

## **Student Skill Activity: Conducting an Interview**

### **Why Learn This Skill?**

Suppose your friends went to see a concert, but you were unable to attend. How would you find out how the show was?

### **Learning the Skill**

You would not normally think of asking your friends questions about a concert as conducting an interview, but that is exactly what you are doing. Interviews are an excellent way of collecting important facts and opinions from people. Interviews allow you to gather information from people who witnessed or participated in an historical event firsthand. For example, Studs Terkel interviewed many different people and used the results to write his book, *The Good War: An Oral History of World War II*, which recounted memories of the war from the perspective of four decades later.

- 1. Make an appointment.** Contact the person, and explain why you want to conduct the interview, what kinds of things you hope to learn, and how you will use the information. Discuss where and when you will conduct the interview, and ask if you may record it.
- 2. Gather background information.** Find out about the education, career, and other accomplishments of the person you want to interview. Do research on the topics you wish to discuss.
- 3. Prepare questions.** Group questions into subject categories. Begin each category with general questions and move toward more specific questions. Formulate each question carefully. If the answer could be simply "yes" or "no," rephrase the question.
- 4. Conduct the interview.** Introduce yourself and restate the purpose of the interview. Ask questions and record responses accurately. Ask follow-up questions to fill gaps in information.
- 5. Transcribe the interview.** Convert your written or recorded notes into a transcript, a written record of the interview presented in a question-and-answer format.

### **Practicing the Skill**

Imagine you are assigned to interview someone who participated in or was old enough to remember the events that occurred during the World War II.

1. What kind of background information might you gather?
2. What are some broad categories of questions you might ask based on what you know about the person you are interviewing and what you know about the war?
3. What are some general questions you might want to ask within these broad categories? Consider the responses you might get to these general questions, and formulate follow-up questions for each.

### **Applying the Skill**

World War II probably included some people you know—your grandparents, great-grandparents, or neighbors. Even if they were not directly involved with the conflict, they probably remember what the United States was like during the war. Use the questions you developed in Practicing the Skill to interview one or more of these people. Ask about their experiences during World War II. Ask about their attitudes toward the war and its many related issues, past and present. Summarize your findings in a short report or comparison chart.