
EXERCISE

INTERVIEW PRACTICE SESSION

Stornoway, Isle of Lewis

In this session, you will get the chance to plan and conduct a short interview with another participant. You will take your turn at interviewing and being interviewed.

Theme for interview - Schooldays

We suggest that you conduct your interview on the theme of ‘Schooldays’. This is something we have all been through, and you will therefore be able to interview your partner even if you know nothing at all about them. Your task is to plan your line of questioning, and then conduct a short interview. You should aim for a semi-structured form of interview, i.e. you should have a range of topics and sub-themes you would like to cover, but be prepared to ‘go with the flow’ if you are getting interesting material which you might not have been expecting.

Part 1 (15 minute) – Planning your Interview

What sub-themes do you think you might like to cover? Examples might include

- Travel to school
- The daily routine
- Subjects studied
- Playground games
- School meals
- Discipline and punishment
- Any others?

Decide which themes you would like to follow up, and then divide these into sub-themes, e.g. ‘Travel to School’ might further divide into what mode of transport?; who accompanied you?; how far was it?; did you play on the way?; how were you taught to understand road safety?; what happened if you were late?; etc. If you follow a similar exercise for several main themes, making notes as you go, then you will find that you build up a plan of attack for the interview fairly quickly.

Part 2 – Conducting the Interview

Roles – A interviewer; B interviewee, C technician

Each slot will last 10 minutes. Move round one place after each slot

- A. Interviewer: Announce basic info on mic – your name, place, date, interviewee's name. Then start interviewing B! Begin with basic biography e.g. where and when they went to school; basic family background; then work through your planned themes and sub-themes; try to remain flexible and react to the information you are getting, following up interesting points
- B. Interviewee: Answer the questions!
- C. Technician: set up the equipment; think about mic placement; make sure you are recording; keep an eye on recording levels; try to be unobtrusive!

When you are interviewing, try to bear some of the following points in mind as you go:

- Ask 'open' questions and avoid 'leading' questions (e.g. 'how did that make you feel' rather than 'that must have felt awful'.
- Stay silent when your interviewee is answering (show interest in non-verbal ways!)
- Try to avoid an overly formal approach
- Use 'bait' from time to time (e.g. 'at my school we ...')
- Try to follow up on issues as they arise (even if you hadn't thought of that theme beforehand)
- Try to get as much detail as you can
- Take time to gather your thoughts if needs be – silences and pauses are not a problem and can be edited out
- Don't push on certain lines of questioning if you suspect the interviewee is uncomfortable or upset
- Don't leave him or her in the past at the end – bring the conversation back to the present (not necessarily on mic)

Good luck!

After this exercise we will have time to discuss, reflect and share our thoughts about the practicalities of oral history interviewing.