AOHT Sustainable Tourism

Lesson 11

A Consumer-Driven Market

Student Resources

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Student Resource 11.1

Interviews: Community Opinions

Student Names:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

The Interview

Your project group needs to talk to local community members and businesspeople about your project business. This will give you an opportunity to find out what people in the local community need and want from a business like the one you are proposing. As a group, you will create a list of questions to ask.

Each member of your group is responsible for interviewing one or two people. You will bring the results of those interviews back in the next lesson and you will use that information as you put together your final presentation about your project business.

Who Will We Interview?

Each of you will need to contact three or four people to request an interview; you will conduct an interview with one or two of those people. You could ask family members, neighbors, teachers or staff at school, people who work at local businesses, advisory board members, or hospitality professionals you have met during your AOHT courses or internships.

Obviously, if you interview a family member, you might ask different questions than if you interview the head chef of a local restaurant. But no matter who you interview, your goal is the same: to find out what the person might want or expect from the type of business you are proposing.

The Process

1. Learn about how to ask good interview questions (see Step One below).
2. Write down as many potential questions as you can think of.
3. Determine which of these questions you want to ask.
4. Decide on who you will ask for interviews.
5. Write a business email to ask for the interviews.
6. Conduct the interviews.
7. Discuss the results with your group.

Step One: Learn how to ask good questions

You already know some of the topics that you are responsible for covering in the interview. But you need to think about how to ask effective questions on those topics—how to ask the right questions to get the information you need. Below are some of the types of questions you can use to get the maximum amount of information from your interviewee.

Use Different Types of Questions

There are many different types of questions you can ask during an interview. Think about how each of these types might be helpful for you to learn as much as possible.

**Permission Questions** are used to make sure your interview subject is comfortable with what you are doing/asking. Examples:

* Is it okay if we record this interview?
* Are you comfortable talking to us about your company’s sustainability policies?

**Factual Questions** help you obtain objective (factual) data about the interviewee. These are easy questions to answer and can be a good way to start the interview or introduce a new topic. Examples:

* How long have you worked at this company?
* What is your job title?
* How long has the company been in business?
* How many employees do you have?

**Follow-Up Questions** are a great way to keep the interviewee talking. These allow you to follow up on something the interviewee just said. Examples:

* And then what happened?
* What did you do next?
* Tell me more about…
* Can you be more specific?

**“Tell Me About…” Questions** give you an opportunity to let the interviewee talk in more detail about a specific topic. These can be valuable because they may give you information that you didn’t think to ask about, or provide an insider’s view of how the person makes decisions. Examples:

* Tell me about how you decide to shop at a new store or patronize a new business.
* Describe what your priorities are in terms of green behavior or choices.
* Tell me what you think about local companies’ environmental policies.

**Feelings Questions** allow you to get a personal perspective on the person’s behavior and decisions. These can be particularly helpful as follow-up questions. Examples:

* How did you feel when…
* What do you like best (least) about…

**“Magic Wand” Questions** encourage the interview to speculate or dream. These can be a great way to get really interesting or surprising ideas. Examples:

* If you could change anything about local businesses’ sustainability policies, what would it be?
* What is your ideal green business like?

**Confirmation Questions** allow you to make sure that you really understood the interviewee’s answer. These can be used throughout the interview, but are especially valuable when you’re asking about a really important topic or when you’re finishing up the interview. Examples:

* If I understand you correctly, you are saying…
* Is this what you mean?
* Would it be fair to say that you think…

