


1982

Development and Use of Student-Conducted Interviews with Native Speakers for Use in the Language Class

Janie L. Duncan
School for International Training

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/ipp_collection

 Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#), [Communication Commons](#), and the [Linguistics Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Duncan, Janie L., "Development and Use of Student-Conducted Interviews with Native Speakers for Use in the Language Class" (1982). *MA TESOL Collection*. 361.
https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/ipp_collection/361

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the SIT Graduate Institute at SIT Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in MA TESOL Collection by an authorized administrator of SIT Digital Collections. For more information, please contact digitalcollections@sit.edu.

DEVELOPMENT AND USE OF STUDENT-CONDUCTED INTERVIEWS
WITH NATIVE SPEAKERS FOR USE IN THE LANGUAGE CLASS

Janie L. Duncan
B.A. Ohio University

December, 1982

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Master of Arts in Teaching degree at the
School for International Training, Brattleboro, Vermont.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
RATIONALE FOR USING INTERVIEWS.....	3
PREPARATION FOR INTERVIEWING.....	8
I. Definition of the Interview.....	10
II. Defining Content Objectives.....	11
III. Defining Linguistic Objectives.....	12
IV. Defining Interviewing Skill Objectives.....	13
V. Choosing Likely Participants.....	14
VI. Pronunciation.....	15
VII. Beginning the Interview.....	16
VIII. Maximizing Participation.....	17
IX. Communicating Accurately.....	18
X. Drawing the Interviewee Out.....	19
XI. Manifesting a Positive Attitude.....	22
XII. Ending the Interview.....	23
XIII. Other Considerations.....	24
FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES.....	27
I. General Feedback.....	29
II. Specific Information Collected.....	30
III. Identifying New Vocabulary.....	31
IV. Evaluating Performance.....	32
V. Outlining Preparation.....	33
CONCLUSION.....	34
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	35

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, it will document and organize my insights into the preparation for, implementation and uses of student-conducted interviews with native speakers. The interview process itself is intended to expand the cross-cultural awareness and linguistic exposure of second language learners studying in the country of their target language. The second purpose of this paper is to provide useful information and a framework for second language teachers who might wish to explore the use of this technique.

The paper is divided into three chapters followed by a conclusion. Chapter One will address the rationale for using interviews and will give a basic definition of the interview. Chapter Two deals with the preparation for interviewing and includes activities and suggestions for classroom use. Chapter Three will focus on follow-up activities in and out of the classroom.

While my purpose is to explain and describe preparation and follow-up steps for interviews, it should be noted that there is no real set of "do's and don't's." Just as the interview process itself is a creative one, the selection of strategies, techniques and tactics for classroom use should not be expected to adhere to a fixed, mechanical sequence. Still, a working knowledge of interviewing skills and techniques is essential. Identification and practice of these skills can provide a meaningful structure for learning and using language and other means of communication.

Teachers should feel free to combine, alter, or delete exercises according to their students' needs. I offer these exercises and my personal notes as suggestions for working on skills I have identified as crucial to successful interviewing. I would welcome helpful criticism from anyone who uses these exercises.

My experience with interviewing techniques for language students began in 1972 when I was asked to write instructions for a series of interview assignments. The interviews were called Cultural Awareness Projects or CAP's and they were published by Boston University.¹ The purpose was to serve as a crutch for American students to approach French speakers to practice using and hearing French.

When I began teaching ESL to students at the School for International Training in 1978, I rewrote the assignments to focus on American language and culture. Little by little I have realized that the greater potential for practicing language lies in relevant preparation and follow-up activities than in the interview alone. Furthermore, I have observed student involvement to increase proportionately with the students' increased responsibility for and preparation for the interview. The first students I sent out on informational scavenger hunts generally enjoyed themselves but recent students who have been more active in preparation and follow-up have learned and practiced more skills and specific language. They have also learned how to structure and direct their own language practice.

¹ Barbara Oder and Peter Dublin, Cultural Awareness Workbook: Paris, France, (New York: Wider Horizons Project, 1977).

