

Exercise 1: Discussion Questions

1. How would you respond to a source who, several days before a scheduled interview, asked for a list of the questions you intended to ask?
2. How would you respond to a source who insisted on approving before publication all direct and indirect quotations you planned to attribute to her?
3. Do you agree that reporters have an obligation to inform their sources when they plan to record an interview even when it's legal to do so?
4. If a story's publication is likely to embarrass a source, do reporters have a responsibility to warn the source of that possibility? Does it matter whether the source is used to dealing with reporters?
5. What should you do if a person you interview alleges that another person engaged in sexual misconduct? What steps should you, could you, take to verify the information? Does your decision about how to handle the information vary with whether the person accused of sexual misconduct is a public figures, such as a celebrity or a politician, instead of a private individual?
6. Would you be willing to interview a mother whose son just died? Would it matter whether her son drowned in a swimming pool, was slain or was a convicted killer executed in a state prison?
7. Imagine that you wrote a front-page story about students' use of marijuana on your campus. To obtain the story, you promised several sources that you would never reveal their identities. If, during a subsequent legal proceeding, a judge ordered you to identify your sources, would you do so? Or would you be willing to go to jail to protect your sources?

Exercise 2: Sleep Shortage

INSTRUCTIONS: Write a news story based on the following interview with Diana Gant, a member of the psychology faculty at your institution. Gant is recognized as one of the nation's leaders in the study of sleep. The interview provides a verbatim account of an interview you conducted today in her office. "Q" stands for the questions that you asked Gant, and "A" stands for her answers, which can be quoted directly.

The Interview:

Q: You're a professor in the Psychology Department?

A: That's right, for 17 years now. That's how long I've been here, ever since I finished graduate school.

Q: Have you been studying sleep all that time?

A: Even earlier. I started when I was a graduate student and wrote my thesis, then my dissertation, about sleep.

Q: How much sleep have you found most people need a night?

A: Most people need nine to 10 hours a night to perform optimally. Some should be taken in afternoon naps.

Q: I read somewhere that most people need only seven or eight hours of sleep a night, and that there are people who need only four or five.

A: Nine hours is better. I know not everyone agrees with me, but that's what I keep finding. Think of sleep like exercise. People exercise because it's healthy. Sleep is healthy.

Q: How much sleep does the average person actually get?

A: About seven hours.

Q: If most people need more sleep, why aren't they getting it?

A: Believe it or not, some people think that going without sleep is the big, sophisticated, macho thing to do. They figure they don't need it, that the rules don't apply to them, that they can get more done. It may work for them for a while, but sooner or later they begin to suffer the consequences. Then you can have some real problems.

Q: How can the average person tell if he's getting enough sleep?

A: Its easy. Ask yourself: Do you usually feel sleepy or doze off when you are sitting quietly after a large lunch?

Q: What else happens if people don't get enough sleep?

A: Going without enough sleep is as much of a public and personal safety hazard as going to work drunk. It can make people clumsy, stupid, unhappy.

Q: Can you give some examples of the problem?

A: I look at a lot of disasters, really major disasters like the space shuttle Challenger, the accident at Russia's Chernobyl nuclear reactor and the Exxon Valdez oil spill. The element of sleeplessness was involved in all of them, at least contributed to all of them, and maybe—probably—caused all of them. The press focused on the possibility that the captain of the Exxon Valdez was drunk, but undershifting and long shifts on the ship may have led to the third mate's falling asleep at the wheel.

Q: How did you get interested in sleep?

A: When I started I wanted to write about people who got little sleep and remained productive. The problem was, when my subjects arrived in laboratories and got a chance to sleep in dark, quiet rooms, they all slept for about nine hours. That and other work convinced me that most people suffer from sleep deprivation.

Q: How do you gather your data?

A: Partly laboratory studies and partly statistics, statistics on the connection between sleeplessness and accidents. One thing I've done is study the number of traffic accidents in the state right after the shift to daylight savings time in the spring, when most people lose an hour's sleep. There's an 8 percent increase in accidents the day after the time change, and there's a corresponding decrease in accidents in the fall when people gain an extra hour of sleep.

Q: Why's that?

A: What we're looking at when people get up just an hour early is the equivalent of a national jet lag. The effect can last a week. It isn't simply due to loss of sleep, but complications from resetting the biological clock.

