

LifeBio's 7 Quick Tips for Interviewing

L = LISTEN. Listen carefully and be patient. Try not to interrupt and don't draw attention away from the person you are interviewing--especially if the interview is being recorded. You may have a follow-up question you want to ask, but stay quiet as much as possible. There could be pauses as your storyteller thinks about what he or she wants to say. Don't worry--don't rush. When your subject has finished his or her thought, it will be a good time to ask the next planned or impromptu follow-up question.

I = INVESTIGATION. In preparation for the interview, you may want to ask other people about the person you are interviewing. For example, if you are going to interview a family member or friend, ask people that know him or her well to tell you if there are memories or stories this person likes to share. You can incorporate these into your interview. If your subject is a veteran, it would be a good idea to know about the time and place where he or she served so you can research it in advance.

F = FIND VALUES. Behind many stories are hidden or not-so-hidden values. See if you can draw out the deeper meaning of what your storyteller is remembering. Was this person encouraged to go to college since he or she was a small child? Education was most likely an important family value. Families may value religious beliefs, equality for all people, or public service. Many times a person being interviewed may not really think about his or her family values being part of the stories. You can help them make the connection between memories and values, thereby making the interview have even more impact.

E = EMOTIONS. Be ready for the possibility that emotions may be uncovered as stories from the past are told. It's been said that, "Eyes are the windows of the soul." You may ask a question that touches someone very deeply. He or she may want to talk through why they feel so strongly, and they are counting on you to be a good listener. You may also find that your subject would rather not talk about certain topics and that's okay too. Regardless, it is always a good idea to have a box of tissues on hand during an interview in case tears of happiness or sadness do come.

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B = BE PREPARED. Ensure that you have a comfortable, quiet place to conduct the interview. Turn off the phone, TV, or other potential distractions (dishwasher, clocks, etc.), and ensure that other people will not be interrupting--unless you think other people's presence would be helpful or enjoyable. Don't forget to have a list of thought-provoking autobiography questions to ask, a notebook (or *Memory Journal*) for jotting down answers or follow-up questions, and some pens or pencils. If you are a "high-tech" person, test and ensure your equipment (computer/internet, audiotape, videotape, other digital recording equipment) is working properly.

I = INTEREST. Express interest in the person you are interviewing. The smile on your face and the light in your eyes will encourage the person to keep talking. Even if you are speaking by telephone, the person you are interviewing can *hear the smile* in your voice. Some people think their average lives aren't interesting, but you can convince them otherwise by your response to their stories and experiences. Everyone has a story to tell, and *extraordinary* things do happen to seemingly ordinary people. Through sharing memories, the person may see all that they have accomplished and see the "big picture" view of his or her life. It will be fascinating information.

O = OPEN-ENDED STYLE. Open-ended questions (like those available at LifeBio.com or in the *Memory Journal*) should lead the person you are interviewing to explain their memories or experiences in more detail, resulting in very few, if any, basic yes or no answers. If a person answers a question very briefly and you think he or she should elaborate, a good follow-up question might begin with "How..." or "Why?" The DETAILS of his or her stories should come through with these types of follow-up questions. Also, be Open to what may happen in the interview. You may not get through all the questions you planned, or you may find he or she has much to say about one particular topic. You may also need to help your subject stay on track through the structure of your interview. It's important to go with the flow, but have fun too!

To use LifeBio.com or the *Memory Journal* for your interview, visit www.lifebio.com or call 1-866-LIFEBIO. info@lifebio.com