CHAPTER ONE

RATIONALE FOR USING INTERVIEWS

To meet, talk with, and be understood by native speakers in an informal situation is an objective common to almost all second language students. Yet finding an acceptable way of initiating communication is often awkward for both student and native speaker. Even if students do manage to engage in conversations, it is difficult if not impossible to plan, structure, practice, predict and control a conversation in such a way that it retains both natural and spontaneous characteristics. Conversation is not a reliable, consistent technique for soliciting or practicing specific structures because it cannot be planned. The characteristics of an interview, however, allow students to interact and communicate while using the procedure as a tool for a specific purpose.

Morgan and Cogger, in The Interviewer's Manual, define the interview as an interactive communication process involving two or more people talking with each other in a planned, purposeful event. "Directed and goal-oriented, it is conducted by one of the participants who is interested in getting information from the other party."²

² Henry H. Morgan and John W. Cogger, The Interviewer's Manual, (New York: The Psychological Corporation, 1973) p.2.

While interviews may range from formal to informal, may be requested by either participant, may take place over the telephone, the TV, at the front door, or in a coffee shop, a common and essential characteristic is the direction of questions toward a definite, predetermined purpose -- getting information. The information sought may vary greatly. For example, interviews may be used to collect a range of local accents, different ways to tell time, statistics or facts, opinions, or gestures accompanying specific linguistic patterns.

I have identified six ways interviewing exercises have served my students. I believe that each alone would be a valid reason for using interviews. Combined, they offer a strong rationale for using interview exercises.

1. Students have an acceptable entry to meet and talk with native speakers.

Students who might be shy about striking up a conversation under normal circumstances generally respond well to the assignment of interviewing people as a means of meeting and talking with them. This is also a socially acceptable form of interaction for the native speaker who may be a stranger to the foreign student, and who under other circumstances might hesitate to engage in a simple conversation.

2. Language patterns are repeated.

Students accept the fact that questions, introductions and explanations in an interview will be repeated each time the interview is repeated. This provides perfectly natural practice for focusing on listening, speaking, note-taking, and observation

skills. With each repetition students should gain confidence in their skills and increase their awareness of the similarities and differences in the responses of their interviewees.

3. Students can collect information or behavior patterns not available through printed or other recorded forms.

Predetermined by the student, the interview can be used to gather information or behavior patterns to be shared and discussed in class. For instance, students might ask someone to teach them the rhymes they used as children to determine the order of participation in games. The information and behavior gathered from a rhyme such as "One potato, two potato..." can become the focus of follow-up activities on rhythm, reduced speech, gestures and vocabulary.

4. The student is in control of the exchange.

Feeling secure about manipulating structures and controlling the direction of discussions are problems for most language learners in a conversational setting. The student-initiated interview, however, puts the student in control of the situation from beginning to end. Furthermore, the student and teacher have the advantage of being able to predict and practice vocabulary and structures which may logically occur during the interview.

5. Students can practice many skills.

The interview is a dynamic process. It provides a simultaneously natural and structured speaking exercise to practice many

skills. Before, during and after the interview students can focus on speaking, listening, note-taking, writing, observation, or non-verbal skills, to name the most common.

6. Feelings of goodwill can occur between two people who otherwise might never meet.

Most people like to talk and most people like to be in a position to help others, especially when it is easy to provide the assistance in a painless, quick manner such as answering questions to which they undoubtedly know the answers. By tailoring questions to suit interviewers the student can plan and word his questions to ensure a successful exchange and a mutually beneficial experience.

To summarize, I would stress the element of purpose, which makes interviewing a productive technique for practicing and learning languages inside and outside the classroom. Interviewing is a natural exchange between speakers, but it is also a process which can be directed by the student. Although usually informal, interviewing has an officialness lent by its purposeful quality which encourages native speakers to participate because they are automatically in a position to be helpful to a stranger who is a foreigner.

By nature goal-oriented and mutually beneficial to interviewer and interviewee, the interview is an activity well worth pursuing as a language teaching technique.

The success of the interviewing technique will depend on the student's acceptance and attention to his responsibilities as an interviewer. The

teacher should be aware that initially students may want to relinquish responsibility for directing the interview to the interviewee. This problem may arise because the student is in a more insecure position linguistically and may feel presumptuous about being in command. However, if a student is reminded that he is the only participant who knows the purpose and direction of the interview, he will usually accept and fulfill his responsibilities. In the next chapter I will identify areas of responsibility, give a rationale and suggest activities to practice prior to the interview.

