

## The Interview

### Summary

The lesson begins with the introduction to interview as a commonplace of journalism since its invention, which was a little over 130 years ago. According to the author, it is not very surprising that people have very distinct opinions about the usage of interview. Some think of it in its highest form whereas some people can't stand being interviewed. An interview leaves a lasting impression and according to an old saying, when perceptions are made about a certain person, the original identity of his soul gets stolen. Famous celebrities, writers and artists have been heard criticising interviews. Rudyard Kipling's wife wrote in her diary how their day in Boston was ruined by two reporters. Kipling considers interviewing an assault, a crime that should attract punishment. He believes that a respectable man would never ask or give an interview.

There is an excerpt from the interview between Mukund (from The Hindu newspaper) and Umberto Eco, a professor at the University of Bologna in Italy who had already acquired a formidable reputation as a scholar for his ideas on semiotics (the study of signs), literary interpretation, and medieval aesthetics before he turned to writing fiction. The interview revolves around the success of his novel, *The Name of the Rose* whose more than ten million copies were sold in the market. The interviewer begins by asking him how Umberto manages to do so many different things to which he replies by saying that he is doing the same thing. He further justifies and mentions that his books about children talk about peace and non-violence which in the end, reflect his interest in philosophy. Umberto identifies himself as an academic scholar who attends academic conferences during the week and writes novels on Sundays. It doesn't bother him that he is identified by others as a novelist and not a scholar, because he knows that it is difficult to reach millions of people with scholarly work. He believes there are empty spaces in one's life, just like there are empty spaces in atoms and the Universe. He calls them interstices and most of his productive work is done during that time. Talking about his novel, he mentions that it is not an easy-read. It has a detective aspect to it along with metaphysics, theology and medieval history. Also, he believes that had the novel been written ten years earlier or later, it would have not seen such a huge success. Thus, the reason for its success still remains a mystery

### **POINTS TO PONDER THROUGH THE LESSON – The Interview**

#### PART I

- Interview has become a commonplace of journalism. Opinions on the functions, methods and merits of Interview vary considerably.
- Some claim it to be the highest form, a source of truth and in its practice an art.
- Some despise the interview as an unwarranted intrusion into lives, which diminishes their personality.
- S. Naipaul feels that 'some people are wounded by interviews and lose a part of themselves.
- Lewis Carroll never consented to be interviewed for he believed it to be 'a just horror of the interviewer'.
- Rudyard Kipling considered it 'immoral, a crime, an assault that merits punishment'.
- G. Wells referred interviewing to be an 'ordeal'.
- Saul Bellow describes it 'like thumbprints on his windpipe'.
- Despite the drawbacks interview is a supremely serviceable medium of communication. Interviews are the most vivid impression of our contemporaries and the interviewer holds a position of unprecedented power and influence.

## PART II

- An extract from an interview of Umberto Eco interviewed by Mukund Padmanabhan.
- Umberto Eco was a professor with a formidable reputation as a scholar for his ideas on Semiotics, literary interpretation and medieval aesthetics before he turned into writing literary fiction. He attained intellectual superstardom with his publication “The Name of the Rose”.
- In the interview Eco shares his idea of empty spaces in our lives just as they exist in an atom, which he calls Interstices. He says that he makes use of these empty spaces to work.
- Eco’s essays were scholarly and narrative. He likes to be identified more as a university professor who writes novels.
- Eco’s ‘The Name of the Rose’, a serious novel, which delves into metaphysics, theology and medieval history, enjoyed a mass audience. It dealt with medieval past. He feels that the novel wouldn’t have been so well received had it been written ten years earlier or later.