Tips

* Ask more open-ended questions—that is, questions that encourage the interviewee to explain and elaborate. Try not to ask too many closed-ended questions, which only require “yes” or “no” for an answer. Questions that begin with “how,” “why,” or “tell me about…” are good open-ended questions.
* Questions should be simple. It’s better to ask several simple questions than one long complicated question. In other words, don’t ask, “Do you think local restaurants are sustainable and if so, how do you know, and if not, what are the top five things you think need to be changed?” That’s really one question and two follow-ups all combined. Ask simple questions so that you and your interviewee won’t get confused.
* Questions should be as neutral as possible. Try not to slip your opinion of the topic into the question. For example, if you are interviewing someone who works at a restaurant that is part of a national chain, you might ask, “Is your customer service policy the same in every restaurant in the chain, or do you develop your own?” instead of, “Does it bother you to have to follow orders from company headquarters all the time and not set your own environmental policies?” The second question is not neutral—it reveals a negative attitude toward that chain of restaurants or to chains in general—and might upset your interviewee. If you want to ask about a potentially controversial topic—for example, if a company has a bad reputation for how it treats its employees—think carefully about how to ask it and be prepared to skip onto another topic if your interviewee doesn’t want to discuss it.
* Avoid using “absolute” words like *all, always, none,* or *never*. Questions that use these words are frequently unfair or biased. For example, if you are interviewing someone who says their company recycles and composts everything at their business, you might ask, “So it’s true that reducing waste is important to your company?” rather than “So your company never throws anything out in the trash? It’s always recycled or composted?” The second question could sound as if you don’t believe the interviewee.

Step Two: Write down potential questions

Now that you’ve learned about all the different types of questions, it’s time to write down as many different questions as you can think of. As a starting point, try to write one question of each type, using the prompts below. You can skip follow-up and confirmation questions for right now, because those would be based on what your interviewee actually says.

Permission Question:

Factual Question:

“Tell Me About…” Question:

Feelings Question:

“Magic Wand” Question:

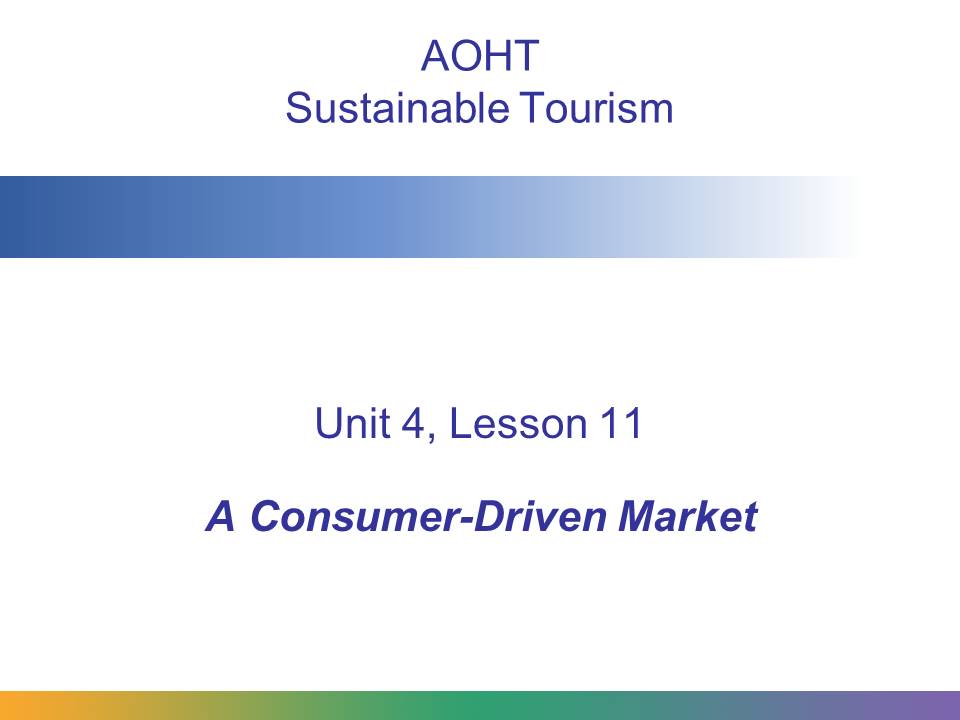
Now, write down five more questions you think might be good to ask as a part of your project. These questions can be any type.

