

Interview guide for *space s* theme

The following document is intended to be a guide for Dawson College students and others from across the disciplines who would like to conduct interviews on the 2020/2021 SPACE theme: *space s*.

A description of the *space s* theme is available on the SPACE website, [here](#).

The interview: a multidisciplinary genre

Interviewing is a form of research based in conversation. An interviewer initiates a conversation with an interviewee, usually because the interviewer—and any of their potential readers or listeners—are interested in the interviewee’s unique perspective on a subject. That perspective may have been gained through the interviewee’s work or personal experience or in some other way, and the interviewer’s goal is to elicit that perspective, to make it vivid and accessible to others.

When successful, an interview transcends a single point of view; it crosses the distances between individuals, communities, societies, as well as potentially different fields of study, leading to an exchange that leaves everyone involved—the interviewer, their readers or listeners, and even the interviewee themselves—a little more enlightened on a subject.

Interviewing technique

Conducting a successful interview requires a mix of thorough preparation and on-the-spot improvisation, and above all, active listening. A common error among inexperienced interviewers is to cut off the interviewee and / or move the conversation on to a new line of questioning just when the interviewee is about to delve into the good stuff—e.g. details, examples, anecdotes, analogies, further explanations, etc. A skillful interviewer comes prepared with a list of thoughtful, penetrating questions they want to ask interviewee, and at the same time lets the interviewee talk. If an interviewee goes off on an apparent tangent, the interviewer may decide to allow it for a while, in case the interviewee is heading somewhere fruitful. If an interviewee gives answers that are a little too vague or incomplete, the interviewer, rather than switching topics, may gently invite them to elaborate on or illustrate the idea they’ve just discussed.

A successful interview is both structured and lively—it covers the ground the interviewer wants to cover, yet like any interesting conversation, it also goes surprising places and yields unexpected information and ideas.

Closed and open-ended questions

Closed questions address background info on the interviewee—e.g. their field of study or work, their role in an organization, their political or other identifications, etc. This background info can be necessary, but imagine a conversation where someone only asked you closed questions about

yourself; it probably wouldn't inspire you to share much beyond the simple answers to those questions.

Open-ended questions, on the other hand, can be answered in many ways, and can lead in unpredictable directions. Because the goal of these particular interviews is to explore the *spaces* theme, here are a few open-ended questions that you can use to help guide your interview, so that you eventually touch on the theme's various facets and how they intersect with your interviewee's interests:

- Here is a statement that I invite you to respond to. *Spaces are filled with potential*. Do you agree? If so, why?
- Can you describe a space in your life—whether at home, at school, at work, or somewhere else—that is filled with potential?
- What kinds of activities does that space spark?
- How does it spark them?
- Do the activities that take place in that space have an impact on the space itself? If so, how?
- What, specifically, is your role in that space? What does your role look like?
- Have your ideas about that space and the activities that take place in it ever been challenged? If so, why and how?
- Do you think it matters how you and others think about that space? If so, why?
- Has this space and the activities that take place in it changed how you see the world? If so, how?

In addition to these theme-specific questions, you can also ask more general open-ended questions that might encourage your interviewee to go into more depth in their answers:

- Can you explain a little more what you mean?
- Can you give an example of what you mean?
- Did anyone have a major impact on your thinking about that?
- Is there an event that had a major impact on your thinking about that?
- In everything you've just described, what stands out as the most important thing?

Recording / taking notes during your interview

You may decide to record your interview, with your interviewee's permission of course, but the recording should only be your backup. It's also a good idea to take notes during an interview, and it is totally fine to ask your interviewee to pause for a moment while you write something down, or to ask them to repeat something they said so you can jot it down word for word. You should be aware, too, that some interviewees will be less comfortable being recorded, and that you might get better responses simply taking notes.

It sometimes happens that after an interview you realize you are still missed some key information, so you should arrange with your interviewee some way to contact them in case you have follow-up questions.

Transcribing your interview

Most interviews that are published in some print form are lightly edited for the purposes of being clear and concise. Sometimes an interviewee will need to search for what they want to say before they arrive at it, or they may be unclear, or they may repeat themselves. In these instances, it is acceptable and appropriate to lightly edit what your interviewee has said; just make sure you are capturing the essence of your interviewee's meaning and never putting words in their mouth. You can also send your interviewee a copy of the interview after you've written it out, before you publish it, to make sure you didn't accidentally make any errors in transcribing it. If your interview is appearing in written form online, you can also include hyperlinks to any of the references or other pertinent info your interviewee mentions.