

## Interviewing Subject Matter Experts Remotely: 10 Best Practices

Interviewing, like so many other things, has become a remote activity in the face of COVID-19. Whatever you're interviewing for — a story, instructional content, newsletter, video or anything else — these tips will help you to make the most of your remote interview.

1. **Prepare ahead of time.** Doing your research ahead of time is your first step to a successful remote interview. Learning more about who your source is and what kind of work they do can help you dive into their work and learn where your work fits into the conversation. It can also help you answer preliminary questions about their work, making time for other questions during your conversation.
2. **Check your environment.** Evaluate your space before turning your camera on. Ensure it's somewhere you feel comfortable being seen (and recorded, if your interviewing will be part of the final product).
3. **Check your tech.** Technology is unreliable. Sign on five to ten minutes before your interview and make sure everything is working, to avoid delaying the call.
4. **Record your interview (with consent).** Recording the interview, whether or not you intend to use the audio or video you capture in your final product, will create a detailed record of your conversation you can reference later. It also helps make the interview more of a conversation, rather than you asking questions and rushing to write down everything they say. Make sure your source knows you are recording them (it is illegal to record without consent [in some states](#)).

Read more: Best practices for audio (link to Alex's post) and video recording (link to Susan's post).

5. **Start with framing.** Remind this person who you are, what you'd like to talk about, and where content from this interview will be published. Say your subject matter expert (SME) is a child psychology expert. Your conversation with her will be different, depending on if you're writing a bio about her, versus if you want to ask questions

about a specific study she worked on — so reminding her about what you hope to talk about and what your end goal is at the beginning will help frame the conversation.

6. **Ask open-ended questions.** Asking questions like “When did you become a child psychologist?” and “When did you start your latest study?” may lead to short, few word answers. This, in turn, doesn’t give you much to work with when creating content. More open-ended questions like “How did you become interested in child psychology?” and “What inspired your latest study?” will typically lead to more comprehensive answers and compelling insight for your content.
7. **For audio and video, ask them to repeat the question.** If you plan to turn SME’s answers into an audio or video product, you may not have the interviewer’s voice in the final product. That means, asking your source to repeat back the question in their answer will give you the context you need for your final product. For example, if you ask “how did you become interested in child psychology?” make sure your source says “I became interested in child psychology when I took an introductory course in college” instead of just “in college.”
8. **Ask your expert to define acronyms and words you don’t understand.** Whether they’re an expert in biomedical research or modern jazz, SME’s will likely use words that people outside of their field are unfamiliar with. As an interviewer, ask them to define any terms or phrases you don’t understand. This is especially important if you’re interviewing them for a video project where you won’t be able to define terms after the fact.
9. **Dive deep and ask follow-up questions.** It’s important to have a list of questions to ask, but sometimes subjects offer up information that’s so interesting that you need to know more. If your source sounds particularly passionate about something you didn’t have on your list, don’t be afraid to ask more about this topic.
10. **Ask if there’s anything they’d like to add.** Make sure “is there anything you’d like to add?” is on your list of questions! Sometimes, sources say no. Sometimes, they’ll have a lot to say and talk about something that’s really important to them — and you’ll be glad you asked.