Share

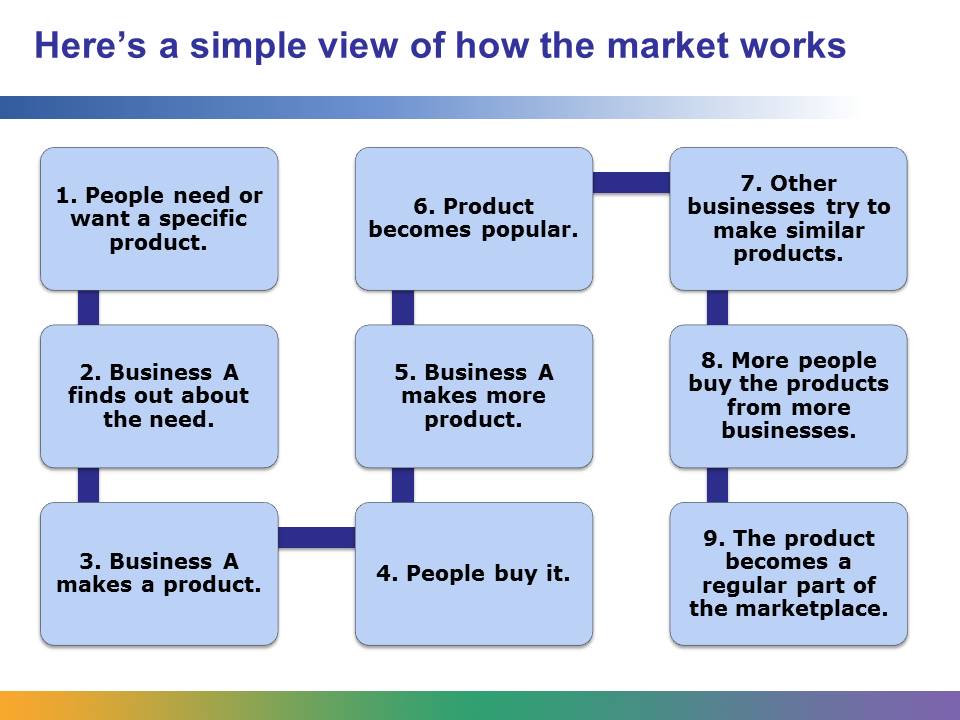
Now share your 10 questions with the rest of your project group. Write down your group mates’ questions in the space provided below so you all have a good list of questions to start working with.

Student Resource 11.2

Reading: A Consumer-Driven Market



There is no doubt that we are starting to think about how the choices we make today might affect future generations. As we learn about the ways human activity has affected the planet and as we witness the effects of global climate change, this awareness is also starting to carry over into the marketplace. Today we are going to look at how consumers impact the market for sustainable products, not just in the hospitality industry, but in every industry.



Let’s start by looking at an example of how consumers can affect the market for a product.

In 1989, a woman named Annie noticed that there weren’t a lot of fast, pre-packaged meals that didn’t contain food coloring and artificial flavors. She created a business called Annie’s Homegrown. She sold all-natural macaroni and cheese make-at-home meals to local supermarkets.

Annie’s macaroni and cheese became popular. Her purple boxes with the bunny logo became familiar. The company expanded into making other natural food products for families, and they began selling their products nationwide. Today, Annie’s Homegrown has over 125 products and sells in over 25,000 stores.

If you go into a grocery store today, you may find several different all-natural options for quick and easy family meals. Even large companies like Kraft now offer more natural options—like an organic macaroni and cheese. These products are a regular part of the marketplace because there was a demand for it—a demand that Annie first recognized more than 20 years ago.

Consumers have a lot of power to impact the marketplace. 70% of the gross domestic product of the United States comes from consumer spending.