CHAPTER TWO

PREPARATION FOR INTERVIEWING

In an interviewing exercise the bulk of time should be spent on preparation for the interview and subsequent follow-up. Students can easily be sent out of the classroom to find answers to a list of questions or to meet and find out as much as possible about someone they don't know. This spontaneous, often spur-of-the-moment activity frequently meets with success. However, with thoughtful preparation and follow-up the interview can yield even more possibilities for learning and can ensure that the student will have greater control over the situation. This is particularly important for the timid or reluctant student.

The following sections of this chapter describe the interviewer's responsibilities and the skills each suggests be mastered. Also, to help students focus their attention and practice on these skills I have designed preparation exercises for each area.

The exercises should further the students' understanding of the whole interview process, clarify roles and responsibilities, and allow them to refine skills needed in the interview.

The first four exercises should be used in order. The rest continue in chronological order but may be used in a different sequence. Also it may be useful to combine some exercises. It is important that all skill areas be practiced or at least acknowledged in discussion. While it is

easy to assume that students know how to politely end an interview, for example, experience has shown me that this is not always so. Just as professional interviewers must consider and practice all skills required, so too should second language students using interviewing techniques.

I. Definition of the Interview

Rationale

Although students may quickly recognize the word "interview," the specific image each has of the process may vary drastically. Some may conceive of only a formal situation while others may envision an informal, on-the-street questionnaire. It is essential that there be some class discussion to define and describe the variety of interviews.

Purpose

To define an interview.

Materials

Blackboard and chalk or large sheet of newsprint or brown paper and magic markers.

Activity

Ask the class as a whole to define an interview and to write the definition on the board or paper.

Notes

If students have trouble with the definition, ask them to recall interviews that they have seen, heard or participated in. Asking them to contrast an interview with a conversation should help them to make further distinctions.

Depending on students' level, it may be necessary or helpful to introduce these words:

interview	interviewee
planned	goal-oriented
purpose	objective
communication	process
conduct	initiate
information	opinion

II. Defining Content Objectives

Rationale

A discussion of objectives is essential in the early stages of preparation so that students understand the particular value that interviews can have for them. Students can be guided to approach interviews by considering the interviewee and the particular interests or information that person is able to share because of his identity or position.

Purpose

To choose appropriate content objectives.

Materials

A list of names of people from various community groups, backgrounds or professions.

Activity

Have students choose a potential interviewee from the list. Have students then compile a list of questions which are most logical for the person they have chosen.

Notes

The questions, as reflections of the objectives of the interview, need to take into account the identity and orientation of the interviewee. For an interview with a policeman, the following questions would be appropriate:

How does a person become a police officer?

What kind of training is given?

Where is training done?

What is the percentage of women on the police force?

Has the focus of the job changed in the last twenty years?

III. Defining Linguistic Objectives

Rationale

It is important for students to predict the language that they will use during the course of the interview by identifying specific information or target grammatical structures and compiling a list of questions to elicit the information or structures.

Purpose

To formulate questions which will yield a desired linguistic pattern or function.

Activity

Ask students to choose a grammatical item they would like to elicit through interviewing. Then have them work on a list of questions which are most likely to produce the information.

Notes

In working with prepositions of place, the following sample question and answer indicate what can be elicited:

- Could you tell me how to get to the Common Ground Restaurant from the Gibson-Aiken Center?
- Sure. As you leave the Aiken Center turn to your left, walk down Main Street, all the way to the Dutch Bake Shop at the intersection of Main and Elliot Street. At the traffic light, cross the street and continue down Elliot Street on the right-hand side of the street. It's about half way up the block, next to the pharmacy and upstairs.

IV. Defining Interviewing Skill Objectives

Rationale

The process of successfully carrying out an interview depends on more than content and linguistic aims. There are other important skills, such as listening, speaking, note-taking and observation.

Purpose

To identify skills to refine.

Materials

Video or audio tape recorder and playback unit.

Activity

Have each student role play an interview with another student and, if possible, record the activity. Following the play-back, ask the class to comment on the skills they observed. As a group, list suggestions to make future interviews more efficient and smooth.

