

# INTERVIEWS

Getting the Big Get  
Pre-Interview  
Interview  
Post-Interview



# Getting the “Big Get”

## STEP 1

Figure out who would make a great interviewee

1. If your topic is recent, consider:
  - a. The main character
  - b. An opposing character
  - c. Sibling/Child of the main character
  - d. Sibling/Child of the opposition character
  - e. Someone who was there (eg: Who wrote a diary? Who was named in an article? Who was interviewed on TV? Who gave an oral history?)
  - f. Expert at a Presidential Library or museum
2. If more than 100 years ago
  - a. Expert at a Presidential Library or museum
  - b. Author of your favorite secondary source
  - c. Author of your favorite opposition source
  - d. University who has the “Institute of *your topic*” or the official papers of your topic (for instance, University of Tennessee has the James K. Polk Papers”
3. Someone from that location or organization who has benefitted from the event
4. Someone from that location or organization who has been hurt by the event
5. Someone from an association or organization related to the topic (for example: The Gallipoli Association; The NAACP; The OSS Society, etc.)

Main Players	Opposition Players	Those Impacted	Family Members	Experts	Society or Association

# Pre-Interview

## STEP 2

### Securing the Interview and Preparing

1. You (the student) should handle all correspondence. Nothing should come from a parent or teacher. However – please have your parent proof and approve your email or letter before it is sent.
2. Include a picture of yourself in the signature to personalize your request.
3. It may take months to get the “Big Get” don’t give up!
4. Do your research before you ask for the interview.
5. If you are requesting an interview with a retired military person, a Congressman/Senator, a judge, or anyone with a title that requires a specific way to address them – make sure you address them properly in the salutation or on the envelope (if you write a letter).  
GOOGLE IT!
6. If this is for the documentary, then make sure they know you will be filming.
7. Send the questions ahead of time so they are prepared.
8. Make sure you include the time in your questions 😊
9. Ask them to consider the theme in their answers
10. Briefly explain the contest, theme, your topic, your thesis

# Format for Requesting an Interview:

- ✓ Greeting (be aware of etiquette),
- ✓ Introduce yourself and National History Day
- ✓ Layout your theme and thesis
- ✓ Ask for the interview
- ✓ Give sample questions
- ✓ Let them know you are interested in learning different perspectives and that you have a respect/appreciation for what they have to offer.
- ✓ Include contact information
- ✓ Sign the letter or email
- ✓ Include a picture

**(LETTER)**

October 13, 2013

The Honorable George H. W. Bush  
41<sup>st</sup> President of the United States  
Dallas, Texas



Dear President Bush,

My name is Macy Mateer. I am a 13 year old student from Pensacola Beach, Florida. In June, 2013, I won the National History Day competition by doing a performance. Being able to ask you a few questions would be an honor.

The theme this year is "Rights and Responsibilities." I have chosen to do my performance on Virginia Hall - who was an SOE then an OSS Agent. As an amputee and a woman, the State Department felt she was not "fit" to serve. Yet after going undercover in Vichy with the SOE and organizing French Resistance, drop zones and sabotage missions, she convinced the OSS otherwise. As a result, Hall made a huge impact before, during and after D-Day. She is the only civilian woman to win the Distinguished Service Cross in WWII.

I understand you are very busy and there may be limitations on how a President can be quoted, however it would be incredibly inspiring if I had the privilege to include your thoughts or a comment in my National History Day performance.

Three Questions:

- 1. Did you ever have the opportunity to meet Virginia Hall? What was your impression of her?**
- 2. From your time at the CIA, how do you feel the agency benefits from female and/or disabled agents?**
- 3. What is the one thing you hope I learn as a result of my research?**

I admire you and the entire Bush family. I grew up hearing about your steadfast leadership. I am very much aware that you are a respected President, CIA Director, WWII veteran, and member of what I see as the Greatest Generation. Thank you for your service, your time and consideration.

Macy Mateer  
[bchlivin@mchsi.com](mailto:bchlivin@mchsi.com)  
850-934-4858

**(E-MAIL)**

Hello Mr. Khrushchev,

My name is Max Mateer. I am an eighth grader from Florida competing in the National History Day Competition. Previously, I have placed first in our state two years in a row and fifth at the national level last year in the performance category.

This year, the theme is Taking a Stand in History and my project is on Vasili Arkhipov. His stand during the Cuban Missile Crisis avoided a nuclear strike and allowed diplomacy to end the confrontation instead of Armageddon.

It is important to me that I understand all perspectives of the events that I research. Therefore, I had contacted the Watson Institute hoping to reach you – it is from them that I received your contact information. It would be an honor to speak to you about this topic and hear your thoughts, either through email, or—preferably—a phone interview.

My initial questions would be:

1. When did you learn of Arkhipov's stand?
2. Do you and/or others of Russian heritage consider Arkhipov a hero? Is that different than people's original views on his actions?
3. Have you ever met Arkhipov? If so, what surprised you the most about him?
4. What is the one message you would like me to assuredly convey in my performance?

I've included my parents, Craig and Lesley Mateer, on this email in case you have any questions for them.

I truly appreciate you supporting my research. Thank you and have a great day.

- Max



# The Interview:

## STEP 3

### Conducting the Interview

1. Practice questions
2. Practice follow-up questions
3. Manners!! (Especially if older or military – “yes ma’am” “yes sir”)
4. Dress nicely (if in person)
5. The student should not take notes, he/she should be listening
  - a. The parent should take notes or record. (Ask permission first!)  
“So I can listen, is it Ok if I record our interview?”
6. Smile and have good eye contact. (in person) Be engaging.
7. Smile even if you’re on the phone.
8. Put the camera just over the student’s shoulder to get a good angle.  
(documentary)
9. Lamps, even table lamps, can provide good lighting, but natural lighting (window) is best. (documentary)
10. Sit still and relaxed. Be aware of any distracting movement (leg swinging, playing with fingers, fixing her hair etc.)
11. Be sure to spend time in their archives. (if at a museum or library)
12. Get permission to take pictures/video.
13. Send them your thesis before the interview so they know the "angle."

### **Favorite Questions:**

1. "What do you think is the greatest impact of \_\_\_\_\_"
2. Ask three specific questions related to the theme. Ask them to use the theme words in their answers.
3. Ask them to tell their favorite story about the event or a person involved. Personal stories can be the best.
4. If there is one thing you would like me to get across in my project, what would that be?

# After the Interview:

## STEP 4

### The Thank You and the Follow-up

1. Thank you note!! Handwritten and mailed if possible! (e-mail if a handwritten note is not possible – know the generation and the position of interviewee. You will stand out!)
  - a. Let them know that your favorite quote or idea from the interview was \_\_\_\_.
  - b. Let them know they caused you to think in a different way (for the project or in life in general etc.)
  - c. Let them know you will keep them posted as the contest progresses – AND FOLLOW-UP!!! These contacts will be important in the future. You never know...
2. Transcribe the interview or take notes from the recording. Use this in your project, your judges' interview and your annotations.