

## CRLN 300: Interviewing

### Introduction

An essential aspect of journalism is interviews, which can add credibility to your story, make your search for quality information and resources quicker, and can give you a different view of the story than just covering it using previous articles and research. They may seem intimidating, but it's important to remember that you'll be interviewing people about something they're passionate about, that they're an expert on, or that they need others to know about - most will be willing to talk if you can show them you're invested. Below you'll find information like a template for sending interview requests, the difference between an interview on or off the record, and recommendations for cleaning transcripts and working quotes into your article when writing.

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## Interview Policy

Some newspapers will ask you to identify how communication with you that you reference was done. For example, "In an email response, Dr. Thomas Chase said that *the Carillon* is an office full of malcontent journalists unworthy of support." Please note for our lawyer's sake that this is not an actual quote, though Tom didn't tend to like us much.

We don't do that unless it's relevant. How someone communicates with you is a function of accessibility, not morality. Always ask the person you are interviewing the best format to communicate (e.g. in person, phone, Zoom call, email), and use products like Google Meet that have live captioning if you are interviewing someone who is d/Deaf. Do your best to give your interviewees ample time to respond to requests; when sent at the last minute, they may not be replied to (let alone seen) until days after your article is due. Do not try to do all of your interviews the day articles are due. We are not a daily newspaper; take time, take space, and get the job done to the best of your ability. We're structured for it.

You are asking questions to fill out the following: who the fuck, why the fuck, when the fuck, what the fuck, where the fuck, and how the fuck. We are a student newspaper. As such, you are not to ask leading questions, but to get a sense of the environment of the story. That said, pointed questions are okay if you are holding people to account like campus figures, members of government, or other organizations and institutions who are sometimes assumed to be faultlessly credible. They can get their softball questions from *Global* or *CBC*. We know better about what's going on, at least on campus, and it is our job to show it. For example, let's say (maybe not so hypothetically) that Chartwell's has a rodent infestation again. Some questions you could ask are:

*Who:* "What kinds of pests are entering the building?"

*Why:* "Is the infestation a recurrence of previous issues?"

*When:* "When was Chartwell's made aware of the infestation?"

*What:* "Is there a current pest problem in places outside of the Riddell Centre?"

*Where:* "Where have the pests been re-entering?"

*How:* "How did the pests re-enter the building?"

An appropriately pointed question might look like asking Chartwell's what the cost is per student per meal, and asking how this compares to their prison clients. What you shouldn't ask your interviewees (despite how tempting these types of questions may be) are:

“Why were your staff so incompetent?”

“Does this mean I have rat shit in my overpriced burgers now?”

“How are you going to make sure this never ever happens again, so help you God?”

“Do you think that your company is as useless as the current administration?”

## Sending the Interview Request

Interview requests can only be officially sent out once you've run your topic past a section editor or the editor-in-chief and have received approval to pursue the story you pitched. If nobody at *the Carillon* knows you're writing the article, you are not yet writing an article for *the Carillon* and cannot claim to be doing so. You are free to contact interviewees in advance and inform them that you'd like to write an article for *the Carillon* and would be looking to interview them should the pitch be confirmed, but we recommend you check pitches with us first so you don't risk wasting your time and effort (and the time and effort of others).

Interview requests should go out early, as there's never a guarantee the person/people you want to interview will have free time at the last minute. In the initial email always be sure to mention your name and pronouns, followed by the information that you're working on an article for your university's student newspaper. It's also important to include the topic of the article you're working on, and the area or field you'd like to ask them questions about.

Don't assume you'll get all the information you need from one interview. You're expected to verify (fact-check) the information you're given by interviewees. Humans are notorious for making mistakes, so if you've interviewed somebody there is always the chance they've made one. It's beneficial to have done research on the topic before constructing your interview questions or even sending the initial request as you're more likely to get a response if you can show you're invested in putting in the work to do the story justice. To speed the process, include a few potential interview times that you know work with your schedule, and ask that the potential interviewee indicate which time(s) and location would best work for them if they're willing to meet with you. Our final tip when sending the request is to politely but firmly set a deadline for when you'll need their response; your interviewees are likely unaware of the timeframe you're working within, and some structure can help ensure clear, prompt communication.