### Extract based questions

**A .—Lewis Carroll, the creator of Alice in wonderland , was said to have had a \_just horror of the interviewer and he never consented to be interviewed- It was his horror of being lionized which made him thus repel would be acquaintances, interviewers and the persistent petitioners for his autograph and he would afterwards relate the stories of his success in silencing such people with much satisfaction and amusement**

I. Choose the most appropriate option that resonates LewisCarroll’s opinion about interviews.

i. Frightening ii. Satisfying

iii. Pleasing iv. Appalling

a. ii and iii

b. i and iv

c. I and ii

d. iii and iv

II. Which of the following statements CAN berelatedto the opinion of interviews as expressed in the above extract.

a. Interview is a source of truth and ,in its practice an art.

b. Interview is a satisfying and amusing mode of journalism.

c. A repulsive and horrifying experience

d. A supremely serviceable medium of communication

III. What does the word lionised mean?

- a. To show disrespect
- b. To give a lot of public attention and approval
- c. To dishonour
- d. To treat with contempt

IV. Why did Lewis Carroll never consent to be interviewed?

- a. He disliked interviews.
- b. He did not consider interview as a medium of communication
- c. Had horror of the interviewer.
- d. Considered interviews as thumbprints on his windpipe.

**B. —Why do I refuse to be interviewed? Because it is immoral! It is a crime, just as much of a crime as an offence against my person, as an assault, and just as much merits punishment. It is cowardly and vile. No respectable man would ask it, much less give it”**

I. To whom is the above opinion about interviews attributed ?

- a. Saul bellow
- b. Rudyard Kipling
- c. Lewis Carroll
- d. H G Wells

II. Find a word from the passage that can be replaced by — extremely unpleasant

III. The use of the word ‘ assault’ indicates that interviews are \_\_\_\_\_

- i. Harmful ii. Offensive
  - iii. Entertaining iv. Righteous
- a. i and iv
  - b. iii and iv
  - c. i and ii
  - d. Only iii

IV. The above extract indicates \_\_\_\_\_ attitude towards interviews

- a. Discouraging
- b. Condemnatory
- c. Laudatory
- d. Positive

**C. —Maybe I give the impression of doing many things. But in the end, I am convinced I am always doing the same thing!**

I. The above is in reply to the question asked by \_\_\_\_\_

- a. Christopher Silvester
- b. Rudyard Kipling
- c. Umberto Eco
- d. Mukund Padmanabhan

II. What are the many things mentioned in the above extract?

- a. Different novels written by Eco
- b. Newspaper articles by Umberto Eco
- c. Eco's academic works, novels, books for children etc
- d. Scholarly works on semiotics

III. What is the 'same thing' mentioned by Eco?

- a. Similar narrative style
- b. Same philosophical and ethical interests pursued in Eco's works
- c. Academic works of Eco
- d. Works of fiction by Eco

IV. The above extract is taken from an interview

between \_\_\_\_\_

**D. — It’s a detective yarn at one level but it also delves into metaphysics, theology, and medieval history. Yet it enjoyed a huge mass audience. Were you puzzled at all by this?”**

I Who were puzzled at the huge mass audience?

- a. Umberto Eco
- b. Journalists and publishers
- c. Readers
- d. Community of writers

II What does ‘it’ stand for?

III What is the thing that puzzled many?

- a. The success of a novel that provided difficult reading experiences.
- b. The plot of the novel
- c. complexity of the theme
- d. Eco’s style of writing

IV Which of the following options convey the meaning of ‘yarn’ as used in the extract?

- a. She still spins the yarn and knits sweaters
- b. Douglas has a yarn or two to tell me about his trips into the bush
- c. The shop sells yarn and embroidery floss.
- d. He took a ball of yarn from the basket

**E. —Almost everything of moment reaches us through one man asking questions of another. Because of this ,the interviewer holds a position of unprecedented power and influence”**

I Whose opinion about interviews is given in the above extract?

- a. Dennis Brian
- b. Christopher Silvester
- c. Umberto Eco
- d. Caroline

II The interviewer occupies a position of power and influence

as \_\_\_\_\_

- a. everything reaches us through one man asking questions of another
- b. Interviews are immoral, vile and cowardly
- c. Interviews are unwarranted intrusion
- d. Interviews are integral part of journalism

III. Find a word from the extract that means the same as —not known, experienced or one before.

IV —Almost everything of moment reaches us through one man asking questions of another“.

