

## Communication 4312 – The Successful Story

To write a successful story about someone you are going to have that person talk.

You can then use what they say in one of two ways: You can use direct quotes OR you can paraphrase. How you mix the two is very important.

You are going to need some full quotes, quotes that have depth to them. So, how do you get these quotes? You have to get them from the person the story is about. How do you do that? You can hang around them and hope they say something useful. Or, you can ask questions.

The questions you ask must be designed to result in quotes that you can use in the story you are writing. That is, you are going to have to give some thought to what the story is about from the very first.

You may carry on a conversation if you like, but for the most part you get better results according to how you direct the interview. Therefore, ask short, simple, direct questions. Alternate them with questions designed to make the interviewee respond more fully. Follow-up questions can be extremely valuable.

Listen. Most of us aren't very good listeners. Listening requires practice. Try to be a better listener in everyday life. You'd be surprised how often students make glaring factual errors in stories. How does that happen? They weren't paying attention.

Pay attention to the way a person talks, to the rhythm, the cadence. Then you may begin to anticipate when they are about to say something that will be a significant quote in your story.

Take notes. Learning to take notes requires constant practice. You need to practice all the time. You need to give some thought to the pad and pen you are using, the way you write on the paper. You need to learn how to write the facts down immediately. You need to look for and capture full quotes. And you need to take every opportunity you have to practice.

You need to do all that at almost the same time – take notes, listen, be ready with the next question, etc.

■ David McHam