Notes

After listening to recorded interviews, my students often recommend that they do the following to improve their skills:

- predict and practice listening to and saying vocabulary items and expressions which will probably occur.
- devise a short-hand system for easier, quicker note-taking
- practice taking notes while having a conversation

V. Choosing Likely Participants

Rationale

Students are sometimes skeptical that people would want to talk with them, particularly when they are planning on-the-street interviews. This exercise helps them think of likely candidates by focusing on professions or activities people might be engaged in.

Purpose

To identify potential interviewees.

Activity

Have students list the types of individuals or places they might expect to find likely interviewees.

Notes

If necessary suggest that students consider jobs which allow workers to carry on extended conversations. Ask them what locations they may find people who are waiting or relaxing. My students can usually suggest the following: people waiting at bus stops, people doing their laundry, store clerks during slow hours, people sitting in parks, taxi drivers waiting at cab stands, people in coffee shops on a break, firemen at the firestation.

VI. Pronunciation

Rationale

It is not difficult to convince students of the importance of correct pronunciation. Some amusing or embarrassing anecdotes or a simple listing of minimal pairs will emphasize the importance when the difference in meaning is conveyed by a difference in pronunciation.

Purpose

To practice pronunciation.

Activity

Ask students to produce their own minimal pairs by identifying the sounds they have trouble distinguishing. Have them make lists focusing on these sounds and then have them work in pairs to practice listening and producing the sounds.

Notes

This exercise may also be used in follow-up when students wish to work on areas they may have had some difficulty in during an interview.

VII. Beginning the Interview

Rationale

The first and most obvious responsibility is to begin the interview. How the student introduces himself and explains the purpose of the interview may determine whether or not the interview will proceed.

Purpose

To practice introductions.

Materials

Video or audio tape recorder and playback unit.

Activity

Have students work in pairs practicing introducing themselves explaining where they are from and why they wish to speak to the potential interviewee.

After all students have taped an introduction have the class review the tape, make positive comments, and offer suggestions.

Notes

If class time is limited the students may prepare the tapes as homework.

To see if the introduction and purpose of the interview would be clear to a native speaker, ask a friend to listen to the tapes and to paraphrase each one. The paraphrase can be taped to be played back to the students or it can be written and distributed to individuals.

VIII. Maximizing Participation

Rationale

Included in the opening statements should be some conscious effort to maximize the interviewee's ability and willingness to participate. Most potential interviewees will respond favorably to an opportunity to help someone, especially when it requires very little effort and when they understand from the outset that the success of their efforts is guaranteed. If they feel they are not expert enough, or not important enough, they may shy away. Hence it is important in wording the first statements and questions that the potential interviewee be made to feel he is the right person to respond.

Purpose

To maximize participation by clarifying the purpose of the interview and wording it so that the interviewee sees it is within his realm.

Materials

Video or audio tape recorder and playback unit.

Activity

Have students work in pairs taping introductions and explanations of purposes. Play the exchanges to the class and have the participants critique their work.

Notes

Comparing a variety of responses to the initial question may be useful. To do this within the class, play the taped introduction and question but stop before the reply is given. Ask class members to respond. Then play the tape and compare the responses. It is important to note when the responses are different because of the individuals involved and when they differ because of misunderstandings.

Although body language is not the focus of this activity, it may be appropriate to ask students to incorporate some kind of behavior which indicates the interview will be a pleasant exchange. For example, a smile or a nod of the head may show the interviewer is listening closely and appreciating the exchange. If the interviewee feels that the student is merely completing an assignment the answers he gives may be short and uninteresting, leaving both participants feeling that the exchange was superficial.

IX. Communicating Accurately

Rationale

To communicate accurately students will need to focus on pronunciation, intonation, word order, and appropriate levels of formality. A question which is perfect in every aspect except pronunciation or intonation, for example, may go unanswered because the interviewee may not be able to figure out what the student is trying to ask.

Key words and set patterns which will recur should be practiced before the interview takes place. For instance, students interviewing someone on the subject of nuclear energy should know the meaning of and correct pronunciation of such words as fusion, fission, reactor core, fuel bundles, spent fuel, reaction chain, etc.

Purpose

To predict and practice vocabulary.

