

The Interview

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Question 1:

What are some of the positive views on interviews?

Answer:

Interview, in the 130 years of its existence, has become an inherent part of journalism. It is a useful means of communication that is, at times, considered to be an art, serving as a source of truth. Denis Brian has stated that in today's world we get to know "our contemporaries" through their interviews.

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Question 2:

Why do most celebrity writers despise being interviewed?

Answer:

Celebrity writers believe that interviews unduly interfere in their private lives. They regard themselves as victims of interviews. They claim that the interview in some way 'diminishes' them, just like some ancient cultures believed that a portrait of a person takes away his soul. Certain celebrities like V.S Naipaul have claimed that interviews leave them wounded, while others like Rudyard Kipling have referred to it as a crime and an immoral act.

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Question 3:

What is the belief in some primitive cultures about being photographed?

Answer:

Some primitive cultures believed that getting oneself photographed would rob them of their souls.

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Question 4:

What do you understand by the expression “thumbprints on his windpipe”?

Answer:

“Thumbprints on his windpipe” means to choke or suffocate somebody by applying pressure on his throat. Saul Bellow uses this expression to refer to the pressure and discomfort felt by a celebrity while giving an interview.

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Question 5:

Who, in today’s world, is our chief source of information about personalities?

Answer:

Interviews help us know our contemporaries and their opinions. They serve as a means of communication between the celebrities and the audience. In this case, the interviewer is endowed with a very special power and he becomes our chief source of information about personalities.

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Question 1:

Do you think Umberto Eco likes being interviewed? Give reasons for your opinion.

Answer:

Yes, Umberto Eco, in all possibilities, likes being interviewed. He readily answers every question asked by Mukund Padmanabhan in an energetic and lively manner. He does not seem apprehensive about sharing his secrets, experiences and opinions with the

interviewer, and consequently, the world. There is no indication throughout the interview that he dislikes being interviewed.

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Question 2:

How does Eco find the time to write so much?

Answer:

During the interview, Mukund Padmanabhan reiterates David Lodge's astonishment on Umberto Eco's large amount of works and how he manages to write them all. Eco replies that just like the universe has empty spaces, our lives too, have a lot of empty spaces or 'interstices', as he calls them. Whenever he has a few moments to spare in between two different tasks, instead of wasting them, he uses the time to write. He even gives an example of his working technique. He says that while waiting for someone to come up the elevator he keeps himself busy.

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Question 3:

What was distinctive about Eco's academic writing style?

Answer:

Eco's writing style is strikingly different from that of the standard academic mode. The academicians first make a thorough research, then move on to prove their hypotheses, and finally, give their conclusion on that subject. The final outcome, therefore, comes out as tedious. Eco, on the other hand, tells the story of his research, including his "trials and errors". While the scholars usually use a very depersonalised and dull manner, Eco's style is personalised and playful, and in the form of a narrative.

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Question 4:

Did Umberto Eco consider himself a novelist first or an academic scholar?

Answer:

Umberto Eco considered himself an academic scholar first and then a novelist. He wrote more scholarly articles as compared to novels; and, he attended academic conferences and not meetings of Pen Clubs and writers. According to him, he was a university professor who wrote novels on Sundays. "I started writing novels by accident", he said.

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Question 5:

What is the reason for the huge success of the novel, *The Name of the Rose*?

Answer:

Umberto Eco has rightly pointed out that the success behind *The Name of the Rose* is a mystery. It is not possible to know the exact reason behind a book's success or failure; one can only make wild guesses. Perhaps the time in history when it was written has proved favourable for its success. According to Mukund, the novel's setting in the medieval past might have contributed to its success. But many novels written about the medieval past have failed to get as much success.

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Question 1:

Discuss in pairs or small groups.

- 1. Talk about any interview that you have watched on television or read in a newspaper. How did it add to your understanding of the celebrity, the interviewer and the field of the celebrity?**
- 2. The medium you like best for an interview, print, radio, or television.**
- 3. Every famous person has a right to his or her privacy. Interviewers sometimes embarrass celebrities with very personal questions.**

Answer:

1. **Directions:** The students can watch or read an interview of a politician or a bollywood actor. Some of the issues that can be discussed are:

- The celebrity and his/her life
- His/her work and the career
- The interviewer, his questions and his mood
- The way the celebrity answers the questions- his language, mood, gestures, body language
- The views and opinions of both the interviewer and the interviewee

2. Each medium has positives and negatives – yet, television is the best medium – more enjoyable and attractive – visual medium allows us to observe the celebrity, his gestures, expressions and body language – helps connect better with the interview

3. Everyone has a right to maintain his/her privacy – wrong to ask private and humiliating questions about his/her past – wrong to consider the private life of public figures as public – once their privacy is breached, it may be difficult for them to recover – may affect their personal relationships even

(Directions/pointers have been provided for students' benefit. It is strongly recommended that students prepare the answer on their own.)

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Question 1:

If the interviewer Mukund Padmanabhan had not got the space in the newspaper to reproduce the interview verbatim, he may have been asked to produce a short report of the interview with the salient points.

Write this report for him.

[The teacher should be able to help the pupils in what to include and what can be omitted. We could also provide a short report of an interview as a sample.]

Answer:

A CHAT WITH UMBERTO ECO

By Mukund Padmanabhan

Delhi, 6 September

Umberto Eco, the renowned scholar and writer, in a short interview with *The Hindu* claimed to be an academician first and a novelist later. He is a professor at the University of Bologna in Italy. His works range from semiotics to literary interpretation, medieval aesthetics and finally to novels and children's books. When asked about his wide-ranging works, he clarified his position saying "I am a professor who writes novels on Sundays".

One is amazed by his ability to manage time. He revealed his secret theory of empty spaces or 'interstices', as he calls them. Eco explained his way of utilising every second, even the free ones between two different tasks.

All of Eco's works including his academic publications have a personal touch to them. This is Eco's unique style of writing which, he declared, began at the age of 22 when he was a research scholar. His inclination towards creative writing led him to novel-writing in his later years.

His detective novel *The Name of the Rose* has sold 10 million copies, but its success apparently did not surprise him. He stated that the success of the book proves that there are people who read difficult texts.

All in all, Eco turned out to be a dynamic personality who loves his work. His enthusiasm is apparent in the way he gave the replies to all the questions, without any apprehension or qualms.

Question 1:

Interview a person whom you admire either in school or your neighbourhood and record it in writing.

Answer:

Directions: Think of a person whom you admire. He or she may be one of your teachers, your relatives, your role model or any elderly person in the family. Consider his or her profession or work and based on that prepare a questionnaire. Before the actual interview, remember to ask for permission and accordingly fix a date for the interview. During the interview, follow the questionnaire but you may ask any relevant questions that crop up during the course of the interview. Try to note down the important points.

(Directions have been provided for students' benefit. It is strongly recommended that students prepare the answer on their own.)