­­­­­Interview Questions for artists

<http://questionsforartists.com/>

Questions for artists

Promote yourself: take a look at our handy Q&A for artists as a primer to promotion.

Working out how to promote yourself can be a bit tricky. We’ve put together some questions that should help you prepare for any promotional exercerise – some are slight, some are serious, but all of them are useful to get your head around for those Paxman moments.

You can even answer a handfull and email them to[arts@newsandmediarepublic.org](mailto:%20%20arts@newsandmediarepublic.org) for a possible feature on the site.

Include a photo of your ‘creative space’, and some examples of your work, or links on how to get them.

Q&A for artists.  
**Who are you and what do you do?**

**Why do you do what you do?**

**How do you work?**

**What’s your background?**

**What do you think is integral to the work of an artist?**

**What role does the artist have in society?**

**What has been a seminal experience for you?**

**Explain what you do in 100 words**

**How has your art or style changed over time?**

**What art do you most identify with?**

**What work do you most enjoying doing?**

**What’s your strongest memory of your childhood?**

**What themes do you pursue?**

**What’s your scariest experience?**

**What’s your favourite art work?**

**Describe a real-life situation that inspired you?**

**What’s your most embarrassing moment?**

**What jobs have you done other than being an artist?**

**Why art?**

**What is an artistic outlook on life?**

**What memorable responses have you had to your work?**

**What food, drink, song inspires you?**

**Is the artistic life lonely? What do you do to counteract it?**

**What do you dislike about the art world?**

**What do you dislike about your work?**

**What do you like about your work?**

**Should art be funded?**

**What role does arts funding have?**

**What makes you angry?**

**What research to you do?**

**What superpower would you have and why?**

**Name something you love, and why.**

**Name something you don’t love, and why.**

**What is your dream project?**

**Name three artists you’d like to be compared to.**

**Favourite or most inspirational place (in Devon)?**

**What’s the best piece of advice you’ve been given?**

**Professionally, what’s your goal?**

**What wouldn’t you do without?**

• Got any more questions that should be included? Drop us a line**.**Email [arts@newsandmediarepublic.org](mailto:%20%20arts@newsandmediarepublic.org)

## **Before, during, and after the interview**

### BEFORE YOU INTERVIEW YOUR FIRST ARTIST:

* Work with students to brainstorm a pool of generic questions that they might ask any artist. For some sample questions, see "Types of interview questions," below.
* Talk about types of questions, especially the difference between interview questions and survey questions. (Strong interview questions are typically open-ended and elicit narrative responses. Survey questions are more closed and elicit short, one- or two-word responses.)
* Model and practice interviewing through simulations and other activities prior to artist visits. Students can work on aspects of interviewing such as making eye contact, taking notes, and asking follow-up questions to probe for more information. See "Open-ended interviewing," below, for some suggestions on teaching good interviewing techniques.
* Establish boundaries for questions — discuss what should and shouldn’t be asked.
* Discuss expectations for appropriate audience behavior.

### BEFORE EACH ARTIST INTERVIEW:

* Share some information about the artist ahead of time to whet the students’ interests.
* Decide what it is that the class wants to learn from the interview. This can be flexible. Artist interviews are typically a combination of planned questions and spontaneous questions. Students should be encouraged to listen carefully enough to what is being said so that they can ask further questions on the story being told. See "Following the thread of a conversation," below, for suggestions on how to do this.
* Organize who will ask questions and consider having a basic order in which questions will be asked. One idea is to assign groups of students certain lines of questioning.
* Set the expectation that every student will ask at least one question, if that is feasible given the size of the group.
* Have a plan for how students will record the information they learn. Will all students write all answers? Will groups of students write on certain topics? Will individual students be responsible for recording answers to specific questions?
* Allow students to rehearse asking each other their questions and making up answers in small groups.
* Develop a tentative plan for what you will do with the information gathered in the interview.

### DURING THE INTERVIEW:

* Keep track of who is asking questions and what kind of questions each student is asking. Use this information to guide further instruction on questioning.
* Assess students’ audience behavior skills.
* Pay attention to the ideas and aspects of the artists’ experience that seem to capture the attention and interest of your students.
* Think about how the information you are learning in the interview might be used as a springboard for your classroom objectives. Be alert to opportunities to probe deeper with questions about an area that you think you might follow up on later. (For an example of how one teacher did this, see "The artist’s visit as springboard" on the [CMC website](http://www.unc.edu/learnnc/cmc/).)
* Firm up your plan for what you will do with the information gathered in the interview.

### AFTER THE INTERVIEW:

* Debrief the class on what you noticed with regard to the questions they were asking and their audience behavior.
* Provide opportunity for student self-reflection on skills you have emphasized (i.e., listening, making eye contact, speaking loudly and clearly, asking follow-up questions, etc.). Encourage students to set personal goals.
* Provide an opportunity for the class to synthesize the information gathered in the interview.
* Give the students time to reflect on the artist visit and what they learned. Journal writing works nicely for an independent version of this. It is also nice to let students talk about their reactions and opinions with others.
* Follow through with your plan to use the information gathered for some purpose. Use the momentum of the artist visit to meet your classroom objectives.

## **Types of interview questions**

Students typically ask artists four types of questions in interviews.

