



Key Takeaways for Difficult Interviews

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(For more suggested questions and the related story, visit <http://bit.ly/difficult-interviews>)

- 1. Don't fear the fear!** It's natural to be nervous before an important or difficult interview.
- 2. Prepare.** Make sure you have all your facts and reporting in order and that they will be accessible to you during the interview if you need them. Then practice the interview as much as you can—map out an interview flowchart and/or role play with a colleague.
- 3. Stay calm and stick to the facts.** During the interview, if your interviewee starts to get upset or shut down, ask them to share their concerns. “I can tell that you're upset/reluctant to talk about [X]. What specifically are you worried about?”
- 4. Make every effort to include all voices in your story.** Don't just send one email and then say the source didn't respond to a request for comment. If you can't get a phone or in-person interview, put serious thought into writing questions for written response. Remember that your questions are on the record; keep them neutral.
- 5. No surprises!** If you work with a publication that has a fact-checking department, they will run much of your reporting by the source. If you don't have a fact-checking department, a “no surprises” letter that goes through everything you said about that source and gives them a chance to respond can be useful. A “no surprises” phone call can also be a great idea, but make sure you record it.
- 6. Be kind and fair.** The relationships you build with the people you're investigating will make reporting easier, and could even lead to new stories down the road.