

The Interview as an Instrument for Peer Review Mini-Lesson (with Specific Focus on the transition from Topic to Thesis)

Pre-Class Preparation

You will need to discuss with the professor before the mini-lesson that the students should have chosen a topic and read the material assigned for that topic. Students should come to class with any notes on the reading they have done. This may be an issue for classes which do not read, but this might be remedied by collecting summaries/abstracts or reading notes for a grade.

Lesson Objective

The purpose of this exercise is to teach students how to use the interview as a technique to hone in on a topic and generate a thesis statement. The writing issue that this module is meant to address is students difficulties turning a problem area, question or topic into a thesis statement. Often students pick too broad a problem area, question or topic. This makes it difficult for students to develop a thesis statement that is manageable. The paired interview strategy reduces the load on the writer by sharing the work between two writers. Also, the very structure of interviews— question and answer— provide a collaborative dynamic that generates discussion between writers. The ultimate goal is to get the writer to find a specific “answer” or thesis statement for which s/he/it can provide arguments and evidence.

List of Handouts

1. “The Interview as an Instrument for Peer Review”
2. “Interviews Rubric”

Length of Lesson

The lesson should take 25-30 minutes.

Variations for different disciplines

1. Designed for Philosophy, but it could be used in other Humanities and Social Sciences classes

Source

1. J.M.C. Dow

File name

ML_Interview for Peer Review_PhilA.doc

Process: What to Do and When...

1) Introduce the idea of using interviews as an element in the peer review to transition from topic to thesis (2 minutes). A sample script follows:

“Sometimes it is difficult to get a paper going. You have a question and you have a basic topic, but you cannot decide on the central thesis, the argument, or what type of evidence you could use in the paper. Often you are given a general topic or question which could be a book-length manuscript. And writers often struggle to write a paper when they have picked a thesis out of thin air. The goal is to find a specific topic, for example, the issue of free will/determinism, human cloning, or the mind/body problem, and select a manageable thesis statement about which you can write a paper. For instance, if you focus on the general topic area of the existence of God, consider the difference between the following thesis questions/statements: (1) Does God exist? No, because there is suffering in the world; (2) Does Swinburne’s response to the problem of evil for God’s existence adequately address the problem of natural evil? The latter question is likely to generate a more focused and manageable thesis statement. The purpose of this exercise is to home in on a topic and generate a thesis statement. When academics want to write a paper on a topic or position, they will sometimes get together with colleagues and have discussions about the prospects of the paper (not often enough, however...). This exercise provides you with the opportunity to discuss your paper topics and theses with fellow students. (The assumption of the exercise is that every student has decided on a topic area and has read the assigned material for that topic area.)”

2) Give out Handout I, explain process and break up into groups of 2 (3 Minutes)

3) Have students go through interview procedure (20 minutes or longer)

4) Give out Handout II, if professors elect to have peer grading

5) Students share thesis statements (5 minutes)

1. Break up into groups of two, making sure that your partner's topic is different from yours. 2. In the first part, one student plays the role of the interviewer and the other student plays the role of the interviewee; in the second part, students swap roles. 3. The interviewer asks the questions, the interviewee answers, and the interviewer records the answers. Also, the interviewer plays the role of devil's advocate. 4. After both parts have taken place, each student collects his interview and writes a thesis based on the interview. 5. After the exercise has been completed, students may elect to share their thesis statements.

What problem or question is your paper going to address? Is the problem area or question focused enough? Could the problem area or question be more specific?

Why is this question controversial or problematic? Why is it significant in general?

Why are you interested in the problem area or question?

Who are the authors? What are the main sources? What are their main claims and arguments? Why are the authors main claims and arguments significant in answering the problem area or question?

What are the problems with the authors' claims and arguments? What else needs to be addressed in order to properly answer the question?

What is your one-sentence answer to this question? What arguments or evidence will you use to show this answer is true?

Interviews Rubric

Handout II

Rate your partner from 1-5, 5 being the highest mark.

PART 1 Grades

Interviewer

Asked questions effectively

1 2 3 4 5

Asked clarificatory questions

1 2 3 4 5

Proposed thesis statements and arguments

1 2 3 4 5

Played Devil's Advocate

1 2 3 4 5

Interviewee

Was prepared with topic and research

1 2 3 4 5

Answered questions and offered arguments

1 2 3 4 5

Understood claims and arguments

1 2 3 4 5

Provided a thesis statement

1 2 3 4 5

PART 2 Grades

Interviewer

Asked questions effectively

1 2 3 4 5

Asked clarificatory questions

1 2 3 4 5

Proposed thesis statements and arguments

1 2 3 4 5

Played Devil's Advocate

1 2 3 4 5

Interviewee

Was prepared with topic and research

1 2 3 4 5

Answered questions and offered arguments

1 2 3 4 5

Understood claims and arguments

1 2 3 4 5

Provided a thesis statement

1 2 3 4 5