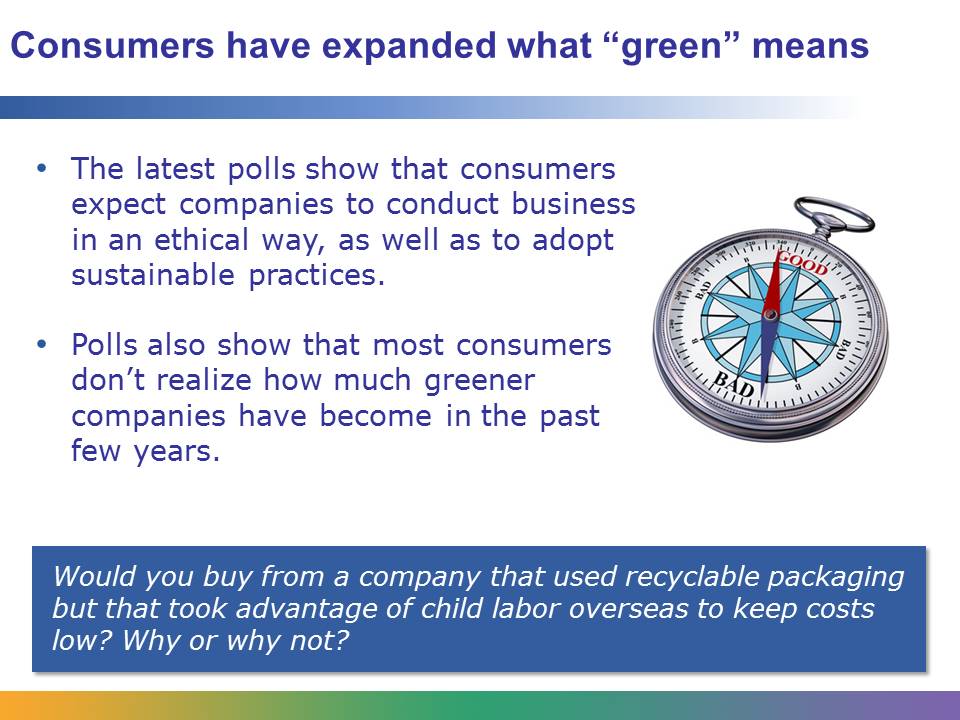
Green, “eco,” and organic products are becoming more mainstream. As you have learned with the tourism industry, nearly every large corporation now advertises its sustainability initiatives.

Companies make their products and practices more sustainable in many ways, and they can save on costs this way too. Packaging is a good example. Most every product could use less packaging, and companies should make sure that the packaging they do use is biodegradable.

Businesses also modify the way they produce their goods. Three fundamental changes include: minimizing emissions, minimizing the use of nonrenewable resources, and designing products to be biodegradable or recyclable whenever possible.

You have already learned about some of the ways hospitality and tourism (HT) businesses can be green, including offering organic meals, using energy and water efficiently, reducing waste, and choosing green building and landscaping methods.

Since more consumers are aware of these methods, companies can use their green practices to attract new business.



When the economy got bad a few years ago, some consumers started buying fewer green products. But that doesn’t mean they lowered their standards. Today, most consumers have high expectations for businesses. They don’t just want businesses to operate in a greener way, or to produce green products that can compete with the prices of conventional products and do at least as good a job. Now they want companies to operate in an ethical way—to engage in corporate social responsibility. Also, people are thinking beyond just environmental sustainability. They are considering if companies behave in a socially and economically sustainable way, too.

According to one large study, 75% of Americans give companies a C, D, or F on how well they are addressing social and environmental issues. And yet, they aren’t actually aware of the changes that have been taking place in this regard. For a change, many companies are making great strides in their corporate social responsibility practices, but they haven’t figured out how to market these changes effectively to consumers.



Now that companies know consumers want green products, green marketing claims are popping up all over the place. But what counts as a green product? There is no universal definition, and because green products are becoming so popular, some businesses advertise themselves as sustainable or eco-friendly when they really aren’t.

Using the term without backing it up is called greenwashing. Have you ever noticed a product label, like shampoo, that claims to be “all natural,” but when you check out the list of ingredients it includes a whole bunch of chemicals you can’t even pronounce? Greenwashing is wrong because it deceives customers into making a purchase based on false or exaggerated concern for the environment.



One environmental marketing firm created a list of the “Six Sins of Greenwashing.” These include:

1. The Hidden Trade-Off: When companies focus on one environmentally friendly part of their business, but the other parts aren’t green at all.
2. No Proof: Companies should always be able to provide proof such as test results or certification of standards on their websites or ads.
3. Vague Claims: When companies don’t elaborate on their claims; they only use vague terms such as *earth-friendly* or *all natural*.
4. Irrelevant: When companies use information that doesn’t apply to their product to claim greenness; there’s no such thing as a free-range potato!
5. Lies: When companies flat-out lie about the green qualities of their products or services.
6. Lesser of Two Evils: These are products that have a questionable environmental benefit, such as organic cigarettes or an environmentally friendly golf course.

That doesn’t mean everything labeled “all natural” or “earth-friendly” is bad. But you need to look closely at the packaging and the ingredients to see if that label is really true or not.



