

Interview Analysis Exercise

1. Ask someone you know – it could be a friend or acquaintance here at MIT, a family member, an old friend, or someone you've just met – if they would be willing to be interviewed for your course on food. You should be able to conduct the interview in about 10 minutes or less. Tell them that their answers will be anonymous and that no data is being collected. It is fine if they don't want to answer every question. This is just a class exercise. Ask permission to take notes.

2. Begin with this question:

Imagine that you have an opportunity to create your ideal meal. Describe the meal and the setting to me. In particular:

- *What sort of meal is it and who is coming? (Give the overall type of event, time, place, participants.)*
- *What is the menu?*
- *Who prepares the food?*
- *Where did the dishes/recipes come from (what food traditions, family traditions, etc)?*
- *Where will the meal be eaten (inside/outside, in kitchen, dining room...) and how will participants be arranged?*
- *What sort of dress/manners etc. will be appropriate (formal, casual, costume...)?*

3. Follow up on the answers to these questions to determine the reasons for these choices: why this sort of meal? Why this menu? Why these food traditions? Why this setting? Avoid leading questions, i.e., questions that lead the interviewee to give a particular answer to the question.

4. LISTEN CAREFULLY. TAKE NOTES of the answers and the reasons provided. A form that you may use or modify is provided on the back of this page.

5. AFTER the interview has been completed, write a short (600-900 word) analysis of the interview. Summarize the interviewee's answers to the bullet points above, and please answer the following questions:

Reasons: What were the reasons given for the meal choices made? Was the attraction of the meal, from the interviewee's description, mainly social (bringing people together, conversation, exclusive access to participants), gustatory (taste), emotional (memory, sentiment?), or something else? Was there a theme to the reasons for the choices, e.g., mainly pragmatic, aesthetic, ethical? (See handout on reasons.) Were there any tensions between the reasons given?

Meanings: In what ways was the interviewee sensitive (or insensitive) to the symbolic or material significance of the meal choices? Do you think the food choices were socially meaningful? In what ways?

Health/Welfare: In what ways were issues of the health and well-being of those involved in the food chain – from agricultural production and distribution, to cooking, to serving, to eating – factors in the interviewee's thinking about the meal. To what extent was the interviewee sensitive (or insensitive) to ethical considerations?

6. Turn in your notes (on the form or a modification of it) together with your analysis.

Question	Answer	Reason
What sort of meal?		
Participants (relation to interviewee)?		
Setting/context?		
Where/when?		
Menu?		
Preparer(s)?		
Sources (dishes/recipes)?		
Arrangement of participants & food		
Dress, manners, style		
Other observations		

INTERVIEWER'S NAME:

Date of Interview:

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