## Interview Request Template

For those of you still feeling a little uncertain where to begin or who'd benefit from a template while sending out your first few requests, here's a draft you can work with:

Hello (insert name of email recipient)

My name is (insert first and last name, pronouns) and I'm working on an article about (brief topic description) for *the Carillon*, the student newspaper at the University of Regina. While doing research on the topic I found your (insert a report, article, piece of artwork, statement, event announcement, or something else that connects them to the topic) and would appreciate the opportunity to interview you about it for the article. I'd be willing to do the interview at (list potential settings). It will likely take (insert an estimate of the interview length [15-30 minutes is standard]), and I'd be available during the following times:

-(day of the week, month and date, time span)

-(day of the week, month and date, time span)

-(day of the week, month and date, time span)

In order to include information from this interview in my article I'll need to have conducted it by (insert last date you're willing to interview [we recommend at least two days before your article is due]), so please let me know by (insert date you'd like to have the interview scheduled by) whether or not you're interested, and when you'd be available if you are.

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider,

(email signature)

Here's an example of what that draft might look like once you fill it in with the information relevant to your article:

Hello Been Ripdoff

My name is Holly Funk (she/they) and I'm working on an article about how university students are impacted by high and steadily increasing textbook prices for *the Carillon*, the student newspaper at the University of Regina. While doing research on the topic I found your paper on how much the people writing textbooks are paid compared to the profits kept by the companies who publish them, and would appreciate the

opportunity to interview you about it for the article. I'd be willing to do the interview at your office, over Zoom, or somewhere on the university campus. It will likely take half an hour, and I'd be available during the following times:

-Tuesday, August 9 between 2-7 pm

-Wednesday, August 10 before 5 pm

-Thursday, August 11 before 2 pm and between 5-8 pm

In order to include information from this interview in my article I'll need to have conducted it by August 11 at the latest, so please let me know by August 9 whether or not you're interested, and when you'd be available if you are.

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider,

Holly Funk

## Constructing the Interview

### Structured Interviews

Putting together a structured interview is a little bit like writing short answer questions on a test. You'll come up with a list of questions before the interview, normally ordering them from a general topic to those on specifics, and those will be the only questions asked. When conducting the interview you'll simply read the questions off the page, listen attentively to your interviewee's response, and move on to the next question. This isn't to say you're either reading questions off the page or sitting silently; you may (and should) respond to their answers to show you're listening and engaging with them. This method can be a bit restrictive if you're one to think of other questions you'd like to ask during the interview, but can be a good starting point if you're still getting the hang of interviewing. Structured interviews work well with Q&A-style articles, and may also be used for incorporated quotes, review, and creative options.

### Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews start out much like structured ones: you do your research, come up with your list of general-to-specific questions, and when you conduct the interview you'll be reading off your prepared questions. The difference is that if your interviewee brings up something you didn't have a question prepared for, you're able to come up with questions on the spot and sprint down rabbit holes to get to topics or areas you may not have thought to ask about. With this method it's important to pay attention - make note of the things your interviewee gets excited (or hesitant) to talk about. If they suddenly start using their hands more in conversation, taking much more time to choose their words, or get an excited gleam in their eye, chances are there's knowledge and passion trying to find its way out. Relevant questions asked by a genuinely interested person can really help that process. Semi-structured interviews can also be used for Q&A-style articles, incorporated quotes, review, and creative options.

### Important Interview Questions

While constructing your interview, there are a few questions it's important to include at the beginning. If you're recording the audio from the interview (and you should be) the first question you'll ask is for their verbal consent to have the audio from the interview recorded so that you can transcribe the interview afterwards. Once you have that and are recording, the first information you get from them should be their name and pronouns, followed by any position, title, or information that explains why

they're the person you're interviewing for the specific topic you're covering (e.g. job title, area of study, involvement in the event). You may then launch into the questions you've prepared (and those that may come up during), and when you're winding down the interview make sure you thank your interviewee for their time and let them know when and where your article will be published.

## Transcribing the Interview

In simplest terms, transcribing is typing out exactly what was said during an interview by you, the interviewer, and the person(s) you interviewed. It's best practice to transcribe verbatim, including every "um" and "like," long pause and laugh. These things can be removed later when cleaning up the transcript, but may prove necessary to include which will cause frustration later if you've left them out and have to re-transcribe parts of the interview. When it comes to gathering information for an article, it's usually better to have it and not need it.

Time spent transcribing depends on a host of things, but on average a standard half-hour interview can take two-three hours to properly transcribe. This may seem like a lot of time to spend just typing what you hear, but there are serious benefits from the process that extend beyond simply having a transcript to work with. It can build your skills as an interviewer as you'll be more able to notice things like terms or phrases you may be overusing, questions you could have worded better, or even questions you should've asked but didn't think of during the interview. Essentially you're listening to a conversation rather than taking part in it so you'll be able to engage with the information differently, and if you're someone who works better when they read information than hear it you may notice things you couldn't while just listening. That being said, the process is not preferred by or accessible to everyone, and that's part of why transcription can now be done using software, apps, and the like. Following are some websites you can look at that provide transcription services (we are always looking to update this list, so please contact us if you have recommendations we don't have listed).