It highlights interviews as

- a. An attractive mode of communication
- b. Highly useful
- c. Despicable
- d .Detestable

**Answer key**

<b>EXTRACT A</b>	<b>EXTRACT B</b>	<b>EXTRACT C</b>	<b>EXTRACT D</b>	<b>EXTRACT E</b>
I b	I b	I d	I b	I a

II c	II Vile	II c	II The Name of the Rose	II a
III b	III c	III b	III a	III Unprecedented
IV c	IV b	IV Eco and Mukun d Padman abhan	IV b	IV b

## Short Answer Questions

### **Q1 Other than celebrities, what do some people think about an interview?**

**Ans.** Other than celebrities, mostly common persons think that an interview is the only and best source of truth. It, according to them, is an art.

### **Q2 In which way do the celebrities take an interview?**

**Ans.** Celebrities find themselves as victims, they take interviews as an unwarranted intrusion into their lives which somehow diminishes them.

### **Q3 How can we say that Umberto Eco had a wide range of writing?**

**Ans.** Umberto Eco had an expertise in semiotics and other than this he started to write fiction, literary fiction, academic texts, essays, children's books, newspaper articles etc. So his versatility in writing can be easily understood.

### **Q4 What made 'The Name of the Rose' a highly successful novel?**

**Ans.** According to Umberto Eco, the most possible reason for the success of the novel was a mystery and actually nobody could predict the exact reason for it.

### **Q5 What is Umberto Eco's theory of interstices?**

**Ans.** Umberto Eco says that if we eliminate the empty spaces from the universe, then the universe would become as big as his fist. He stresses on the importance of the empty spaces of time.

### **Q6 Umberto Eco does many things, but says, 'I am always doing the same thing but that is more difficult to explain.' What does he mean to say?**

**Ans.** Umberto Eco says that he has philosophical interests which reflect in all his writings, fiction and nonfiction. In this way, he does the same thing, though he seems to pursue various activities: writing notes for newspapers, teaching novels, writing essays, children's books etc.

### **Q7 Despite the drawbacks, the interview is a supremely serviceable medium of communication. Explain.**

**Ans.** Though an interview is an intrusion into the personal life of the interviewee, it is always a supremely serviceable medium of communication. Through the interviews only we get vivid impressions of our contemporary celebrities. We get a glance of their way of working, their personal life and experiences.

### **Q8 What are some of the positive views on interviews?**

**Ans.** Interview is considered as a reliable source of truth. Contemporaries and their success can be read through the interviews. Nowadays, a very important part of journalism is interviews.

### **Q9 Why do most celebrity writers despise being interviewed?**

**Ans.** Most celebrity writers despise being interviewed because they have faced the fright of interview. Among them, the interview is regarded as an unwarranted entrance into their privacy.

### **Q10 What do you understand by the expression "thumbprints on his windpipe"?**

**Ans.** Thumbprints on his windpipe expresses the blockage to any person's freedom and privacy. It can be considered as a suffocation felt by the interviewees.

### **Q11 Do you think Umberto Eco likes being interviewed? Give reasons for your opinion.**

**Ans.** Umberto Eco surely likes being interviewed as a part of his interview is presented in this chapter. He answers every question asked by Mukund and never frustrates or criticizes the interview like many other celebrity writers do.

**Q12 How does Eco find the time to write so much?**

**Ans.** Umberto Eco uses each and every moment of time. He is capable of utilizing the little space of free time between different activities. So he calls it the usage of interstices, the management of time.

**Q13 What was distinctive about Eco's academic writing style?**

**Ans.** Eco's academic writing style can be said as a narrative which is personalised and interesting. Eco's writing style is not dull and boring like the others.

**Q14 Did Umberto Eco consider himself a novelist first or an academic scholar?**

**Ans.** Umberto Eco firstly considered himself as an academic scholar because he was a professor and wrote many academic texts while he wrote his first novel at the age of 50, that too, accidentally.

**Q 16. Why does Denis Brian believe that interviewer holds a position of unprecedented power and influence?**

**Ans.** Denis Brian believes that almost everything of moment reaches us through one man asking questions of another. So, interviewer holds a position of unprecedented power and influence. It highlights the utilitarian aspect of interview.