The term *greenwashing* was first used in the HT industry. A New York environmentalist noted that many hotels displayed signs encouraging guests to save the environment by reusing towels and not wasting water; but the hotels didn’t even have basic recycling programs in place. Now the term *greenwashing* is used to describe exaggerated or false green advertising throughout the marketing world.

Some golf courses have engaged in greenwashing. And golfers themselves believe that golf is an “environmentally friendly sport,” according to a 2007 *Golf Digest* study! Of the more than 16,000 golf courses in the United States, some are located in the desert. On average, one desert golf course in one day uses as much water as a family of four will use in four years. Golfing’s use of pesticides, chemical fertilizers, and poor turf management have all received scrutiny and criticism in recent years. Accordingly, more and more golf courses are adapting policies that will not only be beneficial to the environment but save them money and bring in more customers too. The power of the consumer is very much at work to profoundly change the way golf courses do business.



It’s not just some golf courses and hotels that engage in greenwashing. Other companies are also exploiting the public’s interest in sustainable tourism. They greenwash their services or products to attract more customers and increase their profits. “Already the word ‘eco’ has lost all power and meaning,” says Guyonne James, senior projects manager at Tourism Concern, a British charity that campaigns against greenwashing and unethical tourism. “In Brazil, if a bed-and-breakfast has a back garden, they’ll call it an eco-lodge.”

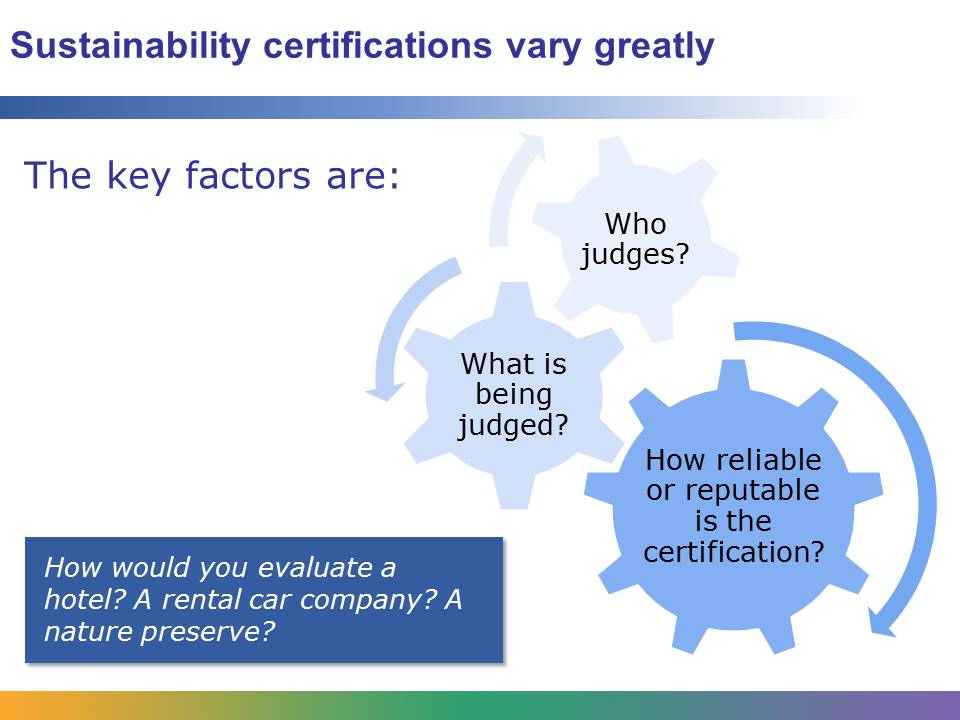
According to a recent TripAdvisor survey, many consumers are indeed skeptical of green marketing claims: 72% of travelers polled said they think that hotels are more interested in marketing themselves as environmentally friendly than actually being green.



So, how do you know if an HT business is really committed to going green or is just greenwashing? It can be hard to tell unless you do a lot of research; however, there are a few factors that help distinguish between the two. For instance, it is questionable for a business to label itself “green” just because it asks guests to reuse towels or only serves water upon request. These are good first steps but require no change on the part of the hotel or restaurant.

