



The Lantern English Co.
The Advanced Writer

Professional Writing – Syllabus

Course Description: Strong writing skills are not only important for academic essays. In fact, writing is frequently used in professional settings, and high school students with a solid grasp of the most common forms of professional writing are more likely to be successful in whatever future educational or career path they choose. In this class, students will learn how to create and write the following: letters and emails, an observation report, an interview with response, a survey with response, an application essay, a scholarship essay, a cover letter, and a resume.

Course Outline:

Week One: Professional Writing Basics

Week Two: Writing Letters & Emails

Week Three: The Observation Report

Week Four: The Interview

Week Five: The Survey

Week Six: The College Application Essay

Week Seven: The Scholarship Essay

Week Eight: The Cover Letter & Resume

Grading Information: All assignments will be graded using *The Advanced Writer* Grading Rubric and averaged to receive a final course grade.



Professional Writing

Lesson Four: The Interview

SAMPLE LESSON

The interview is a useful part of professional communication, because it is a primary source of valuable information. Personal interviews are useful for research in addition to speaking with potential clients, bosses, or partners. Although reading provides great information, sometimes getting information from a knowledgeable source gives an entirely different side to your writing.

When our company owner, Mrs. Grape, was much younger, she conducted a history research project for a club she belonged to. One of the projects was to research a specific time period, for which she chose the early 1900s, the Victorian Era. Of course, she did a lot of reading, but one of the most informative research sources was a visit she had with her great-great aunt and uncle. Still healthy and spry in their late eighties, her aunt and uncle spent an entire afternoon with her, telling her of stories from their parents and their childhoods. They told of all of the changes from the time they were born to the modern age. At nine years old, Mrs. Grape found these stories fascinating; and through listening to them, the facts she had read in books came to life. This afternoon interview became the inspiring basis for her club project, and she was a very proud and educated young lady come presentation day!

As another example, when Mrs. Grape was twelve, a reporter from the local newspaper called and asked to interview her family for an article on homeschooling. Although the woman certainly could have read books, websites, and magazines to get her information, she was wise to go directly to experienced sources. The reporter spent a morning at Mrs. Grape's house, interviewing her mom, siblings, and Mrs. Grape herself—asking all sorts of questions about how their home school worked. Several direct quotations in the article provided real-life opinions and experience in the midst of many facts and figures.

Perhaps you have a similar experience. Evidently, whether you are writing an essay, preparing a presentation, or writing an article, interviews can be invaluable resources if you know how to conduct them and what to get out of them!

RULES FOR INTERVIEWS –

- **Ask plenty of questions.** You can always cut extra information if you do not need it. But, you may not be able to go back and ask more questions later on if you do not have enough information.
- **Make a list.** When you go for the interview, have an *organized* list of questions to ask. This gives you clear direction on how to direct the interview and help you to not forget any questions you wanted to ask. (Anyone else struggle with their mind going blank as soon as the interview starts?)
- **Take notes.** Do not think you are going to remember everything the person says. (Spoiler alert: you probably won't!) You might remember bits and pieces, but you need details and quotes. Take specific notes when interviewing, and if possible, record the interview using a tablet, laptop, or smartphone.
- **Always bring a writing utensil and notebook to an interview.** Do not try to take notes on a tiny piece of paper or on the back of your question list. In addition, trying to take notes on your phone may not be very professional. That said, in many cases these days, it is appropriate to take notes on a laptop or tablet, but having a writing utensil and notebook is a valuable backup in case technology isn't working as it should. (If you feel that you may not be able to keep up with note taking, considering bringing along someone else to take notes for you.)

PREPARATION FOR INTERVIEWS –

- **Choose a setting with little distraction.** Avoid loud lights or noises. Ensure the interviewee is comfortable (you might ask them if they are). Often, they may feel more comfortable at their own places of work or homes, but a quiet local coffee shop or even the library may also be good options.
- **Explain the purpose of the interview.** Why are you going to be asking these questions?
- **Address terms of confidentiality.** Explain who will get access to the interviewee's answers and how their answers will be analyzed. If their comments are to be used as quotes, get their written permission to do so.
- **Explain the format of the interview.** Explain the type of interview you are conducting and its nature. If you want them to ask questions, specify if they are to do so as they have questions or wait until the end of the interview.

- **Indicate how long the interview might take.**
- **If the interviewee does not already have your contact information, tell them how to get in touch with you later if they want to.**
- **Ask the interviewee if they have any questions** before you get started with the interview.
- **Do not count on your memory to recall the interviewee's answers.** Ask for permission to record the interview and take notes.

TYPES OF QUESTIONS –

There are typically six kinds of questions you could ask in an interview. One can ask questions about the following:

- **Background/demographics** – standard background questions, such as age, education, etc.
- **Behaviors** – about what a person has done or is doing
- **Opinions/values** – about what a person thinks about a topic
- **Feelings** – note that respondents sometimes respond with "I think . . ." so be careful to explain if you are looking for feelings
- **Knowledge** – to get facts about a topic
- **Sensory** – about what people have seen, touched, heard, tasted or smelled

Note that the above questions can be asked in terms of past, present or future.

Assignment 4A: Complete an interview this week. Choose an interesting subject that you want to learn more about. Create a list of open-ended, interesting questions regarding this topic. Try to have at least 15-20 questions. Think of someone who could best answer your questions.

- You may interview any person of your choice.
- You may conduct this interview in person, over the telephone, or through an online video chat (Zoom, for example), depending on your schedule and ability to meet with the person you want to interview. Please *do not* conduct the interview via email, text message, or chat.
- Please send back your interview questions and answers. Also include a brief note about your

experience of giving an interview. (i.e. Did you find it difficult to conduct this interview? Did you not ask enough questions? Did you find note taking to be challenging? Or was the entire process easy? Was your subject nervous, or were you? Etc.)

Assignment 4B: Write an essay with a minimum of five paragraphs summarizing why you chose the topic, who you interviewed, the goal of the interview, and what you learned about the topic through the interview.

Ensure that the essay is formatted properly. Write your name and the date in the upper left-hand corner. Add a title centered above the essay. Properly format the paragraphs with an indented first line or a full space between each paragraph, and left-align the text. Justified text is optional but not required. Content should be double spaced and typed in one of the standard fonts, size 12.