

Course Title: The Art of the Interview: Techniques to Cultivate Great Material

Course Code: CW 07

Instructor Name and Bio: Karen Coates

Author; Journalist; Editor

Karen Coates has more than 25 years of professional interviewing experience. She is the author or coauthor of four books, and her reporting has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Pacific Standard*, *The American Scholar*, and elsewhere. She is a James Beard Award nominee, contributing editor for *Archaeology Magazine*, and coproducer of the documentary film *Eternal Harvest*. Coates received an MS in journalism, anthropology, and international studies from the University of Oregon.

Class Sessions and Recording

Meeting days and times: Wednesdays, 7:00 - 8:50 pm (PT); 4 weeks, November 9 - December 7 (No class on November 23)

Meeting location: Zoom

Class sessions will be recorded.

Those who participate live will have the opportunity to interact with other students, learning from group activities and practice interviews. Many will find that live attendance is the most beneficial way to take the course. However, students who cannot attend live or feel more comfortable watching rather than participating can opt to view the recordings at a later date.

Course Features:

- Live session
 - Lecture, discussions, small-group activities, Q&A
 - Requires interaction and active participation
 - Guest speakers
- Assignments & Coursework
 - Assignments and course materials posted in Canvas
 - Students will discuss assignments & learn from each other
 - Instructor will be available for individual feedback
- Instructor will be available for individual consultations by request

Course Summary

Congratulations—you got the book deal! Or maybe it’s a magazine story, a podcast, or a film script. Whatever the project, it’s time to get to work, and you know that work will entail interviews that make you a little nervous or uncomfortable. It’s OK. Many of the most experienced reporters admit to feeling nervous before an interview. The trick is preparing yourself for the expected *and* the unexpected so you can walk away with the best, most informative usable material for your project. This course is here to help.

The Art of the Interview will guide students in preparing for, conducting, and following through with interviews essential to writing and broadcast projects, no matter the genre. Since it’s important to plan for interviews depending on the context—whether you are interviewing a government leader, university professor, trauma survivor, child, or someone else entirely—students will be given a pre-course survey so small-group discussions and group activities can be tailored to individual needs. While each interview is unique, we will learn strategies for bringing out the most in various scenarios.

What will students learn?

- Researching and preparing the right questions;
- Different strategies for conducting interviews in person, online, or over the phone;
- Calming the nerves (for yourself and your interviewee) so the conversation flows;
- Dealing with tough subjects;
- Adjusting yourself to different environments and personalities;
- Ensuring you get the basics: name spellings, title, contact info, other details;
- Getting reticent, shy, or standoffish subjects to talk;
- Conducting interviews in different timeframes—from the one-shot meeting in a hurry, to following a subject for weeks or months to create a well-rounded profile;
- Recording information beyond what is *said* in the interview;
- Note-taking, recording, organizing, and incorporating information into your work;
- Legalities: state-to-state recording laws, terms like “off the record” or “background,” differences between interviewing public officials versus sources unaccustomed to the interview process.

Who should take this course?

This course is designed for writers, producers, journalists, essayists, and anyone working on broadcast/radio projects at any stage of development. Maybe you’re writing a dissertation or your first book and you have little background in interviewing. Or maybe you have years of experience as a reporter, but you’re facing new challenges with interviewing online. The instructor will use the pre-course survey to design activities based on individual situations.

What will the course entail?

We will have four sessions with a combination of large-group and small-group discussions, short lectures and handouts, guest speakers who are experienced interviewers, and practice interviews. We will work together, learning from each other. Students will have related assignments to conduct between sessions. The instructor will also be available for one-on-one feedback throughout the course.

Do students need any special equipment?

No fancy equipment is required, although students may want to practice recording interviews with anything from a smartphone to a professional recorder (in class, we will discuss the pros and cons of recording, as well as equipment options). All students must have two pens (or pencils) and a notepad.

**Please see course page for full description and additional details.*

Grade Options and Requirements

- No Grade Requested (NGR)
 - This is the default option. No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided.

Textbooks/Required Materials

Recommended textbook:

Talk to Me: How to Ask Better Questions, Get Better Answers, and Interview Anyone Like a Pro by Dean Nelson (Harper Perennial, 2019)

First Assignment

In order to tailor the course to individual student needs, and shape course activities accordingly, students will be asked to fill out a survey before the course begins. The link will be provided in Canvas.

Tentative Weekly Outline

Week One (Nov. 9)

- Opening comments and introductions

- Practice interview with another student
- Follow-up discussion
- Dissecting the interview process & class exercise
- Guest speaker (TBD) & Q&A
- Inter-session assignment explained

Week Two (Nov. 16)

- Recap of Week One; dissecting the interview continued
- Assignment: small-group discussion
- Large-group discussion, Q&A
- Class exercise: planning your interview & anticipated challenges
- Inter-session assignment explained

Week Three (Nov. 30)

- Guest speaker (TBD) & Q&A
- Large-group discussion of assignment
- During the interview: small-group discussion & troubleshooting

Week Four (Dec. 7)

- Practice interview/exercise
- After the interview: organizing notes & following up
- Plans for your real-life interview(s) and beyond