Interviewing: An Overview

Mr. Burke

Overview
This assignment asks you to interview one or more people about a topic we will be discussing in class in the weeks ahead. For your interview to be successful, you must prepare for it. When you finish, you will write a short synthesis paper about what you learned.

Goals
This assignment will teach you how to:

• Generate and ask effective interview questions.
• Arrange the questions in the best order.
• Pose follow-up questions for more detailed answers.
• Take notes while others respond to your questions.
• Synthesize your notes and respond to the details in a short paper.

Step 1  Generate a list of possible people to interview for this subject. Choose the people who will give the best information and be easiest to interview.

Step 2  Make a list of questions to ask these people. The questions should all be related to the topic you are investigating and should yield interesting and relevant information.

Step 3  Decide which questions to ask; you should ask no more than six or seven.

Step 4  Arrange your questions in the order in which you will ask them.

Step 5  Format your note-taking page: Write your questions in the left margin, leaving room between them for answers.

Step 6  Conduct your interview(s). If interviewing more than one person, consider interviewing them separately so one person’s answers do not influence the other person’s. As you conduct each interview, take notes in short phrases, jotting down both key ideas and memorable phrases. Also, ask follow-up questions when the subject says something interesting or is not forthcoming. For example, if your subject says, “My family was not in favor of me marrying your mother,” ask a follow-up question like, “What did that feel like?” or “How did you respond to that?” or “Why did they feel that way?” After you finish, go back over your notes and add any details that you didn’t have time to write down or that you remembered after you finished.

Remember to thank the people you interview for taking time to answer your questions!

Step 7  Write a response (1–2 pages) to the interviews, in which you synthesize (make connections between) the different details and discuss what they mean and why they are important. Include in your synthesis paper your own thoughts about what you learned from these people. What surprised you? What interested you most? Why? How do their comments correspond with what you thought before you interviewed them?