Materials

Reference books listing topics and related vocabulary:
(The ESL Miscellany³, What's What⁴, Roget's Thesaurus⁵)

Activity

Have the students choose a topic for an interview and list probable vocabulary and expressions they may need to recognize and or use. Have them practice pronouncing and writing the words in isolation and then in context.

Notes

This may be an appropriate time for students to devise a short-hand system or abbreviation for words they may expect to write when taking notes.

³ Raymond C. Clark, Patrick R. Moran, and Arthur A. Burrows, The ESL Miscellany (Brattleboro: Pro Lingua Associates, 1981).

⁴ Reginald Bragonier, Jr., and David Fisher, What's What (New York: Ballantine Books, 1981).

⁵ Norman Lewis (ed.), The New Roget's Thesaurus (New York: Berkeley Publishing Corporation, 1978).

X. Drawing the Interviewee Out

Rationale

Students should be able to identify, formulate, and use different types of questions. Nothing can be more devastating than to ask a question but to be answered by a simple "yes" or "no" or other one-word reply. Frequently the problem lies in the type of question which has been put.

Purpose

To formulate and practice asking various types of questions.

Activity A: Interjections

Have students interview each other in pairs. Instruct the interviewee to give only the information called for; that is, not to elaborate until encouraged by the interviewer. Tell the interviewer to draw his partner out by interjecting encouraging remarks.

Notes

Some examples of encouraging comments to practice are:

Hm...	And?
So...	Tell me more!
Oh?	Yes, I see.

Activity B: Echo Question

Have students interview each other in pairs. Instruct the interviewer to indicate a need for clarification or elaboration by echoing a word or phrase just uttered.

Notes

The dialog which follows may be a useful example:

"The cheapest cup of coffee is at the greasy spoon on the corner."

"The greasy spoon?" (The echo)

"Yeah, Ed's diner." (Elaboration)

Activity C: Probing Questions

Have students interview each other in pairs practicing information questions (introduced by "who," "where," "what," or "when") followed by a second probe seeking an explanation or description (introduced by the question words "why" or "how").

Notes

For variety, have students being interviewed take on the identity of famous personalities, such as characters from short stories or novels or someone in the news. An interview which might result from questioning Tom Sawyer from Mark Twain's "The Glorious Whitewasher"⁶ might sound like this:

Interviewer: Tom, did you really get your friends to whitewash Aunt Polly's fence?

Tom: Yes, I did.

Interviewer: How did you convince them to do it?

Tom: Oh, it was really very simple. I just made the job look like a lot of fun and a special privilege. By seeming reluctant to allow anyone else to paint the fence, I made others envious and soon everyone was begging for the chance to do it. They even paid me for the opportunity!

Activity D: Multiple Choice Questions

Have students interview each other in pairs. Instruct the interviewer to practice formulating multiple choice questions (also known as "laundry list," "menu," or "shopping list" questions) from which to make a selection.

Notes

There should be three or more equally desirable choices, with the last one being open-ended. This question, for example, should encourage a philatelist to explain why he collects stamps: "Some people collect stamps because of an interest in history and geography. Others are interested in the

⁶ Mark Twain, "The Glorious Whitewasher." In American Plays for Reading. Adaptation by Henry Gilfond. (USA: Walker Educational Book Corporation, 1966).

monetary value...others are fascinated by the artistic and engraving skills...some take pride in owning a rare stamp.... There are lots of reasons for collecting. What appeals to you the most?"⁷

Activity E: Alternate Choice Questions

Have students interview each other in pairs. Ask the interviewer to practice formulating alternate choice questions, that is, offering two equally desirable or undesirable options from which the interviewee is expected to choose.

Notes

This type of question does not ensure elaboration but it can easily be followed by the second probe of "why," or "how."

For example, "Would you say that the Brattleboro Actor's Theatre is moving toward greater diversification or toward more specialization in its repertory?" "Why do you think that is so?"

Variations on Activities A-E

Instead of having students work in pairs, have a small group interview one person.

If class time is limited have students turn in tape recorded interviews conducted outside class.

Instead of conducting interviews orally have students prepare questions on 3 x 5 index cards. Put the cards in a pile and let students choose cards on which they then write answers.

⁷ Morgan and Cogger, p. 21.