The American Hotel and Lodging Association (AH&LA) has created “11 Minimum Guidelines for Going Green,” which is a list of actions that properties of any size can take to live up to the claim of being green. In addition to the steps shown in this slide, they are: forming an environmental committee to develop an environmental plan, installing digital thermostats, implementing a recycling program and a separate recycling program for hazardous materials, purchasing Energy Star appliances, and using recycled paper products.

In addition, a number of hotel chains, such as Kimpton (a boutique hotel chain in the United States), Marriott, Hilton, and Intercontinental, have established their own criteria for green practices. Companies can also be certified for their sustainability efforts.



Sustainability certification programs have been growing over the last 10–15 years, but they are still not widely known in the United States.

Ideally, a sustainability certification program will evaluate the “Triple Bottom Line”—the environmental, social, and economic impact of a business. But that’s really hard to do. How do you evaluate the social impact of a nature preserve that’s far away from people? Does a rental car company get credit for having a fleet of hybrid cars, or do they need to make other efforts, too?

Many certification programs focus on a specific area, such as environmental sustainability, or on a specific type of business or attraction. The Blue Flag Program, for example, offers sustainability certification for beaches, marinas, and boat attractions like whale watching.

Since these certification programs are still pretty new, it’s important to find one that is credible. A credible certification process would involve independent assessment by someone not associated with the business and a scaled rating system. Think about it like getting grades in school. You wouldn’t want to take all your classes as pass or fail; it can be helpful to know if your work is “B” work or “C” work or “D” work. And if you graded your own work—or your parents or friends graded your work—it would be hard for an outside observer (like a college admissions officer) to know if you really earned that “A.” As consumers, we want to know if businesses really earned their certification!



Any successful business needs to communicate with its customers. A business that claims to be sustainable or green has an even bigger responsibility to communicate effectively.

A truly green business needs to share enough information about its practices that consumers feel confident the business is really green and not greenwashing. That means talking about what makes your business sustainable—is it your products? How you do business? Your hybrid cars? Organic foods? Composting and energy efficiency? What makes your business green? Have you earned certification? For what?

The business also needs to listen to consumers. Of course, any business needs to listen to customers to be successful. But sustainable businesses have another reason to listen. Consumers are often the first ones to identify new ways for a company to be responsible. By talking to potential customers, a green business can identify new steps they can take and new ways they can make a difference. That’s good for business and for the planet!



We’ve already looked at how what people buy can influence the marketplace. But that’s not the only way potential consumers have an impact. Consumers can make their voices heard in a variety of ways, and all these different ways work together to affect the marketplace.

Sharing opinions and information about companies, especially over social media, is becoming a significant source of power for potential consumers. You can “like” a brand on Facebook. People discuss brands on Twitter and post photos of what they buy on Instagram or Pinterest. Environmentally conscious consumers can use social media to encourage friends and family to support (or avoid) specific companies. Companies are still figuring out how to use social media to promote themselves, but they are very aware of the potential negative impact if people start saying bad things about them on Facebook or Twitter.

People can also speak out in other ways—by voting for green policies or candidates, by signing petitions, and so forth. When a city passes an ordinance requiring supermarkets to charge people for using plastic bags or banning Styrofoam takeout containers, that also affects the marketplace.

Student Resource 11.3

Organizer: Interview Decision Making

Student Names: Date:

Directions: Use this resource to help you figure out who you are going to contact for interviews and what questions you want to ask.

Deciding Who to Ask for Interviews

As a group, your goal should be to obtain information from a wide range of potential customers. That means that you need to think about how many different types of people you can contact for interviews. You want people of different ages, different education levels, different income levels, or different jobs. Remember that each of you needs to ask three or four people for interviews. You will need to send an email requesting an interview to at least one of your potential interviewees.

Use the chart below to determine which three or four people each of you can contact to request an interview. Make notes about each person so you can feel confident you are getting a wide range of perspectives from your interviewees. Some examples are provided.

| Student Name | Potential Interviewee | Description | Relationship |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Example: Luis | Ms. Pangilinan | General Manager, Tres Hombres restaurant | Luis works for her |
| Example: Chandra | Thomas Soun | Grounds crew, City Golf Course | Chandra’s uncle |
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Deciding What Questions to Ask

You aren’t going to ask every person the exact same set of questions. That wouldn’t make sense! But as a group, you should decide on a basic set of questions that you always want to ask. These should be the key questions that are going to have the biggest impact on your project business. Here are a few possibilities to get you started.

