

Tip Sheet

SME Interviews

MORGAN SHORT
Story Finder

Why SME Interviews Matter Now More Than Ever

AI tools can write copycat, boring blog posts all day long. What they can't do? Extract the messy, nuanced, sometimes contradictory insights hiding in your experts' heads.

So what can you do to make your content actually stand out? Have an actual POV. Have something to say. If you're not an expert in the thing you have to write about, SME interviews lay the foundation for content that isn't drowning in sameness.

Use this tip sheet to nail your SME interview.

Preparation for the Interview

Study the Human

Review their LinkedIn, company website, recent talks or articles. Reference something specific they've done to build rapport.

Set Expectations Clearly

Tell them what you want to get out of the interview. Consider sending a few example questions in advance. If you can, share how their POV will be used and who will see it.

Start with Small Talk

Get them talking about themselves. A comfortable SME is a confident SME. When you loosen them up you'll get better responses.

Have a List of Questions Ready

Create your list of questions in advance but be ready to pivot. They should be a guideline, not a script.

Record with Permission

AI can take notes for you at this point. If you can record the conversation, you can stay focused on hosting it instead of scribbling notes down every two seconds.

Show Empathy

This one might be obvious but your SMEs are typically very busy people. Thank them for their time. Make good use of it.

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Effective Probing Techniques

The Echo

Repeat the last few words of an SME's response as a question to prompt further explanation.

The Perspective Switch

Ask your SME to examine their situation from the viewpoint of a customer, partner, or competitor. You can also ask them if, why, and when their perspective has changed over time.

The Strategic Silence

Allow brief pauses after responses to encourage deeper thinking and more detailed answers.

The Summary

Briefly summarize what the SME has said to confirm understanding and encourage expansion.

The Simplification

Invite SMEs to break complex topics down like you're in kindergarten, like you're a teenager, and like you're an elder. If they're using lots of jargon, ask what they really mean

The Why Chain

Continuously ask "why" after each response, pushing deeper into the reasoning behind their strategies or decisions.

Some of My Favorite Questions

- Why is this important?
- What's the biggest misconception people have about this space/topic?
- Is there anything I should have asked you that I didn't?
- What aspects of our industry do you feel are currently underserved or broken?
- How do you think this approach sets us apart from others?
- How has your perspective on this changed overtime?
- Can you explain how it works like I'm a second grader?
- What have you heard from customers about how this benefits them?
- What's one thing you wish you knew about this topic years ago?
- What's the most common pain point people say about this topic?
- What's a customer problem that seems simple but is actually hard to solve?
- If you had unlimited resources what would you do next?
- What keeps you up at night about this topic?
- Can you rant about this topic for 2 minutes?