XI. Manifesting a Positive Attitude

Rationale

Manifesting a positive attitude requires acute sensitivity to the effects of non-verbal behavior. Because of the impact of attitudes conveyed by the interviewer, students should be able to discuss, identify and demonstrate various attitudes and how they are conveyed.

Purpose

To practice conveying various attitudes.

Activity

First through mime, then through spoken language, have students convey the following attitudes:

boredom	disagreement
confusion	interest
anger	surprise
disdain	respect

Notes

It may be useful to follow this activity with a discussion of when it would be appropriate and when it would not be advisable to convey these or other attitudes.

Also, it may be necessary to compare the expression of these attitudes. For example, in one culture to cast the eyes downward may show respect. In another this may indicate timidity or shame.

XII. Ending the Interview

Rationale

The interviewee will expect the interviewer to lead him through the exercise. He will also expect the interviewer to take the initiative to end the interview and to do so in a reasonable length of time.

Purpose

To practice ending an interview.

Activity

Have students prepare a list of behavioral hints to show the interview has come to a conclusion. Have them follow this with a list of verbal clues ranging from polite suggestions to direct statements that it is time to stop.

Have students role play the end of an interview, beginning with the obvious visual clues, such as putting away equipment or tools, looking at a wrist watch, or folding up notes. Progress as far as necessary until the interview concludes.

Notes

Occasionally interviewers experience difficulty ending an interview with a particularly talkative person. It may be necessary then to resort to a firm, clear statement indicating an obligation to return to class or to go on to another appointment.

XIII. Other Considerations

In the preceding activities, I have focused on responsibilities and verbal skills as areas for preparation. Now I would like to turn to other considerations: body language, choosing a likely setting, the importance of aural-oral skills, and arranging the interview itself.

Body Language

Without attaching undue importance to body language, expose students to the subtle influences of non-verbal behavior. Given that body language is culturally specific, the examples and explanations I use will reflect American body language and interpretations. I have chosen four areas personal interviewers agree deserve careful observation and control. Under each area are recommendations and suggestions to develop an awareness of the impact of each.

Facial Expression

The interviewer should try to maintain a relaxed countenance with an impression of friendliness and alertness. Many people frown as they concentrate, but an expression of intense concentration may be interpreted by a stranger as anger.⁸ The interviewer can however, use facial expressions when appropriate to convey meaning just as he might in an informal non-structured situation. "Raising one's eyebrows in a quizzical look is often effective in eliciting further information.... Nodding one's head

⁸ Morgan and Cogger, p. 20.

affirmatively or shaking it in disbelief may sometimes be appropriate if not carried to an extreme."⁹

Body Posture

To convey the impression of attentiveness and poise, the interviewer should maintain an erect posture in a natural and relaxed manner.

Eye Contact

"The use of the eyes is probably the most important of all nonverbal behavior in establishing rapport. Although some people do not feel comfortable maintaining eye contact, most people respond well to continued eye contact. Of course, one should not engage in a staring contest."¹⁰

Physical Distance Between Participants

People of different cultural backgrounds vary in their reaction to the distance between them. Students should observe the distance variations for various groups they might expect to encounter: children, men, women, friends, strangers, etc.

Choosing a Likely Setting

The interviewer should be aware of the surroundings he has chosen and be ready to suggest a change of location if appropriate or necessary. Ideally the place should provide some privacy in a relaxed atmosphere with no people rushing about or distracting noises.

⁹ Morgan and Cogger, p.20

¹⁰ Morgan and Cogger, p.20

The Importance of Aural/Oral Skills

Knowledge of intonation patterns and their effect is extremely important and may determine the entire potentiality of an interview. A student who is not aware of a sarcastic or condescending tone in his speech may find it difficult to initiate or carry out a full interview. In addition to being able to produce different patterns, students will need to recognize intonation patterns and make appropriate interpretations.

Arranging the Interview

Depending on the kind of interview, it may be necessary or advisable to set up appointments or alert someone that students will be asking questions at a certain time and place. Of course this is not possible for the "man on the street" type of interview. When setting up an interview consider having students make the arrangements by telephoning interviewees. Student involvement here tends to increase the interest level as well as the sense of responsibility.

CHAPTER THREE

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

Although the interview may seem to be the climax or peak and therefore the concluding activity, follow-up must not be overlooked or slighted. I consider follow-up any oral or written activity which reviews, examines, reinforces and or synthesizes information, language and or skills learned or practiced during an assignment.

