

One-on-One Interviews

A one-on-one interview is an intentional process of getting to know what motivates another person. It helps to develop respect for people of different backgrounds and is the foundation for work across differences. Instructors can use this handout in class to give students guidelines for setting up one-on-one interviews with each other. These can be done during class time or assigned as out-of-class work.



A one-on-one involves an intentional exploration of another person's interests, passions, most important relationships, and stories. One-on-ones depend on putting aside stereotypes and listening carefully and strategically. If you do this, people will constantly surprise and sometimes amaze you with talents and insights you never imagined. One-on-one interviews are also a way to develop new power through building public relationships across lines of difference. Like other civic skills, they involve a good deal of practice.

To find out others' self-interests requires that you learn to listen in a particular way, with attention to body language and emotional tone. You identify what energizes the other person and focus on that so you can both learn from one another.

Adapted from, used with permission:

- ❖ Dennis Donovan, Sabo Center for Democracy and Citizenship at Augsburg College
- ❖ Kristine Igo, Food Science & Nutrition, kigo@umn.edu

- **Be prepared:** It is best to set interviews up in advance, think about what you want to know, and make the interview short, about a half hour.
- **Keep it informal:** A one-on-one differs from a job interview, a survey, or an academic approach. You do not have a specific set of questions—instead you ask questions that are interesting to you, and then follow up with more questions by noticing what the other person is most passionate about.
- **Look for connections:** Ask questions to keep the conversation going. Look for connections and contrasts between yourself and your interviewee, but try not to talk too much about yourself. The other person should do most of the talking.
- **Ask direct questions:** Find out what is important to the other person. For instance, ask about her connections to her home, or how she came to her job. Find out about the issues that make her angry or energized. “Why do you care about this issue?” “What did you learn from this experience?”
- **Avoid asking yes and no questions:** Questions that start with “do you ...” usually end in yes or no responses. These are too quick and you don't learn much. If you do ask them, follow up with “why?”
- **Listen well:** Pay close attention to what your interviewee says, and build the conversation around those topics.
- **Be sure you understand:** Clarify what the speaker is saying by restating what you've heard and asking if you've got it right.
- **Evaluate:** Afterward, think about the outcome of the interview. What worked? What can you do better next time?

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