Interviewing
Principles and Practices

Eighth Edition

Charles J. Stewart • **William B. Cash, Jr.**

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Charles J. Stewart, Purdue University

William B. Cash, Jr., Achievement Unlimited
National Louis University

Preface

This eighth edition of our book reflects the growing sophistication with which interviewing is being approached, the ever-expanding body of research in all types of interview settings, recent interpersonal communication theory, the importance of equal opportunity laws on interviewing practices, the increasing diversification of the American workplace, and the influences of the global village. We have made a concerted effort to include the latest research findings and developments while continuing to maintain the emphasis on building interviewing skills for both interviewers and interviewees.

In this edition of *Interviewing: Principles and Practices,* we have returned the definition of interviewing to its basics: an interactional communication process between two parties, at least one of whom has a predetermined and serious purpose, and usually involves the asking and answering of questions. We expanded our discussions of language, nonverbal communication, and situation. Several chapters now include important information on cultural, gender, and age differences, how they may affect interviews, and how interviewers and interviewees might adapt to them. The persuasive interview chapter has been moved so students will learn these important principles before delving into the selection process that requires them to understand and apply such principles. Separate chapters now address the employer and the applicant in the selection process because one chapter can no longer cover all that is necessary to discuss and illustrate. The chapter on the applicant includes more materials on self-analysis, resumes, and cover letters. And we have reorganized several chapters so they follow a more natural sequence of stages in different types of interviews while emphasizing the importance of preparation for each interview.

This eighth edition continues discussions of both the general and the specific. The first three chapters address principles applicable to all interview settings. Chapter 1 defines the interview and explores it as a complex communication process between two parties with emphasis on relationships, levels of interactions, language, nonverbal communication, listening, and situation. Chapter 2 discusses the structure of the interview with particular emphasis on openings, interview guides and schedules, and closings. And Chapter 3 discusses and illustrates the "tools of the trade": types and uses of questions, phrasing of questions, common question pitfalls, and question sequences.

The next three chapters deal with types of interviews that are unique and relevant to more specialized interviews. Chapter 4 discusses the journalistic or probing interview with

emphasis on listening and probing into answers. Chapter 5 discusses the survey interview with emphasis on interviewee selection and highly standardized question schedules. And Chapter 6 discusses the persuasive interview with emphasis on analyzing and adapting to interviewees and situations with the purpose of changing a party's way of thinking, feeling, or acting. All of the skills and principles discussed in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are highly relevant for the final five chapters.

Chapters 7 and 8 focus on the employer and the applicant in the selection interview with emphasis on each playing the roles of information getter, information giver, and persuader. The final three chapters discuss performance review and discipline interviews (Chapter 9), the counseling interview (Chapter 10), and the health care interview (Chapter 11).

Some of the principles and guidelines presented in these eleven chapters may seem simple or obvious. However, in our experiences as professors, managers, practitioners, and consultants of interviewing in academic, professional, industrial, business, and social settings, we have found again and again that overlooking the simple and the obvious creates problems in real-life interviews.

We have included a sample interview at the end of each chapter, *not* as a perfect example of interviewing but to illustrate interviewing types, situations, approaches, and *mistakes* and to challenge students to distinguish between effective and ineffective interviewing practices. We believe that students can learn a great deal by applying the research and principles learned in a chapter to a realistic interview that allows them to detect when interview parties are right on target as well as when they miss the target completely. The role-playing cases at the ends of Chapters 4 through 11 provide students with opportunities to design and conduct practice interviews and to observe others' efforts to employ the principles discussed. Student activities at the end of each chapter provide ideas for in- and out-of-class exercises, experiences, and information gathering. The up-to-date readings at the end of each chapter will help students and instructors who are interested in delving more deeply into specific topics, theories, and types of interviews.

This book is designed for courses in such departments as speech, communication, journalism, business, supervision, education, political science, nursing, and social work. It is also useful in workshops in various fields. We believe this book is of value to beginning students as well as to seasoned veterans because the principles, research, and techniques are changing rapidly in many fields. We have treated theory and research findings where applicable, but our primary concern is with principles and techniques that can be translated into immediate practice in and out of the classroom.

