

Interview an Expert

How do you find someone to interview?

TALK TO A PROFESSOR

- You could reach out to a history professor.

TALK TO SOMEONE AT A HISTORICAL SITE RELATED TO YOUR TOPIC

- Try searching online for museums or historical sites related to your topic.
- If your topic is bigger and more nation-wide, see if you can do a phone or Skype interview with someone from an organization named after him or her, or dedicated to preserving the history. Examples include the JFK Library or the Carnegie Foundation.

TALK TO SOMEONE WHO WITNESSED THE EVENT

- Did your event or person live within the last 80 years? Surely someone around here could speak to the feeling of the time. It is tricky to find these people though. Try searching for a newspaper article in which someone reflects on the event. You could contact the paper who could put you in touch with the witness. Try a search online using the phrase “Remembering” along with the topic.

TALK TO THE AUTHOR OF A BIOGRAPHY

- Go to Amazon and search for a biography or major historical text about your topic. When you find a good one, search for the author online and see if you can find their email address or phone number. Many historical authors are also college professors, so their information may be available online.

Once you find someone, how do you even start?

Here’s a sample email that you can modify for yourself. You could even say this in a phone conversation.

Dear _____,

My name is _____ and I am a student at _____ doing research on _____ for the National History Day competition this spring. I found your contact information by _____ and am hoping that you would be willing to participate in an interview to help my project. I have specific questions about your interpretation or opinion about _____, and would love to be able to use your expertise for my project.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Your Name

What should you ask them?

- Tell them what your research question is. Ask them your three “bucket questions” and any smaller questions you think would help probe for the information.
- Tell them the gist of your thesis, or point. Ask them if they agree or disagree with this thesis and why.
- Ask them what they think people really need to know about this topic.
- Ask them if they have any advice for you to continue your research.

Once I have a recording what do I do?

Use a program like iMovie to edit your interview. Ask Mr. Hoag or Ms. Eckert for help.

- DOCUMENTARY: Pick small clips from the interview to intersperse within your documentary. Clips should be short, less than 1:00. Edit out your voice so it is just the expert.
- EXHIBIT: Edit the interview down to a particular comment, or series of comments. Edit out your voice so it is just the expert.
- PAPER: Transcribe small quotes from the interview to type into your paper.
- PERFORMANCE: You can use the interview to inform your script or you can directly quote the expert in your performance.
- WEBSITE: Pick small clips from the interview to intersperse within your website. Clips should be short, less than 1:00. Edit out your voice so it is just the expert.

How do I cite an interview?

Chicago Citation for an Interview:

Last Name, First Name. Personal interview. Date.

Example:

Smith, Jane. Personal interview. 19 May 2014.