[-Otter](#)

[-oTranscribe](#)

[-Colibri](#)

## Attribution

### On the Record

When an interviewee is speaking on the record, everything they say is being recorded, may be used in the article you're writing, and will be attributed to them by position and name (e.g. mechanical engineer Iyam Geared) if quotes are used. This is one of the many reasons it's essential to get verbal consent on the audio recording from your interviewee. You can only use direct quotes from interview sources in an article if they were said on the record.

### Off the Record

To speak off the record, both the interviewee and you as the student-journalist have to agree to the boundaries of the interaction. These interactions can be used to point you towards other potential interviewees or information, but cannot be recorded, and points from the conversation may not be quoted or attributed to the person who gave them by name or position. Though there are fair reasons for someone to request to speak off the record, it's important for you to think about why they might not want to be attached to what they could tell you, and be wary of those who jump on and off record frequently.

### On Background

Having a source on background means many things to many journalists, but *the Carillon* uses it to convey that information given by the person being interviewed can be summarized and attributed to their position (e.g. mechanical engineer), but cannot be attributed to them by name or directly quoted.

## Cleaning the Transcript

It is acceptable to remove “ums” and “ahs” and, in most cases, “like,” if it is unnecessary and/or distracting. You should leave “like” in if it contributes to the quotation, as shown below.

*Original quotation:* “Yeah, like, we had a really good year on the field. And umm, we, like, tried like really hard to you know, umm, get into the finals.”

*Cleaned up:* “Yeah, we had a really good year on the field, and we tried, like, really hard to get into the finals.”

Quotations are written verbatim, if possible, since changing anything that your source says could change the meaning; we can’t be putting words in someone’s mouth. If you come across an error you can add [SIC] behind it to show that it is the wording your source used. However, if it is a simple error that might be unnecessarily embarrassing for a source, you can make small changes (or you can intentionally leave the error if the embarrassment is earned in full). If you have a quote or written submission from a source that has a lot of errors (e.g. a tweet), instead of going through to correct all the errors, you can add “*As printed.*” immediately after.

*Retaining error:* “I bought 1,000 hamgberders [SIC],” said Trump.

*Correcting error:* “I bought 1,000 hamburgers,” said Trump.

We use square brackets when injecting (not replacing) a word or phrase that wasn’t said by the speaker into their quote for clarification.

Original	“The professor said she would have to approve the marks before they are posted.”
Correct	“The professor said she [the Dean of Arts] would have to approve the marks before they are posted.”
Nope	“The professor said [the Dean of Arts] would have to approve the marks before they are posted.”

## Quotation Placement and Punctuation

Quotes are an integral part of reporting. They give your story depth and credibility whether you are quoting someone directly or summarizing information. When setting up a quotation of either type, the speaker should always be introduced.

*Summarizing quote:* University of Regina President Vianne Timmons said that government funding is decreasing annually, affecting both students and faculty.

*Quote included:* "Every year, government funding is dropping," said University of Regina President Vianne Timmons. "This means that tuition has to go up, and faculty numbers have to go down."

All punctuation is placed inside quotation marks - there are no exceptions. Floating punctuation looks awkward, so make sure everything's inside.

Correct	Some of the students said "quiet study space," "food and beverage options," and "affordable housing" at this university "are crucial for a good education."
Nope	Some of the students said "quiet study space", "food and beverage options", and "affordable housing" and this university "are crucial for a good education".

When setting up quotations, the comma placement is different depending on how the quotation is laid out:

*Commencing:* They said, "The new funding program will help students meet their financial needs because income for the average post-secondary student really hasn't kept up with tuition rates, especially over the past decade, but we're trying to help where we can."

*Continuing:* "The funding program will help students meet their financial needs," they said, "because income for the average post-secondary student really hasn't kept up with tuition rates, especially over the past decade, but we're trying to help where we can."

*Concluding:* "The funding program will help students meet their financial needs because income for the average post-secondary student really hasn't kept up with tuition rates, especially over the past decade, but we're trying to help where we can." they said.

*Connecting:* "We want to help students meet their financial needs, and this funding program will do that" they said. "Income for the average post-secondary student really

hasn't kept up with tuition rates, especially over the past decade, but we're trying to help where we can."