

Prose - Chapter 7

The Interview

Page No: 69 Think As you Read

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.

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.

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

Answer: Some primitive cultures believed that photographing a person is no less than stealing his/her soul out of the body and rendering him incomplete and slighted.

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

Answer: The expression means having been strangled. The interview is an assault on a person as it makes him/her so tense that he/she feels as good as being choked.

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

Answer: In modern times, the chief source of information on personalities is the interviewer who, through his power and influence, gathers information and provides us with the best possible information on the interviewees. He extracts everything significant through his questions for us.

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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 felt just at ease with the interviewer and answered all the questions fully and patiently without showing any hurry. He stated his achievement in a very modest manner and explained his philosophical views and interest clearly. He let the interviewer enter the secret about his craft with a loud laugh. Also, he elaborated his approach which was unique. He was mannerly, warm and properly responsive as well.

2. How does Eco find the time to write so much?

Answer: There are two factors that explain how Eco was able to write so much. In his own words, the life of every person has empty spaces- periods with no important jobs. He says that he did most of his writing during these free intervals. Second, he explains that people wondered that he (Eco) had written so much on various subjects. But the fact is that he was writing on the same lines and same interests-peace, non-violence, etc. All his works were linked with the thread of common interests. It saves his time and he could write a lot in a short period of time. That was the secret behind Eco's prolific pen.

3. What was distinctive about Eco's academic writing style?

Answer: Umberto Eco's academic writing style is quite distinctive. It has a certain playful and personal quality about it. It is a marked departure from a regular academic style, which is usually depersonalized and often dry and boring.

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

Answer: Umberto Eco considered himself an academic scholar first and a novelist later. He makes his preference clear by saying, "I consider myself a university professor who writes novels on Sundays". On week days he attends academic conferences and does other scholarly, non-fictional work.

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

Answer: 'The Name of the Rose' is different sort of novel. It is quite serious novel. It is a detective story at one level. But it also probes into metaphysics, theology and medieval history. The reasons for the success of the book, however, remain a mystery.

Talking about the Text

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?

Answer:

I recently read Angelia Jolie's interview in a magazine where she talked about her campaign against rape and violence; and women rights. She was trying to raise awareness for the upcoming International Women's Day on March 8. Being her fan I think while reading the interview I got acquainted with her views and opinions on this most talked about social cause. Being a very popular International Star, she rightly used this medium of communication to spread awareness and a very appealing message for a social cause. She also talked about the kind of advice she gives to her three daughters. She also shared her experience in Kenya while she was there last summer as a part of UN peacekeeping troop.

So, yes, the interview did add up to my understanding of her. She rightly talked about the kinds of harassments she went through just because she is a woman who is a part of the glamour industry.

2. The medium you like best for an interview, print, radio, or television.

Answer: The medium I like best for an interview is the television. It has both audio and visual effect. It presents the interviewer and interviewee before the audience in their true colours. Usually celebrities accuse the reporters of misquoting them or misreporting them in the print media or the radio. This is not possible when they are face-to-face on the television. Their lip movement and body movement while replying to probing questions are there for all to see. The recording of various expressions coming on the face of the interviewee and his/her gestures and words are the additional advantages that television holds over the print media or the radio. The print media has dull, dry words alongside a picture whereas the radio tries to create the atmosphere by skilful variation of the sound. Both expect a lot of attention from the reader/audience.

TOPPERS
CLAN

3. Every famous person has a right to his or her privacy. Interviewers sometimes embarrass celebrities with very personal questions.

Answer: Interviewers want to present exclusive and intimate details about the famous person they are interviewing. Some interviewers focus on the public life and achievements of the individual only. They try to be objective in their approach as well as assessment. However, there are others who want to make their interviews more spicy and usually cross the thin limit of privacy of the individual. In their zeal to present good copy they embarrass the famous person with the personal questions. Sometimes impact of such questions on famous person reveals his/her aversion as well as irritation at the silliness of the person. If they shout, they are accused of being rude and proud and if they keep mum they are labeled as arrogant. In my opinion privacy of an individual must be respected.

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Noticing discourse linkers and signallers

LINKERS

1. Notice how the utterances of the interviewer and the interviewee are linked to one another. The linkers have been italicised for you.

Linking is done either through the use of reference pronouns, like ‘that’, ‘this’, ‘which’ etc. It can also be done through a repetition of words.

I am convinced I am always doing the same thing.

Which is?

Aah, now that is more difficult to explain.

....

While waiting for your elevator to come up from the first to the third floor, I have already written an article! (Laughs).

Not everyone can do that of course.

.....

Novels probably satisfied my taste for narration.

Talking about novels,

.....

at least more than 20 of them...

Over 40.

Over 40.

.....

I cannot expect to have one million readers with stuff on semiotics.

Which brings me to my next question.

.....

Were you puzzled at all by this?

No. Journalists are puzzled.

.....

Could the huge success of the novel have anything to do with the fact that it dealt with a period of medieval history that...

That's possible

.....

.....

The use of linkers is important in all continuous stretches of text. It is very important in conversation, especially a structured conversation like an interview.

SIGNALLERS

When there are shifts in the topic the speaker usually indicates them through phrases that prepare the listener for the shift.

Notice these two examples taken from the interview:

“Which brings me to another question”

“But let me tell you another story...”

Without these preparatory signallers the flow of ideas in a conversation will not be smooth and continuous.

Answer:

For self-study.

Writing

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:

An interview with Umberto Eco by Mukund Padmanabhan
New Delhi, 19th May, 20.....

Umberto Eco needs no introduction. He is an academician and a novelist. He recently shot into fame with the roaring success of his novel 'The Name of the Rose'. Last week he was in New Delhi, in connection with a seminar. I was asked by my newspaper to interview him in his hotel. I took the appointment telephonically. As I entered his room, I found him waiting for me. As the interview began I asked Eco how he could do all the things he does.

He replied that although he appeared to be doing many different things, they were all linked with each other. He said that he worked in empty spaces or interstices. He said that while waiting for me to come up to his room, he had written an article. I asked him whether he considered himself more a novelist or an academician. He replied in good humour that he is a University professor who writes novels on Sundays. Then I referred to his famous novel ‘The Name of the Rose’. Eco was modest to admit that he himself had not expected such a huge success for his novel. The novel has a detective story at one level. On the other, it deals with theology, metaphysics and medieval history. He admitted that his taste for narration helped him to become a novelist.

Things to do

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.)