**The Interview Long Answer Questions**

**Q1 Explain the word Interview and how many writers find favor with it.**

**OR**

**Why do you think Christopher Silvester describes the viewpoints of other writers and authors when discussing the concept of an interview? Support your opinion with reference to any one writer cited.**

**Ans.** The word 'interview' is derived from the French derivative word "entrevue". It is a conversation between a journalist or broadcaster and a person of public interest. It is an oral examination of an applicant for a job through the process of formal questioning. Since the word has wider implications, it duly involves screening, interaction and introspection. During the process, both the interviewer and the interviewee participate and the interviewee has to face the horror of the interviewer.

The word interview was inserted 130 years ago. Since then it has become a commonplace in journalism. In this world, all have to undergo the process of the interview. Thousands of people are interviewed daily for one or the other kind. Depending on the merit of the interview, people have claimed in its highest form as a source of truth and in its practice, it is an art. H.G. Wells remained averse to 'interview' and in 1894 he referred to it as an ordeal. But forty years later he himself was found interviewing Joseph Stalin of Russia. People view that almost everything reaches us through asking the interviewer who holds a position of unprecedented power and influence.

**Q2 Mukund Padmanabhan was a reporter from 'The Hindu'. In the context of the chapter, reveal his traits as an interviewer.**

**OR**

**How would you evaluate Mukund Padmanabhan as an interviewer? Mention at least two qualities he displays in his interview, supported by textual evidence.**

**Ans.** Mukund Padmanabhan was surely a successful and well thought-out reporter who always used to ask answerable and dexterous questions to his interviewees. He used to plan and prepare to conduct an interview of a celebrity. He never asked ugly or embarrassing questions and on the other hand, the celebrity whom he interviewed always seemed to be comfortable with his questions.

Through the interviews, readers not only got the information about the celebrities but many other important aspects of Mukund's personality also came in their knowledge. He asked brief and quality questions to his interviewees scrupulously. He let the interviewees speak in their own manner and never tried to interrupt or cross-questioned them.

His interviewees used to be free and frank with him. He was always a prepared interviewer. Mukund, in advance arranged the information and personality traits of his interviewees and then with full preparations started his sessions. In all we can say that Mukund Padmanabhan was a disciplined and dedicated interviewer.

**Q3 Several celebrities despise being interviewed. Is this justified? Why? Why not?**

**Ans.** There are several celebrities mentioned in this chapter like Rudyard Kipling, VS Naipaul, H.G. Wells, Saul Bellow, etc. who dislike interviews very strongly. They never became ready to be interviewed. Most of them considered interviews as an unwarranted intrusion into their lives. They did not want to reveal the secrets of their personal lives.

Even an interview is considered as an immoral activity, as a crime or sometimes as an assault. They feel that the interviewers waste their precious time which can be used by them for more creativity. On the other hand, the common mass takes interviews very positively as they come to know about the inner and hidden things of their ideals. But interviews have their drawbacks also.

Celebrities feel shy and disappointed when they are asked for interviews but they forget that they become famous and wealthy through the successful interviews. General mass become their fan and devotee by knowing more and more about their ideals. Celebrities are even worshipped. In this regard, it can be said that an interview cannot be termed as an immoral activity.

**Q4 Give a character sketch of Umberto Eco on the basis of the chapter 'The Interview'.**

**OR**

**What do you think about Umberto Eco? Does he like being interviewed? Give reasons in support of your answer. (CBSE 2008)**

**OR**

**What impression do you form about Umberto Eco as a scholar and writer on the basis of 'The Interview'? (CBSE 2010)**

**Ans.** Umberto Eco, a university professor at the University of Bologna in Italy, is an academician and a famous novelist. He, through various interviews, discloses his secret of success in life and never hates the interviewers. He has his taste in various fields of writings as academic texts, fiction and nonfiction, literary fiction essays, children's books, newspaper articles etc.

He always wanted to be called an academician not a novelist. He used to participate in academic conferences, on the other hand, he avoided the meetings of writers and Pen Club Members. He has written forty scholarly works and five novels. He used to denote time for writing novels on only Sundays. He discovered a magical trick of working in interstices.

He used to use even the seconds of his time. He captured the empty spaces for writing notes or any content. He had an expertise in Semiotics, the study of signs. He never became a slave of pride as he openly admitted that his novel 'The Name of the Rose' got success accidentally and the time was in his favour. He didn't have any celebrity attitude though his novel was bought by more than 10 million of the readers.