

## Interviews Make Great Articles

by Sue Patterson

You've written articles but now you want to try something new and exciting. What about an interview? Interviews can make fascinating articles! Here are just a few pointers to get you started:

- Do your homework
- Prepare an outline ahead of time
- Stay flexible
- Avoid closed-ended questions
- Keep track of the time

Doing your homework is critical. Gather all the background material before you develop your interview questions. Find points about the interviewee that interest **you**. When you get excited about interviewing a person, your readers will too. But if you're bored, you can bet the reader will never finish the article. If at all possible, choose only people that really interest you. Diving into more material about your subject will then be more of a pleasure.

Once you've done the research, develop your questions. Be aware that questions that can be answered by a simple "yes" or "no" can make the interview much more difficult. Take the time to think about what your reader wants to know. Sometimes we want the interviewee to explain how they accomplished something - in their own words. We want them to give us a glimmer of what is motivating them or maybe even what it's like to be them. Be sure to write your questions down.

Often, part of an interview can be conducted online via email. This can really help everyone from a time management perspective. Once the interviewer has agreed to work with you on the project, they might actually prefer to have the questions up front. It allows them a little time to carefully consider their responses. If you choose this method, be sure to tell the interviewee that once you've received their responses, you'd like to call them if you have questions. This will allow you the flexibility to build on some of their responses or get clarification on any point that was confusing.

Be sure to have their interview in front of you when you make the telephone call. Highlight any areas where you'd like more information. Write your questions for this ahead of time too.

Tell the interviewee how much of their time you'd like to have on the phone. It's your job as the interviewer to keep track of it. It's crushing to have several more questions left unanswered because you let the conversation get chatty and time runs out. Most interviewees do not want to spend an indefinite amount of time with you on the telephone. So be sure to steer the conversations back to the topic and keep an eye on your watch.

Whether it's "A Day In the Life of..."-style interview or an interview that centers around a specific accomplishment, here are a couple of ideas for interviews in your own community:

- a homeschooler who is fulfilling their dream
- a contest winner
- a homeschooling family that does exceptional community service
- a young adult homeschooler accepted in the college of their choice
- a conference speaker
- a homeschooling (or any learning/education-related) book author
- a veteran homeschooler

Remember, people generally **like** to talk about themselves. Your job is to make the reader feel like you're sitting across the kitchen table with this person - and they're just a fly on the wall.