The Senior Project Research Paper
Field Research: The Interview

Not all research is conducted in the library or on the internet. In fact, what you have done thus far might just be a starting point, providing you with an overview of your topic and the background information you need to undertake field research. In The Call to Write John Trimbur says, “Interviewing an expert on the topic you’re researching can provide you with up-to-date information and analysis, as well as a deepened understanding of the issues involved in these topics—and make a significant contribution to a research project. In such cases, interviewing an expert offers a source of information that supplements print or electronic sources” (566). Since one of your sources must include an interview with an expert in the area you are researching, below are some suggestions to optimize your experience.

Before the Interview—Planning
Once you have an overview and basic information about your topic, think about how interviewing can help you in your research. What do you hope to find out?

- Use the notes from your background research to prepare interview questions. Interviewers normally use open-ended questions (like your research questions) to get the subjects talking. Asking questions that elicit a “yes” or “no” response generally leads to a dead end.
- If you are interviewing an expert, your questions should be precise and seek specific information. Example, “Estimates vary on the number of cod in the North Atlantic. Can you give me your view?”
- When you have come up with a list of questions, organize them so that one question leads to the next (Trimbur 567-8).

Suggestions during the interview
- To “break the ice,” ask some generic questions. Examples: How long have you worked in this field? Can you describe your job? What do you like best about this job (hobby, etc)?
- Take out your list of research questions. Can you craft interview questions from these?
- Borrow a recorder from the media center. Record your interview, then take notes when you listen to the recording. Your responsibility is to produce 5 note cards from the interview.
- Thank the person you interviewed!

After the interview
- Plan time immediately afterwards to review the results of the interview and to make further notes, especially while the interview is still fresh in your mind.
- What questions does the interview raise for further research? What sources does it suggest you use?