

# YBK LESSON PLAN

<b>Class:</b> 21 <sup>st</sup> Century Journalism	<b>Date:</b>
<b>Unit:</b> Interviews	<b>Lesson Title:</b> Tell me more
<b>Alignment with standards:</b> (Common Core, ISTE or 21st Century Learners) Common core: Produce clear and well-reasoned writing that is developed, organized, and presented in a style that is appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.	
<b>Objective:</b> Students will analyze ways to write better interview questions.	
<b>Materials needed:</b> Paper, pens, audio.	
<b>Staffers or teams involved:</b> Ideal with introductory class or writers.	
<b>Prior Knowledge:</b>  Can vary significantly depending on student interviewing experience.	<b>Key Understanding:</b>  Asking better questions yields better answers.
<b>Introduction:</b>  Begin by discussing interview experiences – either interviews conducted by students or that students were the subject of. Discuss what worked and what didn't. Discuss what type of questions they think work best.  Discuss what the goals of an interview should be and help lead students to important points, like revealing new information and developing a deeper understanding of the person or topic. Write some of those goals on the board so you can refer to them after you listen to the interviews.	
<b>Instructional activities:</b>  Students will review two interviews of varied quality. Instruct students to divide a sheet of paper in half vertically. On the left side, they will write down every question asked by Larry King during an interview with Madonna ( <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxTH6fsMULE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxTH6fsMULE</a> ). Tell students to number the questions and tell them they can write down not just traditional questions but any words he says that might prompt her to speak more. Number as they go. After listening to the interview, review the number of questions asked and their quality. Students will typically come to the conclusion that the style is oddly confrontational, that the questions don't tend to follow the most logical order, and that while he gets some new information, he doesn't give her much time to respond. I also remind students how popular Madonna was at the time of this interview and that a million interviews had already been done with her at this point. We discuss how that leaves the questions seeming even less insightful.	

# YBK Lesson Plan

Next, play a section of an interview with Terry Gross and Sean Combs (<https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=91554066>). It's longer so you can choose how much to play. I tend to play more than I do of the Madonna interview. Students will write down the questions or prompts on the right side of the paper.

When you're done, compare the amount of time the interview lasted and the number of questions asked. I often break it down to questions per minute. What students quickly realize is that Terry asks far fewer questions but they are much more insightful and better phrased, leading to better answers. They'll notice that she uses silence far better and asks questions based on research, which leads to better answers. Lots of ah-ha's with this approach.

**Wrap-up/closure:**

I wrap up by discussing a tip sheet that covers question writing strategies. (Attached)

**Differentiation options:**

**Assessment:**

Students will write their own interview questions and conduct practice interviews with a classmate.

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# HOW CAN I ASK **BETTER** QUESTIONS ?

## 3 PURPOSES OF **QUESTIONS**

### Interview for **FACTS**

- This is the information you need in order to explain the story.
- These questions often cover the basics: Who, What, When, Where, Why & How.
- You may not directly quote this information, but asking these questions are essential to building your story.

### Interview for **UNDERSTANDING**

- These are the careful follow-up questions you ask when going over the basics.
- You might ask the person to re-explain something. Or you might repeat what you think the person said to double check your understanding.
- You'll dig into the details with these questions to really understand your story better.

### Interview for **EMOTION**

- This is where you get into the heart of the story and the information that is most likely to be quotable.
- During these questions, you're seeking personality and emotion. You want to really hear the unique voices of your sources.

## **EXAMPLE:** HOW YOU'LL USE THE INFORMATION

Coming back from the Feb. 28 snow day, sophomore Kelsey Guthrie was quick to part ways with Taylor, her infant daughter.

Even though Guthrie had been waiting since last semester to have a chance at taking care of Taylor, a couple days was enough to change her mind.

Frankly, teacher of human growth and development Kristi Henderson was used to it. Worn out and done: That was how most students were after taking care of a Baby Think It Over – a computer baby – over the weekend.

“Usually when they come in on Monday mornings, they are dying to get rid of it, saying, ‘Cut this thing off of me. I’m done. I don’t want it anymore,’” Henderson said.

Taking care of the Baby Think It Over simulator is part of the curriculum for the human growth and development class and what convinced Guthrie to take the class.

“The purpose is for them to have a simulative experience of what it’s like to care for a child on their own,” Henderson said.

Naturally, the process began with pregnancy.

Students had to wear a 25-pound water-filled empathy belly around their waists for a day that let them experience what a pregnant woman feels on any given day of her third trimester.

“The fake pregnancy was pretty much to see how it felt to walk around with that much extra weight and see what people’s reactions were to it,” Guthrie said. “I gained 30 pounds in two minutes. It was really heavy. I didn’t wear it all day.”

What was your baby’s name? How long had you wanted to take one of the babies home?

Please spell your name. What is the name of the class you teach? What is the name of the dolls you use?

Describe what students are like when they return the dolls?

What is the purpose of the assignment?

Describe the empathy bellies. Can I look at one so I can better understand how it works?

Tell me about the “pregnancy” experience.

# 3 TYPES OF QUESTIONS

## THE BASICS

You need basic information from your source.

### EXAMPLES:

**Anyone:** Their name and its correct spelling.

**Student:** Their grade and any other details that help explain why they are relevant to the story. For example, if they are talking about school lunches, how many days a week do they eat school lunches? If they are talking about iPads, do they have an iPad and if so, how long have they had it? If they are talking about the importance of saving money, what have they done to save?

**Athlete:** What is their position on the team (guard, forward, etc). How long have they been playing? How long have they been playing varsity?

**Teacher:** What subject do they teach? How long have they been teaching it?

**In general:** Who is the person and what perspective do they bring to the topic?

## CLOSED-ENDED QUESTIONS

You are discouraged from using these. There are a limited number of times when they are useful, but they are overused by student journalists.

Closed-ended questions demand a simple, short reply. They should be used only when you need specific details.

### EXAMPLES:

What are the days and times for the play performances?

How much will taxes increase?

Who won the race?

Will the game be canceled?

## OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

These should make up the bulk of your interview. These questions don't lead to a specific answer.

### EXAMPLE:

How are you going to convince taxpayers to increase taxes in order to fix up the school?

Describe your record-setting race?

## TOUGH QUESTIONS

Tough questions must be asked sometimes. Prepare and be ready but ask them.

Example: Why didn't you address these allegations of theft sooner?

# INTERVIEWING TOOLBOX: WINNING WAYS TO START QUESTIONS



- Can you give me an example...?
- What did/will that look like?
- Why?
- Tell me more about that?
- That sounds interesting. Can you describe that?
- So are you saying...
- What about...?
- How does that work?
- What happened next?
- What did you say?/How did you respond?
- What is significant about that?

- Tell me about...
- Please describe to me...
- Share something you learned in your research and ask for a response. For example, the basketball team lost its first five games before going on a mid-season winning streak. What turned things around?
- What impact do you think it had...?
- Talk about...
- What was it like to...
- What was your reaction to...