

Resource: Human Rights Interview Guide

Below is a short set of questions to help you with your interviews. These questions are mostly applicable to people who are being persecuted for some type of activity like practicing their religion, activism, or journalism. They also focus mainly on people who have been arrested. While this is not a comprehensive list of questions you might need to ask, it will give you a sense of the details you need to extract from the interview and should help inform other interviews not involving arrests.

This guide offers broad questions that allow your interviewees to tell their stories as chronological narratives. We also provide follow-up questions you can ask if the interviewee does not provide needed details in the course of their testimony.

Biographical Questions

- What is your name?
- Age or date of birth?
- Where are you from originally?
- Where do you live now?
- Occupation (if applicable)?
- What gender do you identify as?
- What is your ethnicity?
- What is your religion (if applicable)?
- What is your sexual orientation (if applicable)?

Background Questions

- Broad Question: Please describe the type of activity you are involved in.
 - Detailed follow-ups: When did you start this activity? Were you part of a group or organization? What types of things did you do (for example: write, protest, organize gathering)?
- Broad Question: Did you experience any difficulties in doing these activities? If so, can you describe them? What happened first?
 - Detailed follow-ups: When did this happen? Where did this happen? Who did this? Was there a particular branch of government involved? Do you know who were the officials you interacted with?

Arrest Related Questions

- Broad Question: Have you ever been arrested? Please describe what happened.
 - Detailed follow-ups: When was the arrest? Where were you arrested?
 - Detailed follow-ups: Who was doing the arrest? How many people were involved? Do you know if they were part of some organization or government body? How do you know this? What were they wearing? What did they look like? Did they have weapons?
 - Broad Question: How did he/she/they act towards you?
 - Detailed follow-ups: Did they show a warrant or other documentation? What was their behavior like? What did they say to you? Did they seize any property? What and what happened to it? Did they interact with you physically?
- Broad Question: Did they take you anywhere after that? If so, describe what happened.
 - Detailed follow-ups: Were you restrained in any way? What kind of vehicle did they use? Was it marked?
 - Detailed follow-ups: Do you know where they took you? How long was the drive? What happened during the transport?

Detention

- Do you know where they took you?
- Broad Question: What happened there? What did you see or hear?
 - Detailed follow-ups: Who did you interact with? Describe the interaction. Were you in a cell or room? Describe it. Were you able to contact family, friends or a lawyer? Where you ever transferred to a different location? If so, provide details. How long were you detained at that location?

Interrogation(s)

- Broad Question: Describe what happened.
 - Detailed follow-ups: Where were you interrogated? When was it (time of day and how many days or hours after arrest)?
 - Detailed follow-ups: Were you alone? Was there a lawyer present? Who interrogated you? (If blindfolded) how do you know these things?
- Broad Question: Describe what they said to you first. What questions did they ask during interrogation?
 - Detailed follow-ups: Did you respond? If so, how? What information did they want? Did the interrogator say anything to you about why you were detained? Did they accuse you of anything? What did they already know about you? Did they ask you about other people or organizations?

- Broad Question: How did they treat you?
 - Detailed follow-ups: Were you standing or sitting? Blindfolded or shackled?
 - Detailed follow-ups: Was there any physical interaction? (If there was torture or abuse ask them to describe it.) What kind of physical abuse? What body parts were abused? Did the abuser use any objects? (If there were injuries ask about medical care in prison and long-term effects.) Was there any sexual interaction? (If they were verbally abusive) What exactly did they say? How did these things affect you?
- NOTE: Any physical, sexual, or verbal torture, abuse or cruel treatment, during any phase of arrest or detention should be asked about in detail.
 - Detailed follow-ups: How long was the interrogation? Did you have breaks? How did the interrogation(s) end?
 - Detailed follow-ups: Were there other interrogations? How often? Please describe them.
 - Detailed follow-ups: At any time during or in between interrogations did you have access to a lawyer? When? Where? What did they do or say?

Trial

- Broad Question: Was a case ever brought against you? If yes, describe what happened in relation to this case.
 - Detailed follow-ups: When was the first time you were informed of your charges? How long into your detention? Who informed you? Were you ever formally charged in a court by a judge? If so, when and what happened?
 - Detailed follow-ups: Did you have a lawyer or legal representative with you before or during this court session? What did they do or say? Did you understand the charges? Did you see the written indictment? Were you indicted with others? Who?
- Broad Question: Describe the trial.
 - Detailed follow-ups: Was it for these same charges? When was it? Where was it, what court? Who was present? Do you remember the name of the judge or prosecutor?
 - Detailed follow-ups: Did you have a lawyer? Did they have access to your case file? Could they enter the courtroom?
 - Detailed follow-ups: What was said during the trial by the prosecutor? By your lawyer or yourself? Or by the judge?
 - Detailed follow-ups: What was the evidence presented against you? Could you present a defense? What were you or your lawyer's arguments? What evidence did you present?

- Detailed follow-ups: How long did the trial last? What was the outcome of the trial? Were you sentenced? Could you appeal? Describe the appeal process and what happened?

Imprisonment

- Broad Question: Describe circumstances of your imprisonment.
 - Detailed follow-ups: Where were you imprisoned? How long were you imprisoned?
- Broad Question: Describe your treatment.
 - Detailed follow-ups: Were you in a room or cell? Were you alone or with others? Describe the food, water and access to medical services? Did you have fresh air? How often? Did you have access to visitors? How often?