Acknowledgments

To the memory of W. Charles Redding, friend, colleague, and mentor

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An Introduction to Interviewing

Rarely does a day go by that you do not take part in one or more interviews. No, you probably did not interview for a new job today, appear on a radio or television talk show, or answer a call from a reporter for the *Atlanta Constitution* or *60 Minutes.* But we will bet that you obtained or gave information to a teacher, physician, or fellow worker; asked for help from a counselor, supervisor, or parent; bought or sold a product, service, or idea; gave advice to a colleague, friend, or member of your family; or interacted with a client, fellow student, or professor. Each time you took part in one of these interactions you participated in an interview, the most common form of purposeful, planned communication.

Table 1.1 reveals many of the specialized types of interviews we take part in on a regular basis.[1] These interviews range from formal to informal, highly structured to unstructured, sophisticated to simplistic, a few minutes to a few hours. And the purpose may be to give or get information, to counsel or be counseled, to obtain a good position or a good employee, to review or be reviewed, to persuade or be persuaded. "But," you may be wondering, "don't conversations, speeches, small groups, and the mass media share many of these characteristics and purposes?" Answer: yes they do. What, then, is an *interview,* and how is it unique?

The Interview Defined

An interview is an interactional communication process between two parties, at least one of whom has a predetermined and serious purpose, and usually involves the asking and answering of questions.[2]

The word *interactional* signifies an interchanging of roles, responsibilities, feelings, beliefs, and information. If one party does all of the talking and the other all of the listening, a *speech* to an audience of one, not an interview, is taking place. Interactional does not mean equal, however. In some interviews, such as journalistic, counseling, and employee selection, an ideal ratio might be 70 percent to 30 percent, with the interviewee doing most of the talking. In others, such as information giving and sales, the ratio might be reversed. Interview parties often exchange roles of interviewer and interviewee as an interview progresses, such as when a customer makes a counteroffer on a home or automobile, an applicant asks questions of a recruiter, or a respondent asks a political pollster to clarify a question.

The word *process* denotes a dynamic, everchanging interaction, with many variables operating with and upon one another, and a degree of system or structure. Although each interview is unique, all involve basic communication ingredients such as

Table 1.1 Types of interviews

1. Information giving
   a. Orientation
   b. Training, instruction, coaching
   c. Job-related instructions
   d. Briefings

2. Information gathering
   a. Surveys and polls
   b. Exit interviews
   c. Research interviews
   d. Investigations: insurance, police, etc.
   e. Medical, psychological, case history, diagnostic, caseworker, etc.
   f. Journalistic

3. Selection
   a. Screening
   b. Determinate
   c. Placement

4. Problems of interviewee's behavior
   a. Appraisal, evaluative, review
   b. Separation, firing
   c. Correction, discipline, reprimand
   d. Counseling

5. Problems of interviewer's behavior
   a. Receiving complaints
   b. Grievances
   c. Receiving suggestions

6. Problem solving
   a. Discussing mutually shared problems
   b. Receiving suggestions for solutions

7. Persuasion
   a. Selling products and services
   b. Recruiting members
   c. Fundraising and development
   d. Changing the way a party feels, thinks, or acts

perceptions, verbal and nonverbal messages, feedback, expectations, and assumptions. And once this interactive process begins, we "cannot not communicate."[3] We may communicate poorly, but we will communicate something as long as we are in sight or sound of the other party.

The words *two parties* signify that interviews may involve two or more people (for instance, two recruiters interviewing an applicant, a panel of faculty interviewing a student for a scholarship, three friends discussing an apartment with a landlord) but never more than *two parties*—an interviewer party and an interviewee party—a dyad. If more than two parties are involved (for example, a student, faculty member, and chair of the grade appeals committee discussing a possible grade change), a small group interaction is occurring, not an interview.

More than two people may be involved in an interview, but never more than two parties—an interviewer party and an interviewee party.

Predetermined and serious purpose means that at least one of the two parties comes to an interview with a goal—other than mere enjoyment of the interaction—and plans to focus on some specific subject matter. The predetermined and serious purpose distinguishes the interview from social conversation, although polite conversation is important in most interviews. And while conversations are rarely organized in advance, interviews must have a degree of advance planning and structure, even if you have little more than a purpose and topics jotted on a piece of paper or a few questions in mind.

Virtually all interviews involve the *asking and answering of questions.* Questions are the tools interviewers and interviewees employ to obtain information, check the accuracy of messages sent and received, verify impressions and assumptions, and provoke thought or feeling. While many interviews consist entirely of questions and answers and others involve occasional questions for strategic purposes, few interviewers and interviewees succeed without skillful questions and answers.

Because we are involved in interviews every day, we too often assume that the process is simple and requires little, if any, formal training. After all, what is so difficult about asking a few questions, providing a few answers, or exchanging bits of information? But if you think interviewing is simple and basic skills come naturally, recall some of your recent experiences: the inept company recruiter who kept talking about her own accomplishments; the alumni fund-raiser who was determined to get a $500 donation for your high school even though you are overburdened with college expenses and loans; the

professor who told you about his problems instead of listening to yours; the political poll-ster who asked leading questions; the computer salesperson who could only talk in "com-putereze" and not answer your questions. Most of us have learned how to "interview" by observing others and assume that "practice makes perfect;" but twenty years of experi-ence may be one year of flawed experience repeated twenty times, sort of like our golf swing, study habits, or cooking. A study in England, for example, discovered that physi-cians who did not receive formal training in interviewing patients actually became less effective interviewers as the years went on, not more effective.[4]

There is a vast difference between skilled and unskilled interviewers and inter-viewees, and the skilled ones know that practice makes perfect only *if you know what you are practicing.* Our purposes in writing this book are twofold. First, we want to introduce you to the basic skills applicable for all interviews (Chapters 1 to 3) and specific skills needed in specialized settings (Chapters 4 to 11). And, second, we want to help you im-prove your interviewing skills for a *lifetime,* not merely while you are a student or a re-cent graduate looking for your first position. Whether you become an engineer, teacher, chemist, attorney, journalist, physician, salesperson, industrialist, researcher, or member of the clergy, you must learn how to get and give information, select employees and be selected, review and be reviewed, persuade and be persuaded, counsel and be counseled.

The first essential step in developing and improving interview skills is to understand the deceptively complex interviewing process and its many interacting variables. Successful interviewing requires you to understand both parties, the exchanging of roles, perceptions of self and other, communication interactions, feedback, and the situation. The remainder of this chapter explains and illustrates the interviewing process by developing step-by-step a model that contains all of the fundamental elements that interact in every interview.

Two Parties in the Interview

The two circles in figure 1.1 represent the two parties present in interviews. Each party is a unique product of culture, environment, education, training, and experiences. Each is an interesting mixture of personality traits. Each adheres to certain beliefs, attitudes, and val-ues. And each is motivated by an ever-changing variety of expectations, desires, needs, and interests. In a very real sense, "the whole person speaks and the whole person listens" in interactions we call interviews.[5]

The circles overlap to portray the interview as a *relational* form of communication in which interview parties are connected interpersonally and have varying degrees of interest in the relationship and the outcome of the interview. The relationship may commence at the start of the interview or have a history that began before this inter-view and will continue to evolve long after this interview ends. For instance, you may encounter a reporter or recruiter for the first and last time, or you may interview a su-pervisor, academic counselor, or acquaintance with whom you have a long-standing and long-lasting relationship. The nature of interview relationships is determined by a number of critical dimensions.[6]

Similarity: Relationships are enhanced when interviewer and interviewee *share* cul-tural norms and values, environmental influences, training, experiences, personality traits, attitudes, and expectations. For example, both parties may come from the same city,

Figure 1.1 The interview parties

Parties
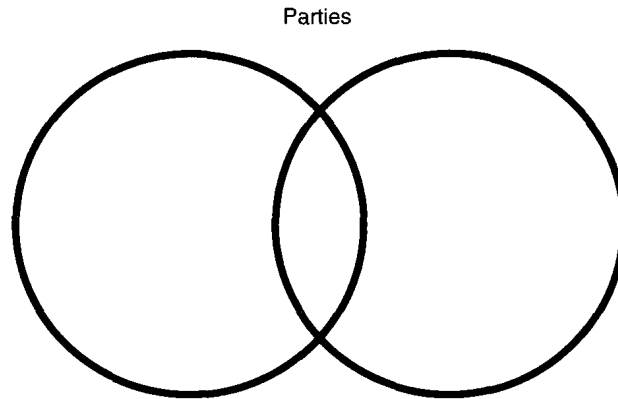
share Hispanic heritage, be optimistic about their economic futures, attend the same church, adhere to certain social traditions, desire to be treated fairly, and want to attain accurate and adequate information. In some situations, you may find it easier to interview a person of the same gender, culture, or age. Do not be oblivious to differences between you and the other party, but recognize important characteristics you share. Awareness of similarities allows interview parties to understand one another, establish areas of common ground, and adapt to one another's needs, perceptions, desires, and customs. You are more likely to communicate effectively if you can expand the area of *perceived similarities* (the area where the circles overlap) and reduce the areas of *perceived differences* (the areas of the circles that do not overlap).

Inclusion/Involvement: Relationships are enhanced when both parties desire to be included in the interview and are involved in the interaction. Too often this is not the case. For instance, an applicant may be eager to meet with a recruiter from a major advertising firm, but the recruiter, having conducted interviews every half hour since early morning, may be tired of talking to applicants and long for a quiet dinner with family. You may welcome the publicity of newspaper and television coverage for your new business venture but not the reporter assigned to you. And the more actively involved you are in an interview, the more satisfying you are likely to find the relationship. Few of us like to be "talked to," let alone "talked down to." Applicants find it frustrating, for instance, when recruiters do most of the talking and they are unable to "sell themselves." And as consumers, we often get irritated at salespersons who will not stop their sales pitches long enough for us to ask questions.

Affection/Liking: Relationships are enhanced when both parties like one another, when there is a high degree of warmth or friendship. Some people find it difficult, especially in formal settings, to get or give affection or to communicate how much they like the other party. Some people fear "closeness" and prefer to keep others, acquaintances as well as strangers, "at arm's length." You may want to sell an insurance policy to a friend from college but fear that the friend will see you "using" the friendship to make money.

You may come to an interview with a positive, ambivalent, or hostile attitude toward the other party, often due to compatible or incompatible needs, desires, demands, and perceptions of the likely outcome of the interview. Ideal affection or liking occurs in an interview when the parties establish a "we" instead of a "me-you" or "we-they" feeling. You cannot establish great warmth and friendship during a five or ten minute interview with a client, customer, or interviewee, but you can try to communicate in such a way that the other party finds you pleasant, willing to listen, fair, and understanding—likable.

Control/Dominance: Relationships are enhanced when both parties share control and neither seeks to dominate the interview. Either party may have considerable control or potential dominance. For example, as an interviewee, you may simply say no to a survey taker and close the door. If you do not wish to listen to a sales pitch, you may hang up the telephone. As an interviewer, you may dominate a performance or disciplinary interview, ask leading or loaded questions in a journalistic interview, or withhold information during a medical interview. Control and dominance often pose problems in interviews because they tend to involve organizational or social hierarchy or chain of command: president over vice president, sales director over sales representative, dean over professor, professor over student, parent over child. One party often has the power to dictate if an interview will occur; when, where, and how it will be conducted; who the other party will be; the results of the interview; and how these results may be used. If you are in a subordinate position, try to attain or sustain a reasonable degree of control during the interview; if you are in a superior position, try to share a reasonable degree of control.

Trust: Relationships are enhanced if the parties trust one another and perceive each other as trustworthy, reliable, and safe. This dimension is critical, for instance, in journalistic, persuasive, employee selection, employee performance reviews, counseling, and health care interviews in which an expected positive outcome may prove instead to be a public embarrassment, an unrewarding position or ineffective employee, poor advice, a loss of money, or endangered health. You will not take people into your confidence if you cannot trust them to keep their word or fear they will react negatively. Trust is essential in the intimate, one-on-one interview because both the interview and its outcome usually affect us directly and perhaps immediately.

The interview relationship, then, is mutual because both parties must contribute to its development and sustenance if an interview is to be successful. Even in surprise interviews at a mall, on the street, or over the telephone, interviewees perceive within seconds why they are being interviewed, what will happen to the information they share, and whether they want to participate. At the same time, interviewers perceive the suitability of the interviewee, the person's desire and willingness to cooperate, and whether the relationship is likely to be positive or negative. Once both parties agree to speak or listen, ask or answer questions, give or seek information, they become interdependent and assume degrees of control and responsibility for the outcome of the interview.

Interchanging Roles During Interviews

The small circles within the two large circles in figure 1.2 signify that roles are frequently interchanged during interviews. As noted in our definition of interviewing, both parties speak and listen from time to time, are likely to ask and answer questions, and take on the