Most interviews have one or more of the following goals:

1. Obtain the interviewee's knowledge about a topic
2. Obtain the interviewee's opinion and/or feelings about a topic
3. Feature the interviewee as the subject

It's important to know exactly why you are conducting an interview and which goal(s) you are aiming for. Stay focused on the questions and techniques that will help you achieve them.

**Do your homework.** You will be expected to have basic knowledge of your subject. Don’t roll up to an interview with a band and ask them how many albums they have released—you should know this already. If you don’t appear to know much about the subject, your interviewees will be less likely to open up to you.

**Have a list of questions prepared.** It seems obvious, but some people don't think of it. While you should be prepared to improvise and adapt, it makes sense to have a firm list of questions that need to be asked.

Some interviewees will ask for a list of questions beforehand, or you might decide to provide one to help them prepare. Whether or not this is a good idea depends on the situation. For example, if you will be asking technical questions that might need a researched answer, it helps to give the subject some warning. On the other hand, if you are looking for spontaneous, unscripted answers, it's best to wait until the interview.

Try to avoid being pinned down to a preset list of questions, as this could inhibit the flow of the interview. However, if you do agree to such a list before the interview, stick to it.

**Ask the subject** if there are any particular questions they would like you to ask.

**Back-cut questions** may be shot at the end of a video interview. Make sure you ask the back-cut questions with the same wording you used in the interview—even varying the wording slightly can make the edit unworkable. You might want to make notes of any unscripted questions as the interview progresses, so you remember to include them in the back-cuts.

**Listen.** A common mistake is to be thinking about the next question while the subject is answering, to the point that the interviewer misses important information. This can lead to embarrassment, and to the interviewee feeling undervalued.

DO write down your questions.

**Interview questions should be B-A-C-O-N:**

* **Brief.** Long questions can be confusing.

☹ or ☺? If you were in a foreign country and did not speak the language but knew someone who did, would you not try to learn the language or let the person that you knew that spoke the language speak for you?

* **About one topic.** A question should include only one topic.

☹ or ☺? “Please tell me whether you would vote for or against a candidate who supports reducing federal spending on education and social services.”

* **Clear.** Avoid questions that could cause the interviewee to say, “Huh?”

☹ or ☺? “Does it seem possible or does it seem impossible that the Nazi extermination of the Jews never happened?”

* **Open-ended.** An open-ended question does not lead to a one-word answer.

☹ or ☺? “Are you satisfied with the police chief’s decision?” *This is a Yes or No question. It is closed-ended and encourages one-word answers.*

☹ or ☺? “What do you think of the police chief’s decision?” *This is an open-ended question.*

* **Neutral.** Questions that are influenced by your opinion can lead the interviewee to give you the answer you want instead of an honest answer. The opposite of a neutral question is a leading question. This is the kind you ask while thinking, “I know the answer I want, and I hope you give it to me.”

☹ or ☺? “Don’t you think the police used unnecessary violence?” *This is a leading question. You already know the answer you want to hear, and are influencing the responder with emotionally loaded words: “unnecessary” and “violence.” This type of question also encourages a short response.*

☹ or ☺? “Tell me how you feel about the recent incident with the police.” *This prompt encourages a more thoughtful and honest response.*