Only recently have I realized the importance and increased the number of follow-up activities I use. For this reason my experience and my discussion of follow-up will be limited. Nevertheless, evidence of students' increased involvement and learning leads me to conclude that this step is just as important as the preparation step for interviewing. I believe it must be included for these reasons:

1. Students take interviewing assignments seriously and are more likely to be responsible and observant during the interview. Most students recognize the value and purpose of interview assignments. There are some students, however, who say they focus better on their purpose and observation skills when they know they will be asked to report on their work.
2. Follow-up which asks students to summarize experiences and information gives students an opportunity to use and to appreciate notes or recordings made during interviews. As students do more

interviews they realize the value of their note-taking and recording skills and consequently they work to sharpen these skills.

3. Students can learn and benefit from hearing about each other's successes and difficulties in interviews. Students are usually eager to share their effective techniques as well as to warn each other of what to avoid. For instance, my students repeatedly recommend the Brattleboro Dunkin' Donuts coffee shop as a likely spot to find talkative, helpful, enthusiastic interviewees. On the other hand, students frequently warn classmates not to expect much information or cordiality from the local Chamber of Commerce staff.

4. Learning how to evaluate one's own and others' performances objectively is an important skill which follow-up can address. It is quite natural for students to feel uncomfortable about critiquing each other's performances. Structured follow-up can provide the opportunity for students to learn how to give and receive and make use of objective criticism.

Thorough, consistent follow-up can help students become more responsible, observant, effective interviewers. As with preparation exercises, the teacher should adapt follow-up exercises to meet the needs, interests, and constraints of the particular class. I shall treat and focus the following exercises for each purpose separately. In practice, however, several purposes may be achieved by one technique.

I. General Feedback

Rationale

The allotment of class time to feedback, even though it may be no more than five or ten minutes, conveys that what was learned or experienced is of importance and interest to the teacher and others. Since emotional reactions and general impressions lose their intensity as time passes it is advisable to have a quick sharing session as soon as possible after the interview.

Purpose:

To canvass the group for general impressions and reactions.

Materials

Blackboard and chalk or large sheet of newsprint or brown paper and magic markers.

Activity

Ask students to write a) five adjectives which describe people they interviewed; b) a key word representing something funny or unexpected that may have occurred during the interview; c) two words describing their feelings before the interview; d) two words describing their feelings after the interview.

Have students on a voluntary basis share their reactions orally with the rest of the class. The teacher or a student may record the information or vocabulary on a large sheet of paper, on the blackboard or on a ditto master to be distributed later.

Notes

This should be a survey of the experiences, not an in-depth report. It frequently shows students that their pre-interview nervousness was shared by many others and that in general, the experience was a positive one for everyone.

As a variation and to introduce new vocabulary, ask the students to check appropriate reactions from a list. For example,

Check the adjectives below which describe people you interviewed:

brusque patient helpful cooperative

hesitant rushed charming distrustful

II. Specific Information Collected

Rationale

Since the purpose of the interview is to collect some information and to practice certain skills, it is important to see what students learned. Students will expect and often look forward to recording or reporting accomplishments. A variety of follow-up activities can bring out this information as well as give students practice in written and oral reporting skills.

Purpose

Compare information obtained through interviews.

Activity

Have each student write or speak about some new piece of information learned from conducting an interview. In response to one question compare the information gathered by several students or that gathered by one student from several people. Discuss differences, similarities, and draw conclusions or make observations.

Notes

This activity often leads into discussions of perspective and helps students see that there is more than one answer to many questions. For example, following are three answers and three observations made in response to the one question, "Is there a right and a wrong side of the tracks in Brattleboro?"

1. Answer: No, this situation doesn't exist in Brattleboro. Everyone here is basically the same.

Student's Observation: The townspeople wanted to present Brattleboro's best profile.

2. Answer: No, the railroad tracks run along the river's edge so there is just one side of the tracks.

Student's Observation: The person didn't understand the question or he understood it but didn't want to answer.

3. Answer: Yes, there are vastly different economic and social neighborhoods but they are scattered throughout the town, not concentrated on one side or the other.

