Lesson 6: Turning Interviews into Articles

From Interview to Article
A recipe for turning your interview notes into a great read

You have learned how to think up interesting interview questions and follow-up questions. The next step is turning the Q&A from your interview into an article.

Think of the quotes from your interview as the chocolate chips in a cookie. You’re going to spread them throughout your article to make it more tasty and interesting. But you need to mix in other ingredients, too – information, facts and your own writing – to get a complete article. A full article which includes quotes embedded in it is more interesting to read than a list of questions and answers.

Spice up your article with quotes from your interview that answer questions or offer insight and opinions. Your readers want to hear what the interviewee had to say, but context and background in your own words help complete the picture.

1. After your interview, write out or print out your questions and answers.

2. Look through your notes and decide what the focus, or angle, of your article will be. You might already have some idea of what angle you want to write about before you start (because you did your research and learned about your subject before you interviewed them, right?), or maybe an angle will emerge as you read over the interview – for example, when our staff interviewed children’s author Elisa Kleven, she talked a lot about how her childhood and her own kids influence her work. That might be the theme you want to use to tie your article together. When you are conducting your interview you should have a vague idea of what you want to write, but be willing to change it if things seem to be going in a better or different direction.

   If you’re having trouble finding an angle in your notes, step away from it for a while. Go play a game or have a snack or go to sleep and come back to it later. Or ask a friend or family member to read the interview and make suggestions.

3. In your notes, highlight the things that are worth including in your article. Not everything the person said has to go into your finished article. Some of the things you’ll want to include from your interview are information – for example, Elisa has written 15 books. That doesn’t need to be in a quote, though, because her exact words about it don’t really tell us anything special about her.

   It’s okay to discard information or quotes that weren’t interesting or that don’t add any important details to your article.
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Sometimes it’s helpful to highlight things that are information in one color and things that are worth quoting in a different color.

4. Now order the information you’ve highlighted from most important to least important. (Remember the Inverted Pyramid for organizing news stories, where the most important information goes first. For a feature article, you might change the order to help tell your story, but the Pyramid is a good place to start.)

5. Your article needs a beginning, a middle, and an end. Think about how you are going to introduce the article. What information do you need to include at the beginning to set the scene or introduce your subject?

Find a hook for the article – an interesting quote or detail that will make your readers want to read on. Use it in the first paragraph.

6. Next, write your first draft incorporating the information and quotes you’ve highlighted.

Don’t just report what was said. Tell a story. You can move quotes around to a different order than they happened in the interview to make the article flow better, as long as you don’t change the words the person said.

Include background information to help tell your story. For example, if you interviewed an author about her new book, you might include what other books she has written or awards she has won for writing.

Using Quotes:
• Make sure when you quote people that you don’t add or remove anything that would change the meaning of what they said.
• It is okay to leave out filler words like “um” and “like” in your quotes, unless those words show something important about the interviewee.

Vocabulary:
• Interviewer: The person who asks the questions (that’s you!)
• Interviewee: The person who answers the questions (sometimes also called the subject)
• Hook: An interesting detail, quote or piece of information that captures (“hooks”) the reader and makes him want to keep reading
• Angle: The focus of your article; the aspect of the story you choose to highlight and develop