Q: How else can a lack of sleep hurt people?

A: You feel as if your clothes weigh a few extra pounds. Even more than usual, you tend to be drowsy after lunch. If, say, you cut back from eight to six hours, you'll probably become depressed. Cut back even further, to five hours, and you may find yourself falling asleep at stoplights while driving home.

Q: If people aren't getting enough sleep, or good sleep, how can they solve the problem? What do you recommend?

A: That's easy. Almost everyone in the field agrees on that. First, you need someplace that's dark and quiet. Shut off all the lights and draw the shades. Second, it's good to relax for an hour or so before going to bed. Watch TV, read a good book. Don't drink or eat a lot. That'll disturb your sleep, especially alcohol and caffeine. Plus, it should be cool, about 65 is best for good sleep. Tobacco, coffee and alcohol are all bad. As their effects wear off, your brain actually becomes more alert. Even if you fall asleep, you may find yourself waking up at 2 or 3 a.m., and then you can't get back to sleep. Also avoid chocolate and other foods that contain a lot of sugar. Finally, get a comfortable bed, and keep your bed linens clean and fresh.

Exercise 3: Interview After a Murder

INSTRUCTIONS: Write a news story based on the following interview with a bookkeeper at the North Point Inn. "Q" stands for the questions she was asked during an interview at her home this morning, and "A" stands for her answers, which can be quoted directly. (The interview is based on an actual case: a robbery and murder at an elegant restaurant.)

The Interview

Q: Could you start by spelling your name for me?

A: N-i-n-a C-o-r-t-e-z.

Q: You work as a bookkeeper at the North Point Inn?

A: Yes, I've been there seven years.

Q: Would you describe the robbery there yesterday?

A: It was about 9 in the morning, around 7 or 8 minutes before 9.

Q: Is that the time you usually get there?

A: At 9 o'clock, yes.

Q: How did you get in?

A: I've got a key to the employee entrance in the back.

Q: Was anyone else there?

A: Kevin Blohm, one of the cooks. He usually starts at 8. We open for lunch at 11:30, and he's in charge.

Q: Did you talk to him?

A: He came into my office, and we chatted about what happened in the restaurant the night before, and I asked him to make me some coffee. After he brought me a cup, I walked out to the corridor with him. That was the last I saw him.

Q: What did you do next?

A: I was just beginning to go through the receipts and cash from the previous night. I always start by counting the previous day's revenue. I took everything out of a safe, the cash and receipts, and began to count them on my desk.

Q: About how much did you have?

A: \$6,000 counting everything, the cash and receipts from credit cards.

Q: Is that when you were robbed?

A: A minute or two or less, a man came around the corner, carrying a knife.

Q: What did you do?

A: I started screaming and kicking. My chair was on rollers, and when I started kicking, it fell. I fell on the floor, and he reached across my desk and grabbed \$130 in \$5 bills.

Q: Did he say anything?

A: No, he just took the money and walked out.

Q: Was he alone?

A: I don't think so. I heard someone—a man—say, "Get that money out of there." Then someone tried to open the door to my office, but I'd locked it. Three or four minutes later, the police were there.

Q: Is that when you found Mr. Blohm?

A: I went into the hallway with the police and saw blood on a door in the reception area. It was awful. There was blood on the walls and floor. Kevin was lying on the floor, dead. He had a large knife wound in his chest and another on one hand.

Q: Can you describe the man who robbed you?

A: He was about 5 feet 10, maybe 6 feet tall, in his early 20s, medium build.

Q: What was he wearing?

A: Blue jeans, a blue plaid button-up shirt and blue tennis shoes.

Q: Did you see his face?

A: He had a scarf, a floral scarf, tied around the lower part of his face, cowboy style. It covered the bottom half of his face.

Q: Did the man look at all familiar, like anyone you may have known or seen in the restaurant?

A: No.

Q: Did you notice anything unusual that day?

A: I saw a car in the parking lot when I came in, one I didn't recognize. It didn't belong to anyone who worked there, but that's all I remember.

Q: Do you have any idea why someone stabbed Blohm?

A: No. Kevin might have gotten in his way or tried to stop him or recognized him or something. I don't know. I didn't see it. I don't know anything else.