

# Interviewing Foundational Learners

## Applying Ethical Storytelling in My Organization

Learners in foundational programs may have limited experience being asked to reflect on themselves — and may not yet believe that their story is worth telling, or that they have the words to tell it. This guide covers how to adapt your approach so that every learner can be heard on camera, regardless of their literacy level or language background.

### The Core Principle

The interview itself — being asked, being listened to, being taken seriously — is often as meaningful to a foundational learner as the video that results from it. A learner who feels genuinely seen will speak more honestly and more comfortably than one who feels like a case study. Start there.

### Key Adaptations

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Use concrete, observable questions</b>      | Abstract questions like 'What changed for you?' are hard for any learner and especially hard when English is limited or self-reflection is unfamiliar. Ask instead: 'Is there something you do now that you couldn't do before?' or 'What did you learn how to do?' |
| <b>Ask about other people first</b>            | Many learners find it easier to describe how change landed on someone else before themselves. Try: 'Did anyone in your family notice something was different?' or 'Did you tell anyone what you were learning?' This often opens a rich, specific moment.           |
| <b>Use yes/no questions as stepping stones</b> | 'Did something surprise you?' is answerable by anyone. When they say yes, follow immediately with: 'Tell me about that.' The yes/no opens the door; the follow-up gets the story.   |
| <b>Narrow from abstract to concrete</b>        | If a question is not landing, narrow it step by step: 'What did you accomplish?' becomes 'What can you do now?' becomes 'Can you think of one day when you did that?' Stop when the learner can answer comfortably.   |
| <b>Give time and permission to think</b>       | Foundational learners — especially ELL learners — may pause longer before answering. Resist filling the silence. A long pause is often followed by the most honest sentence in the interview.   |



# Interviewing Foundational Learners

## Applying Ethical Storytelling in My Organization

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Let them show, not just tell</b>         | 'Can you show me what you mean?' can produce a more natural, usable moment on camera than a spoken answer. If a learner is more comfortable demonstrating, let them.                                    |
| <b>Shorter answers are complete stories</b> | A learner saying 'I can read to my kids now' on camera is a complete, powerful story. Do not push for elaboration beyond their comfort. Build context yourself in the framing and editing of the video. |
| <b>Affirm without coaching</b>              | After the learner speaks, affirm that you heard them – 'Thank you, that really helps' – without suggesting what they should have said or filling in details they didn't offer.                          |

### Adapted Question Bank

| Purpose                                 | Questions to Try  |
|---|---|
| Open warmly and simply                  | "How are you today?" / "Is it okay if I ask you a few questions?" / "There are no wrong answers – just tell me what you remember."                              |
| Open the story at a low threshold       | "When did you start coming here?" / "What were you hoping to learn?" / "What did you do in the program?"  |
| Find something concrete they can do now | "What can you do now that you couldn't do before?" / "Is there something that is easier now?" / "What did you learn how to do?"                                 |
| Ask about a specific moment             | "Was there one day that you remember?" / "Did anything surprise you?" / "Was there a time when you felt proud of yourself?"                                     |
| Ask through other people                | "Did someone in your family notice something different?" / "Did you tell anyone what you were learning?" / "Did anyone say anything to you?"                    |
| Find the impact in plain words          | "What is better now?" / "How does it feel?" / "What do you want to do next?"  |
| Draw out a natural sentence for camera  | "How would you say that in your own words?" / "If you had to tell a friend – what would you say?" / "Can you say that again? I want to make sure I understood." |

# Interviewing Foundational Learners

## Applying Ethical Storytelling in My Organization

### Multilingual Learners

Speak slowly and use shorter questions with one idea at a time. Allow longer pauses. Accept shorter answers as complete. A learner who gives three honest sentences in their second language has given you something powerful. Do not push for more — build the context yourself in the editing and framing of the video.

### Pre-Conversation Planning Notes

Complete before the filming session.

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Learner name / pseudonym:                          |  |
| Framework I plan to use:                           |  |
| The story in one sentence (from pre-conversation): |  |
| The moment I am guiding toward:                    |  |
| A phrase they said that I want to reach on camera: |  |
| Topics that are off the table:                     |  |
| Opening questions I plan to use:                   |  |
| Any accessibility or language considerations:      |  |
| Target video length and platform:                  |  |

