

INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUES AND GUIDELINES

Below each of the following guidelines, read the filled-in row about the LeBron James interview. Then, complete each table with examples and notes from the other three videos you watched.

Decide in advance what you want to know.

Interview	Main Idea Questions (What the Interviewer Wanted to Know)	Notes
<p>LeBron James, "The Decision"</p>	<p>"The answer to the question everybody wants to know: LeBron, what's your decision?"</p> <p>"Why?"</p> <p>"What was the major factor, the major reason, in your decision?"</p>	<p>The interviewer's questions centered on the eventual reveal of what team James chose. The interviewer wanted to know what the process was like, how he came to his decision, and how he felt moving forward.</p>

Ask open-ended questions and follow-up questions to get genuine, detailed responses.

Most of your questions should be phrased in an open-ended way. If your question appears to offer or suggest a certain answer, you might affect your interviewee’s response—this is called a “leading question” and should be avoided. Be sure to follow up with additional questions.

Interview	Examples of Open-Ended Questions	Notes
LeBron James, “The Decision”	“What have you thought about this process?” “What did you expect from this process?”	The interviewer didn’t ask, “Did you expect this process to be fun?” or “Are you feeling happy the process is over?” Instead, their questions were open-ended and didn’t encourage James to answer in a particular way.

Consider using these helpful follow-up questions for:

Extending an answer: “How did you start _____?” “What led to that?” “What happened next?”

Filling in detail: “Could you walk me through it?” “Tell me more about that.”

Identifying actors: “Was anyone else with you?” “Who else was there, and what did they do?”

Explaining inner events: “What did you see/hear/think/feel when that happened?” “Can you remember how you reacted?” “What were your feelings or thoughts when _____ said that?”

Making nonverbal expressions verbal: If your interviewee shrugs or grimaces, you usually can’t report that in your story. However, you can draw them out. You can nod and say, “So, did you have a certain reaction or any strong feelings in response to that?” “What were those feelings?”

Interview	Examples of Helpful Questions	Notes
LeBron James, “The Decision”	“You weren’t able to be recruited because you went straight to the NBA from high school, so have you enjoyed this recruiting process now?” “Who in this process, LeBron, have you taken advice from and who has had the biggest influence?”	The interviewer’s questions extend one of James’s earlier answers and identify other actors in his decision-making process.

Watch for “markers.”

Most interviewees are polite and respectful of your time, so they often won't tell you everything they could say about a subject. However, they might drop some “markers” or hints in their responses. A “marker” is a passing reference to an important event or feeling.

Interview	Examples of “Markers”	Notes
LeBron James, “The Decision”	“You told me that [your mother] had a major influence when you called her this morning — you didn't believe the reaction she would have would be the one that you got. Can you share what she said to you this morning?”	The interviewer picked up on James's mention of an earlier conversation with his mother and followed up with another question.

Be mindful of what to avoid.

If you upset an interviewee or make them uncomfortable, they won't tell you as much as you want and may even stop the interview. Here are some things to avoid:

NEVER talk over your interviewee. The first rule of interviewing is that the interviewee must be able to answer your questions. That won't happen if *you* talk, too. Don't interrupt, if possible, and don't give commentary on what they are saying.

Don't talk about yourself too much. Sometimes, this can't be avoided because the person you're talking with wants to know who you are. But, in general, the better an interview is going, the less you should talk. It's appropriate to tell them who you are and what you are doing and to answer their questions about your project. Just remember the interview is not about you.

Try not to confuse your interviewee. Write down the kinds of questions you want to ask and practice the interview with someone else beforehand. Throw out questions that are confusing. Robert Weiss, a qualitative researcher, says if you fluster an interviewee more than three times in an interview, they'll give up on you and only give you brief answers to your questions.

Don't ask about illegal activity. If it comes up in the interview, don't follow up on it. If you are taking notes, don't write it down. Although it's unlikely, your notes, recorded audio, and other information could be subpoenaed in a criminal case.

Use best practices.

Begin with demographic information. Start with the easy stuff you want to know so that you won't forget to ask it. This is information that requires brief, factual responses, such as, "How old are you?" or "Where do you live?" Consider telling the interviewee, "I'm going to begin with the boring stuff first." That lets them know that you'll have better questions coming up.

Use your manners. Look your interviewee in the eye when you speak. Shake hands before and after the interview—or, if that is not applicable, use another appropriate greeting method.

Dress in a way that won't make your interviewee uncomfortable. For example, if you are interviewing an older person or someone who strongly values the concept of modesty, you might want to cover up any visible tattoos or take out piercings. But if you're interviewing a student-athlete in the gym, there's likely no need to wear a suit or a dress and high heels.

Show that you care with your actions. Listen closely and make it clear you're paying attention. Smile, lean forward in your chair, nod, and say, "Uh-huh," as needed throughout the interview.

Adapted from Mountford, R. (n.d.). Roxanne Mountford Workshop on Interviewing.