Conducting a Research Interview

Planning the Interview
1. Decide what information you want or need to learn.
2. Develop a good list of questions. Consider these points when writing your questions:
   - Are your questions clearly stated?
   - Do you understand what you are asking?
   - Will your questions allow for a variety of answers?
   - Do your questions encourage stories or sharing facts?
   - Will your questions require more than a “yes” or “no” answer?
   - Be prepared with follow-up questions.
   - Use telling phrases such as “please tell” or “please describe.”

Arranging the Interview
1. Decide who can best provide the information you need.
   - What makes this person an expert?
   - What type of advance degrees, if any, does this person hold?
   - How many years of experience does this person have?
   - Is this person affiliated with any professional associations?
   - How can this person help you?
2. Contact your person by writing a letter or making a phone call.
3. Introduce yourself using your first and last names.
4. Explain why you are writing or calling. Mention the school’s name and that you are working on a research project. Briefly describe your project.
5. Tell how long you think the interview will take. (Allow at least a few minutes for each question.)
6. Ask what day, time, and place are convenient for the person you want to interview.
7. Thank the person for their time.

Conducting the Interview
1. Have your questions written on paper with plenty of space for answers.
2. Remember to have a pen or pencil with you.
3. If you must travel to get to the interview be there on time and dress appropriately.
4. If you plan to use a tape recorder in the interview, always ask the person for permission to tape the interview.
5. Even if you are using a tape recorder, it’s still a good idea to take notes during the interview. If the recorder doesn’t work properly or you lose the tape, you still have information.
6. If the person offers more information than you really need, listen politely, then ask your next question.
7. When you are done, thank the person for helping you.
8. Always be courteous and polite!
9. Follow up your interview with a handwritten thank-you note and send it.