

INTERVIEWING WITH COURAGE AND CREATIVITY

Turning story subjects and story sources into storytellers.

By Jacqui Banaszynski
Knight Chair in Editing, Missouri School of Journalism
Faculty Fellow, The Poynter Institute

Envisioning the interview

- Why are you doing the story?
- What do you need to know? (How will you find out?)
- What do you *want* to know? (How will find out?)
- What's your beginning purpose or focus?
- What are the ethical/moral/journalistic/logistical challenges?

Getting the interview

- Have a reason to ask / Give people a reason to talk/answer
- Solicit help from brokers and intermediaries
- Build a lifetime source list
 - Golden Rolodex
 - Peripheral connections
 - Consistency and networking
- Be persistent
 - Return to the lingering question
 - Honor story shelf-life
 - Pursue Act II (or III) stories
- Create partners
 - Teacher/student
 - Channel to public
 - Mutual benefit (they have a story to tell; you can tell it)
- Tap passion
- Use leverage when needed & appropriate

Prepping for the interview

- Do your homework
 - Background clips, etc.
 - Third-party guides
- Tap multiple curiosities and real-people curiosities
 - The Banaszynski Beer Rule
- Rehearse
 - What questions concern you and how will you ask them?

Jacqui Banaszynski

Knight Chair Professor ~ Missouri School of Journalism
Faculty Fellow ~ The Poynter Institute
1988 Pulitzer Prize in feature writing

Logistics

- Editor/news outlet needs and expectations
- Source/subject needs and expectations
 - Establish groundrules
 - Confidentiality, attribution, on/off the record, use of notebook & recorder, etc.
 - Confronting reluctance:
 - Come back to the central question
 - Find another way to ask
 - Set it aside/move on then return at the end

Doing the interview

- Be professional/ be yourself
- Get the basics right
- Use setting and props (artifacts)
- Listen
 - Lists vs free-form questions
 - Listen for patterns
 - Listen for the lie
 - Active listening
 - Listen with all your senses (whole-body interviewing)
- Probe
 - Layer questions
 - Follow-up questions (for every question, ask five more)
 - Circle back
 - Ask the obvious, ask the necessary, ask the “stupid”
 - Ask the feared (fearless curiosity)
- Make it conversational (a controlled or guided conversation)
 - Give and take
 - Story sharing
 - Pushbacks, assumptions and can't-imagines
- Silence is golden (keep shut up; use your notebook to pace the interview)
- Creating storytellers
 - Trigger memory
 - Seek descriptions
 - Seek scenes (put people back into the movie of their own life)
 - For-instances, for-examples and what-do-you-means
 - Framed questions, contrivances, artifacts, timelines, drawings

After the interview

- Fill-in-the-blanks of your notebook (immediately; memory is short)
- Follow-up (the magic of the second interview)
- Get all numbers, e-mails, locations

Pre-publication/broadcast

- Fact-checking: Turn into one last interview
- Honoring the groundrules (walk through the story, but don't give it away)

Post-publication/broadcast

- The Eight Day Rule (call back; address inaccuracies, problems; seek new stories)
 - Normalize relations and *keep the source*
- Return to... Linger questions
 - Stay open to the next story