* Would you be inclined to eat at a restaurant that only served local and organic food? Why or why not?
* How do you decide which hotel to use when you travel?
* Do you use a smartphone? If so, would you be interested in an app that provides this type of information? If not, do you plan to get a smartphone in the near future?

Now, as a group, decide on the questions that you want to ask every one of your interviewees. You should have about five questions that you will ask everybody. Remember, you want to ask follow-up questions based on what your interviewee says during the interview, too! Write down the questions you are definitely going to ask in the space below.

Our Questions to Ask Everyone

Questions that are Specifically for My Interviewees

There might be some questions that are perfect for one or more of your interviewees, but less appropriate for other people’s interviewees. For example, it is sensible to ask questions about how a restaurant conducts its business from the restaurant owner or an employee, but it wouldn't make sense to ask these questions of someone who does not work for a restaurant. Use the space below to write down questions you would definitely like to ask one or more of your interviewees. Make sure to write down to which person you would ask that question, too.

Student Resource 11.4

Assignment: Business Email

**To: “Students in AOHT Sustainable Tourism” <SustainableTourism@naf.org>**

**From: Your Teacher <Teacher@school.edu>**

**Date: TODAY’S DATE**

**Subject: How to Request an Interview**

Dear Students,

In this lesson, you are responsible for contacting three or four different people to request an interview. The interview should focus on your project business. Your goal is to learn what this member of the community thinks about your business idea. You also want to find out what information they need in order to decide if they’d support your business.

Since this is a part of your business project, your email should be businesslike in format and tone, even if you are contacting someone you know very well. You need to explain the purpose of the interview and why you wish to interview this particular person. You should give the person a timeframe during which you would like to conduct the interview (for example, within the next week).

Make sure to explain any logistics of the interview as well. For example, how would you like to conduct the interview—in person? Over the phone? How long do you think the interview will last? Conclude the email by thanking the person and by clearly stating what the next steps will be. For example, will you call to follow up? Will you wait for a response to your email?

Once you have written a draft of the email, submit it to your teacher for feedback before you send it to your potential interviewees.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this assignment.

Sincerely,

Your Teacher

Student Resource 11.5

Reading: How to Interview

Asking Questions in a Logical Sequence

1. Begin with asking a few factual questions. Then move on to more controversial or complicated topics. With this approach, your interviewee will warm up to you and the interview style.
2. Intersperse the remaining factual questions throughout the interview to avoid many factual questions in a row, which could become boring.
3. Ask one question at a time.
4. Try to ask questions in order. For example, don’t ask about something that happened last year, and then ask them to predict what the company will look like 10 years in the future, and then ask about something that happened last week.
5. It’s a good idea to conclude with a final question that allows the interviewee to provide any other information he or she wants to add. For example, “Is there anything else you think we should know?” or “Is there anything you wish I had asked?”

General Interviewing Dos and Don’ts

* DO explain the purpose of the interview and how the information will be used.
* DO indicate how long the interview should take.
* DO come to the interview prepared. Make sure that you have completed your research and bring something to record your notes with—pencil and paper, tablet, or laptop.
* DO record the interview (if possible). Make sure to ask the interviewee’s permission. Having a recording will allow you to refresh your memory of what the person said as you continue working on your project. If you can record the interview, the note taker needs to transcribe the important answers from the recording for your group. Whether or not you record the interview, the note taker needs to capture the answers as completely and accurately as possible.
* DO dress in business or business casual clothing.
* If you want to use a laptop, tablet, or smartphone to take notes, DO explain to the person you’re interviewing that you will be typing notes during the meeting. You don’t want the person to think you’re playing Angry Birds or checking email!
* DON’T pester or push the person you are interviewing. If he or she does not want to talk about an issue, respect that desire.
* DON’T stick to your questions rigidly. If an interesting subject comes up that relates to your research, feel free to ask additional questions about it.
* DON’T allow the person you are interviewing to continually get off topic. If the conversation drifts, ask follow-up questions to redirect the conversation to the subject at hand.
* DO tell your interviewee how to get in touch with you later if he or she wants to.
* DO follow up with a thank-you letter, email, or phone call, as well as an interview summary if requested.