1. Questions about the artist’s personal history. For example:
   * When and how did you first become interested in music? How long have you been playing music?
   * What are your musical influences?
   * Does anyone in your family play music?
   * What kinds of times and places have you played music in your life?
   * What else do you do besides play music?
2. Questions about the stories behind the songs. For example:
   * Why did you write or decide to play that song?
   * What do you think that song is about?
   * What does it take to play a song like that?
   * What is special about that song?
3. Questions about musical style and attributes of the genre. For example:
   * What makes that a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ song?
   * Are there different kinds of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ songs?
   * What is it about the way you play that song that makes it different than the other kinds?
4. Questions about musical taste. For example:
   * What makes this kind of music "good" to you?
   * Why did you choose to play this kind of music?

## **Open-ended interviewing**

How can you teach students to ask good, open-ended questions in interviews? Here are some suggestions.

### 1. PRACTICE WITH PROMPTS OR "TELLABOUTS."

Our goal is to avoid questions that invite yes/no responses or short answers and thus to encourage "conversation" rather than "interrogation." This means staying away from many of the standard who/what/when/where/how questions that we’re told lie at the heart of newspaper writing. Instead, let’s encourage students to ask questions that invite fuller answers. A good way to start is to get kids thinking about the way that questions begin. For easy remembering, we call these beginnings "tellabouts," as in, "Tell me about … " Many (but not all) of these beginnings introduce a statement rather than a question, inviting the person being interviewed to elaborate his or her answer. Characteristic tellabout prompts include:

"Tell me about … " "Why did … " "Can you explain … " "How does … " "Please describe … " "Tell me about a time when … "

### 2. ASKING QUESTIONS ABOUT FEELINGS — "FEELING PHRASES"

A good way to "follow the thread" of answers given to tellabouts is to explore the feelings associated with those stories. Questions about emotions or feelings almost always spur further conversation, encouraging those being interviewed to move beyond purely factual answers to responses that are more personal. Talking about personal feelings shifts the ground of the conversation; suddenly, there’s no right or wrong, but only the sharing of uniquely personal experience. To make these particular tellabouts easier to remember, we call them "feeling phrases." Once again, the easiest way to invite talk about feelings is to introduce your questions with a simple opening like:

"How do you feel about … "

Another approach is to follow up a statement or story with a feeling question:

"How did that make you feel?"

Be sure to encourage your students to share their feelings as well. Once people start talking about feelings, the formal framing of "an interview" often slides away, giving way to a less formal — and usually more meaningful — conversation.

### 3. FOLLOWING THE THREAD OF A CONVERSATION

"Tellabouts" and "feeling phrases" are two ways of prompting conversational exchange. But they can only set the stage for what is perhaps the most important conversational skill — "following the thread." In essence, this means being able to listen carefully enough to what is being said so that you can ask further questions about the story being told.

The easiest way to interview is to follow a list of questions. Though questions offer a comforting place to retreat, they also impose the interviewer’s structure on the conversation. Predetermined questions almost always stall the conversation’s flow, subtly telling the consultant that the interviewer is interested only in the topics that she/he came prepared to discuss. But when students base their questions on what they hear — as opposed to what they’ve written on their list — then the talk often moves into unexpected territory. This is when tellabouts and feeling phrases really come into play, as students invite the speaker to elaborate on points already made. In essence, the students are following the thread of the conversation, rather than introducing a new thread into the weave.

One good way to follow the thread is to paraphrase what the consultant has already said and then ask if there’s more to add. For example, a student might say, "I heard you say…  Is that what you meant? What would you like to add to that?" Another simple strategy is to ask for specifics on something mentioned in the story. If, for example, the consultant talks about corn shuckings in response to a question about early experiences with live music, then the student might say, "You mentioned corn shuckings. What were these like?"

Of course, all such elaboration will eventually come to an end. Once the flow begins to stall on its own accord, then the student should feel free to ask another question from the list. The list does, after all, serve a valuable function; however, it should serve more as a guide to conversation than as a questionnaire to be completed.

A presentational format with which most elementary school students are already familiar is "sharing time." Although many classrooms have abandoned this practice by the fourth grade, it nonetheless provides an excellent and comfortable way to practice interview skills. If, for example, you were to institute some form of regular musical "sharing" (with students bringing in a favorite song, a story about a song, a parent’s story about a song, etc.), then practice in "following the thread" would probably occur quite naturally — and could easily be encouraged and modeled by the teacher.

## Interview Questions

If you are an artist, photographer or designer and sell your work through Etsy, Zazzle, Redbubble, Cafe Press or any of the other print-on-demand website and would like to take part in an interview featuring some of your work you’re on the right page!

**Questions and info below…**

* Name / Age / Location
* Brief intro to who you are / what you do.
* What’s your favorite piece of work that you have created? (Including a link and/or photo would be great!)
* What are you working on at the moment?
* What are your goals for the future, both work wise and life?
* What are you doing when you’re not creating? What (other) hobbies do you have?
* What would people be surprised to learn about you?
* Do you have any favorite blogs you read?
* 3 items or designs that you love from  other Etsy / Zazzle sellers?
* Where else do you sell your work?
* Where else can we find you? (Blog, website, twitter, facebook etc)
* What else should we know about you and your work?
* Do you have any tips or inspiring words for others?
* Do you admire any artists / photographers? (Famous or not!)
* What is your favorite…

Color:

Animal:

Season:

Movie:

Book: