

## THE ART OF INTERVIEWING

### HOW TO ASK GREAT QUESTIONS TO GET THE BEST—AND MOST INTERESTING—ANSWERS

An interview is a conversation. The interviewer asks questions, and the interviewee answers them. Sometimes, journalists conduct an interview to gather information for a news article. Other interviews, often with famous people like celebrities or politicians, are entertaining or enlightening.

Longtime journalist and co-host of “The Social,” Marci Ien has interviewed everyone from celebrities like Kristen Bell, (Princess Anna in the movie “Frozen”) to former US FBI director James Comey. No matter who she is interviewing, her starting point is always the same: “It all starts with great research,” she says.

If the person Ien is interviewing has written a book, she reads it; she goes online and gathers information about the person’s work and background; and she talks to people who know the person to get more information. Doing thorough research helps Ien come up with interesting questions to ask the person.

Before she interviews a celebrity, Ien reads other interviews they’ve done. She often finds that people have asked the celebrity the same questions, over and over. Her goal, she says, is to ask more interesting questions—ones that have never been asked before.

“Unearthing something new is when the magic happens,” she says.

Years ago, Ien interviewed rap star 50 Cent. Most of the people who interviewed him asked him questions about growing up in the streets, or getting shot.



*“It all starts with great research.”*

– Marci Ien

But Ien took a different approach.

“I knew he was also a dad, and grew up (without a father present),” she says. So she asked him what he liked best about being a dad.

“It caused him to pause. He said to me, ‘The best thing, Marci, is that I get to be there, because (my) dad wasn’t.’ And it was really amazing,” says Ien.

Conducting thorough research about the person she is interviewing also helps her combat the nerves that can sometimes come with talking to famous people. Interviewers need to be in control of the interview, and their emotions.

“Whether you’re dealing with a prince or a star, it doesn’t matter. You’ve got the floor.

You’re the one asking the questions.” When she feels nervous, she reminds herself that she will be okay because she is prepared. “I’m ready. I have read the book. I’ve done the research.”

Ien uses two important strategies during interviews. She makes sure to ask questions that will spark “open-ended” answers—in other words, answers that aren’t just “yes” or “no.” One-word answers stop a conversation, she says.

The other important thing to do, she says, is “Listen. That’s a huge part of interviewing. The interviewer has to know when to be quiet. There are moments when there is silence and that silence is because the person is thinking. Let it be. An answer is coming.”

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## LINKS TO MORE INFORMATION

- Watch Marci Ien and Cynthia Loyst interview Kristen Bell, Idina Menzel and Josh Gad for CTV's "The Social." (YouTube, 10:56).

[VIEW NOW](#)

- The Scholastic website features this step-by-step list of things to do before, during and after an interview.

[READ MORE](#)

- Interviewing is one way journalists gather information for an article. For more information about how journalists do research, read "For the Record: Doing Research: Talk, Read, Go."

[READ MORE](#)

## DID YOU KNOW?

Interviewers have to think about the audience, as well as the guest and the subject. Then, they adjust their tone and words accordingly. An interview about a natural disaster like an earthquake requires a more serious tone than one about a subject that's funny or light.

## EDUCATION CONNECTION

**Try It!** Interview your classmate, a relative or a neighbour. Do your research and make a list of questions. Remember to listen and ask follow-up questions. The more you practice interviewing, the easier it will become.

## THINK ABOUT IT!

What is one question that you think the following people have probably never been asked before?

- The Queen of England
- Harry Potter
- Your favourite pop star
- The Prime Minister of Canada
- Your favourite sports figure
- Broadcaster Marci Ien