Student's Observation: The person understood the question and tried to answer objectively.

III. Identifying New Vocabulary

Rationale

Students usually return with a list of new words or expressions they have learned or heard. While they may bring them up in other activities, a separate activity focusing on new words will help them be more aware of what they have learned.

Purpose

To identify, define, pronounce, use new vocabulary.

Activity

Ask students to list on the blackboard or on a large sheet of paper new words or expressions heard in the interview. Have them define any words not known to other students and show that they can use them accurately. Ask them to categorize the words (noun, verb, adjective, adverb, etc.) and then to find the other forms of the words in the dictionary.

Notes

Encourage students to write phonetically any words they may not be certain of. Check the pronunciation of new words. Ask students to immitate unusual or amusing accents or speech characteristics they heard.

IV. Evaluating Performance

Rationale

When follow-up consistently includes student evaluation of performance students not only increase their ability to evaluate their work objectively but they become more invested in preparation and implementation. Whether the evaluation is in the form of a check list or a comment sheet, it pulls together all the objectives and skills and allows students and the teacher to see the total strengths and weaknesses. Often the effect of such a global view is to give students a great sense of accomplishment and a clear sense of direction.

Purpose

To evaluate the interview performance.

Activity

Ask students to comment on each area of the interview, separating the skills they feel good about from those they feel need more work.

Notes

The teacher may wish to use an evaluation form followed by a discussion of what went well and what did not. Trying to understand perplexing situations and laughing over amusing ones can draw a group together as well as offer areas to consider in planning the next interview.

V. Outlining Preparation

Rationale

The last logical step is to ask students to outline areas to be practiced in preparation for the next interview. In addition to including problem areas to focus on, students should identify challenges or higher level skills they wish to practice and use in the next assignment.

Purpose

To outline areas for the next interview preparation stage.

Activity

Have students review their evaluation of the last interview and make an outline of skills or other considerations for preparation. Ask the class to identify common interests and individual needs. Discuss ways to meet the requirements of each student and of the group.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper -- to organize my rationales, techniques, and insights into preparation and follow-up for student-conducted interviews -- has evolved and become increasingly important to me as I work more and more with interviewing as a teaching technique.

To be fair to students and interviewees, to enable students to perform at their best, to help students learn how to evaluate their needs and performance, it seems obvious that time and careful attention must be given to preparation and follow-up. I have only recently become aware of the great potential pre- and post-interviewing exercises imply for my students; it was my students who made me realize this. Their failures or difficulties showed me that some area of responsibility had been neglected, thus causing their problems. In the past my students and I only laughed at the misunderstandings that occurred in interviews. Having learned to go beyond that reaction, I can now see how my students' problems can direct me and them to work on the skills needed to avoid these problems.

The acceptance of a responsibility for learning becomes clearer when adequate preparation and follow-up are part of the whole process: one can see the link between exercises, the actual interview, and the follow-up reports. As students see the effect one stage has on the other they will hopefully take on more responsibility for directing their own language learning outside class as well.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bragonier, J., Reginald and David Fisher. What's What. New York: Ballantine Books, 1981.
- Clark, Raymond C., and Patrick R. Moran and Arthur A. Burrows, The ESL Miscellany. Brattleboro: Pro Lingua Associates, 1981.
- Garrett, Annette Marie. Interviewing, Its Principles and Methods. New York: Family Welfare Association of America, 1942.
- Gordon, Raymond L. Interviewing: Strategy, Techniques, and Tactics. Homewood, ILL.: Dorsey Press, 1975.
- Lewis, Norman, ed. The New Roget's Thesaurus. New York: Berkeley Publishing Corporation, 1978.
- Morgan, Henry H., and John W. Cogger. The Interviewer's Manual. New York: The Psychological Corporation, 1973.
- Oder, Barbara and Peter Dublin. Cultural Awareness Workbook: Paris, France. New York: Wider Horizons Project, 1977.
- Riker, William H. The Study of Local Politics, A Manual. New York: Random House, 1959.
- Schulman, Eveline D. Intervention in Human Services. Saint Louis: Mosby, 1978.
- Twain, Mark. "The Glorious Whitewasher." In American Plays for Reading. Adaptation by Henry Gilfond. USA: Walker Educational Book Corporation, 1966.