details, and examples; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.5 Include multimedia components and visual displays in presentations to clarify claims and findings and emphasize salient points.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.6 Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate. (See grade 7 Language standards 1 and 3 here for specific expectations.)
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.8.4 Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with relevant evidence, sound valid reasoning, and well-chosen details; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.8.5 Integrate multimedia and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.8.6 Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate. (See grade 8 Language standards 1 and 3 here for specific expectations.)
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.5 Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.6 Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate. (See grades 9–10 Language standards 1 and 3 here for specific expectations.)
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.5 Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.6 Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating a command of formal English when indicated or appropriate. (See grades 11–12 Language standards 1 and 3 here for specific expectations.)

ISTE

- ISTE: Empowered Learner, 1a, 1b, 1c Students leverage technology to take an active role in choosing, achieving and demonstrating competency in their learning goals, informed by the learning sciences.
- ISTE: Digital Citizen, 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d, Students recognize the rights, responsibilities and opportunities of living, learning and working in an interconnected digital world, and they act and model in ways that are safe, legal and ethical.
- ISTE: Knowledge Constructor, 3a, 3c, 3d Students critically curate a variety of resources using digital tools to construct knowledge, produce creative artifacts and make meaningful learning experiences for themselves and others.
- ISTE: Creative Communicator, 6a, 6b, 6c, 6d Students communicate clearly and express themselves creatively for a variety of purposes using the platforms, tools, styles, formats and digital media appropriate to their goals.
- ISTE: Global Collaborator, 7a, 7b, 7c, 7d Students use digital tools to broaden their perspectives and enrich their learning by collaborating with others and working effectively in teams locally and globally.