

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

Course Code: CW 07

Instructor Name and Bio: Karen Coates

Fellowship Editor, Mongabay; Author; Journalist

Karen Coates has more than 25 years of professional interviewing experience. She is the author or co-author 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 co-producer 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, May 17 - June 7
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 resource materials, 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.

Grade Options and Requirements

Due to its short format, this course may not be taken for Credit or a Letter Grade. If you require proof of participation, your instructor will provide Certificates of Attendance. Please contact the instructor after completing the class. The Continuing Studies office does not issue these certificates.

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 (May 17)

- Opening comments and introductions
- Practice interview with another student
- Follow-up discussion
- Dissecting the interview process & class exercise
- Inter-session assignment explained

Please contact the Stanford Continuing Studies office with any questions
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Week Two (May 24)

- Guest speaker (TBD) & Q&A
- Recap of Week One; dissecting the interview continued
- Assignment: small-group discussion
- Large-group discussion, Q&A
- Inter-session assignment explained

Week Three (May 31)

- Guest speaker (TBD) & Q&A
- Class exercise: planning your interview & anticipated challenges
- Large-group discussion of assignment
- During the interview: small-group discussion & troubleshooting

Week Four (June 7)

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