



Like detectives, we can learn a lot about our history by looking at evidence from the past. These pieces of evidence, or “cultural markers,” can be objects from the past (pottery, arrowheads, treasures, etc.), maps, books, music, food, clothes, and even people’s memories. Listening to stories from people who were at events in the past is in some ways like looking through a window back in time.

Below, you will learn the five steps to holding an interview that will allow you to learn as much as possible from someone with an experience to share. The steps were adapted from the [Geography Action!](#) Project Guide article “The Art of the Interview,” written by Ann Williams, *National Geographic* magazine Senior Writer and Regional Editor.

STEP 1: PLAN – One of the most important steps in holding an interview is to plan.

Choose and research a topic

- Decide what you want to learn in the interview.
- Learn about the topic.
 - Look online and in books.
 - Take notes.

Select a person to interview

- Find someone to interview. Think of someone in your community who would know a lot of people.
- Get your guardian or teacher to help you ask people if they would like to be interviewed.
- When someone agrees to be interviewed, set a place, date, and time. Be sure he or she understands how long the interview should take and that you plan to take notes.

Equipment

- Voice recorder
- Notebook
- Pens
- Your name and phone number

STEP 2: QUESTION – List questions that you *may* ask the person you are interviewing.

Write up your questions

- Include the basics
 - Remember who, what, when, where, why, how (such as “Where were you born?” and “What was your last name?”).
- Ask about feelings and details
 - Ask the person you are interviewing to share stories in detail (such as “Describe the landscape of your hometown before World War II”).
 - Ask the person you are interviewing to share their feelings about some of the events (“How did traveling for six months make you feel as a 14-year-old?”).

Gather support materials

- Bring photographs or other objects that might help the person you are interviewing to remember details.

Practice your questions

- Learn about your topic inside and out.
- Practicing with a friend before the real thing can help you ask better questions.

STEP 3: LISTEN – It is very important that you *talk with the person* you are interviewing.

Be a good interviewer

- Be natural—make your subject comfortable.
- Throw away questions that you had planned to ask if they don't seem important during the interview.
- Ask questions that you think of during the interview.
- Look at their eyes—try not to look at your notes, never look at your recorder.
- Be a good listener—don't interrupt.
- Don't rush, but don't overstay your welcome.
- Some folks will talk too much, some too little—you can get a good interview in an hour or less.
- Remember, the best interviews are really just good conversations.

STEP 4: RECORD – Listening to the interviewee will give you a lot of information, but unless you properly record that information—either with a voice recorder or with hand-written notes—you may forget details. Never change what the person said or how they said it. Sometimes, the best stories are told in the way they are shared.

Before the Interview

- Check your recorder one last time.
- Run through your questions one last time.

The Interview

- Turn on the recorder, then forget about it.
- Get the basics—your subject's name, address, and phone number.
- Take notes.
- Last question: Is there anything you think I should have asked that I didn't?
- Keep the recorder running as you say goodbye and walk out the door.

STEP 5: TELL A STORY – Now that you've heard a great story, it is important that you find a way to share the story. You can choose to share the story like a news article, or you can try to share the story creatively in poetry or prose.

Write out the interview

- Write out both sides of the conversation, both question and answer. Again, never change what the interviewee said or how they said it.

Tell the story

- Check to see if the answers helped to tell the story you were hoping to tell.
- Introduce your subject.
- Add details from your notes.
- Check the facts.

Public Relations and Press

- Write a thank you.
- Share your story with the person you interviewed.