

## Video transcript

# How to interview people

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**Joe Crowley:** If you want to go history hunting, you need to dig deep. The best way to uncover the facts is to use the same skills and methods that real, professional historians use.

Today we're going to be focusing on interviewing people. You can find out lots of information from people who were part of or knew someone from history. But to get the best out of them you'll need to know how to question them and how to think about what they've told you.

Family members or friends of figures from history often have photographs or objects that used to belong to the people you're investigating.

Ask them to bring anything like this along to a meeting, or if you're going to see them, tell them to have a good look for anything that could be useful.

**Interviewee:** And this was my father's hat, that he wore on his travels and this is faithful suitcase that he took with him on many of his journeys overseas.

**Joe:** It's best to ask them in advance, as then they'll have time to get things ready for you. And if you can, take copies in some way, then you can look at them in detail afterwards.

It's not just what you ask; it's how you ask it that's important too. Good interviewers use open questions. Things like, "Tell me what your grandfather was like," or, "How did he invent that?"

Poor interviewers use closed questions - things that just call for a yes or no answer. Ask these type of questions and you won't find out much.

**Child:** How did the Titanic sink and how did it affect your family?

**Joe:** You'll want to ask a lot of questions and it's always good to do plenty of research beforehand. This might be your only chance to meet these people, therefore you need to know the right questions to ask. Do your homework and work out what areas they're likely to be able to help you with.

**Child:** Why was George Cailey so important?

**Interviewee:** He studied why it was that birds flew and from that why an aeroplane might fly

**Joe:** It's also vitally important that you listen carefully. They might tell you something you didn't expect, so you can ask a follow-up question that will get you more information.

**Child:** So, tell me a bit more about the photograph.

**Interviewee:** This photograph showed, really, what the structure of the DNA was.

**Joe:** And always remember that people are often biased when they're talking about friends or relatives. They might exaggerate their importance or hide their faults.

**Interviewee:** But what happened was, somebody showed it to Crick and Watson, and that's what they used to do their discovering, but she didn't know that they'd got hold of it.

**Joe:** It's up to you as historians to work out what you need to check up on, by using methods such as talking to other people or looking at documents in archives.

So, be careful, think about what seems sensible and what needs to be confirmed using other sources. But if we bear all that in mind, speaking to people who knew historical figures can be a great way of finding out things that are otherwise really hard to discover. And they can provide photos and details that give us an insight into what a person was really like.