

How to Conduct an Interview

Try practicing these tips on friends and family ahead of meeting with your energy experts:

1. Think about what you hope to accomplish. What kind of information do you need?
2. Next, think about whom to interview. Who's an expert in this field? Who can best answer the questions you have?
3. Set up an interview. Call or e-mail the person, explain who you are and what you're doing, and ask if she will speak to you. Arrange a time and a place.
4. Do some research beforehand so you know some things about the person and her area of expertise. (This will give you confidence!)
5. Now, what are you still curious about? Prepare a list of questions. Think about the flow of the interview. Ask simple questions first, then move on to more complex ones. Group questions about one subject together. Then move on to the next subject.
6. When you meet, introduce yourself. If you want to record the interview, ask permission. Assure the person that you're recording so that you will have accurate quotes. But still, take careful notes. You never know when your recorder might fail.
7. Listen closely to what the person says. If you don't understand something, ask her to repeat the answer, or ask for clarification. Check details, spellings, dates, etc., as you go along.

Remember, you don't have to follow your list of questions word for word. If the person says something that surprises you or makes you curious, ask a follow-up question. Sometimes that's how you get the best information.
8. Try not to get so caught up in your note-taking that you don't make eye contact with the person. Nod your head when you're really interested in what is being said.
9. Near the end of the interview, quickly scan your list of questions to make sure you've covered what you need to know.
10. At the end of the interview, ask the person if there's anything she wants to add. Then thank her for her time and for sharing her expertise. Then tell her, "I'll be going over my notes. If I have other questions or need to clarify anything, may I contact you again?" If you're uncertain about anything, check back.