



When we have the opportunity to collect a story from someone who has been impacted by our program, it's helpful to borrow some interviewing basics from the journalistic field. The following tips will ensure that our interviewee feels valued and heard, and that we're able to gather as much detail as possible for our story. Stories emerge when a person is allowed to tell the story in their own way, using their own words.

1. Use open-ended questions.

Open-ended questions are those that can't be answered with a single word, like yes, no, or a number. Open-ended questions are more likely to foster connection and story sharing. For example, instead of asking someone, "Were you worried coming to Canada?" ask "What was it like to come to Canada?"

2. Ask simple, straightforward questions.

Asking multi-part or complex questions may irritate or unnecessarily confuse an interviewee. Avoid using jargon and idiomatic expressions for the same reasons. Keep it simple. For example, ask "What did you hope this program could do for you?"

3. Don't ask leading questions.

And don't make statements. During the interview, it's important to come from a mindset of learning and curiosity, rather than a desire to establish our position. This way, we're more likely to get an individual's true viewpoint or opinion.

4. Allow for silence.

As social beings, we can be uncomfortable with silence during interactions. In an interview setting, however, it's important to give our interviewees time to think and reflect before they answer. Often, the best stories come after an uncomfortable pause.

5. Don't over-script.

In our enthusiasm to get a rich story, we may have crafted many questions that we feel will uncover important details. If we're reading from a list of questions off a page instead of engaging in real conversation, however, the answers will also be less spontaneous and authentic. For this reason, it's best to have a broad over-arching question that allows the participant to start the story. Above all, we need to be prepared for answers that surprise us and be able to adapt to any new directions that are presented.



6. Use follow-up questions.

If we're actively listening to a story, it's sometimes necessary to ask questions to clarify or expand our understanding of what's been shared. This shows that we genuinely care about what's being said and that we want to know more. Often, it's the follow-up questions that dig deeper and uncover the real story or nuggets of rich detail or memory. At this point questions such as: "How did that make you feel?" or "What happened next?" can help to further the story.

7. Build rapport: face-to-face is best

Sitting across from someone in person allows us to gauge their emotions and gain insights into their personality. Their facial expression (and ours) enables a deeper connection and allows us to attend to what has been said, along with what is 'unsaid'. Whether our interview is in person, over the phone or by video conference, it's important we create an atmosphere of comfort and rapport right from the start. For this reason, we need to take some time at the beginning of the interview to get to know our interviewee and allow them to get to know us before jumping in to the "official" interview.

8. Prepare.

Arrive at the agreed interview location in advance and have all materials prepared. If recording the interview, we'll want to test out the recording device beforehand to resolve any technical glitches. Bringing pen and paper as backup can also help to ease our worry if technical issues do arise. In summary, being prepared for our interview shows our interviewees that we value their time and that we place genuine importance on gathering their story.

Adapted from Capacity Canada, *Storytelling Manual for Nonprofits*:

<https://capacitycanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Storytelling-Manual-for-Nonprofits-Capacity-Canada.pdf>