



International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art

## GUIDE TO GOOD PRACTICE: ARTISTS' INTERVIEWS

## **Table of content**

Introduction	.....	1
1. Letter	.....	3
2. Questionnaire	.....	4
3. Phone call	.....	5
4. Working together with the artist	.....	6
5. Face to face conversation	.....	7
6. Brief or limited interview	.....	8
7. Extended interview	.....	10
8. The interview under great pressure	.....	12
9. Other ways of interaction with the artist	.....	13

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## Introduction

The INCCA project aims to promote the conservation of modern and contemporary art by means of exchanging knowledge and information between professionals concerned with maintaining and exhibiting collections. As well as making existing information accessible, INCCA partners collect new information by interviewing artists.

The value of this primary source material is immense, addressing issues such as materials and techniques used, working processes, meaning of the art work, the artist's view on aging and deterioration, conservation and presentation. Conservators and curators – art historians and interpreters – consider this information provided not only by the artist, but also by assistants, constructors and gallerists, as increasingly important in preserving modern and contemporary works of art.

INCCA partners developed 'The Guide to Good Practice - Artists' Interviews'. Eleven international institutions are involved in this European Union project, which is funded by the Raphael Programme 1999 and organised by the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage and Tate. In the course of 1999-2002 INCCA partners will establish a network for exchanging information and sharing their knowledge and experience in the field of artists' interviews.

The web address of INCCA is: [www.incca.org](http://www.incca.org)

In INCCA's first year conservators and curators conducted about fifty interviews. The evaluation of these interviews lead to the compilation of a 'Guide to Good Practice', which suggests and recommends different approaches to artists' interviews. It does not prescribe how information should be gathered, but suggests which issues should be covered depending on the artist, their works and their use.

We will develop the guide as we continue to interview artists, etc; the process will continue indefinitely. Your experiences will provide new insights and will contribute to improvements. Please contact us to share your knowledge.

### Structure of the Guide

'The Guide to Good Practice – Artists' Interviews' has a simple structure incorporating nine different types of communication:

- 1) Letter
- 2) Questionnaire
- 3) Phone Call
- 4) Working together with the artist
- 5) Face to face conversation
- 6) Brief or limited interview
- 7) Extended interview
- 8) The interview under great pressure
- 9) Other ways of interaction

Each section is organised in the same way, outlining the purpose of the method of communication, features, preparation, output (documentation of the information), tips (practical) and tips concerning content.

In this Guide the artist is mentioned as interviewee, however the guidelines also apply to interviews with assistants and others involved with the artist's oeuvre.

### General recommendations

INCCA partners suggest the following points for consideration as an introduction to the Guide:

- The relationship between interviewer and artist should always be oriented towards a non-authoritative dialogue.
- It is the intention that with each approach to the artist a working relationship will be established. Sometimes being a friend of the artist is advantageous, but too close a relationship might result in implicit ways of communication not necessarily understood by others.
- The difference between one-way communication (as in a letter or written questionnaire) and interactive communication (as in an interview or other ways of collaboration) will influence the

quality of information gathered. It is suggested therefore that the interviewer considers the detail of information required before selecting the method of communication.

- Direct communication with the artist (especially in the interview) requires the interviewer's acquaintance with the artist's work; accurate preparation is a safeguard for the quality of the information obtained.
- The choice for an interviewer will be determined by various factors, but the positive value of interdisciplinary collaboration (e.g. between conservator and curator) should not be underestimated.
- Interview skills are important, however acquaintance with the artist's work and professional knowledge are in most cases decisive for the quality of the information obtained.
- If available, training in interview techniques would be advisable for the professional before conducting a series of interviews.
- It is strongly advised that all communication documents are annotated with the date, persons' involved and location.
- INCCA partners are developing Art Archives, which are accessible by means of a meta-database. Descriptions of documents, such as documents resulting from communication with the artist, will be stored in this database in the format of the CIMI Dublin Core standard. To acquaint yourself with Dublin Core standards, you can access their web site at [www.cimi.org/publications.html](http://www.cimi.org/publications.html), or contact INCCA.

### **Recommended literature**

- C. Weyer & G. Heydenreich, *Documentation and registration of artists' materials and techniques*, Modern Art: Who Cares?, Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art/Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage, 1999, pp. 385-90.
- C. Macusi-Ungaro, *Original intent: the artist's voice*, Modern Art: Who Cares?, Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art/Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage, 1999, pp. 392-93.
- Shelley Sturman, *Necessary dialogue: the artist as partner in conservation*, Modern Art: Who Cares?, Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art/Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage, 1999, pp. 393-96.
- E. Ganzert-Castrillo (Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt), *Archiv für Technik und Arbeitsmaterialien zeitgenössischer Künstler*, Ferdinand Enke Verlag, Stuttgart 1979, 1996.
- Joyce Hill Stoner, 'Ascertaining the artist's intent through discussion, documentation and careful observation', *The International Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship*, 1985 (4), pp. 87-92.
- W. Stebler, 'Technische Auskünfte vor Künstlern. Fragen zur Praktikabilität und Brauchbarkeit von Künstlerinterviews durch Restauratoren und Kunsttechnologien in bezug auf die Probleme der Material Erhaltung in der Zeitgenössischen Kunst', *Maltechnik-Restaur*, 1985 (1), pp. 19-35.
- M. Haller, *Das Interview. Ein Handbuch für Journalisten*, Ölschläger, München 1991
- ICN, Scenario for Artists' Interviews, [www.incca.org](http://www.incca.org) → Methodology/Artists intent/Scenario for artists' interviews

## **1. Letter**

### **purpose**

- introduction, clarification of specific points, confirmation of entire content

### **features**

- one or a few specific questions
- written communication
- relatively short time investment for author of the letter and artist
- preparation: formulation of the problem
- output: letter and, if possible: annotations by author of the letter

### **tips**

- formulate accurate and short questions
- explain the reason for the communication
- state a date for an expected answer
- if the artist is known as a very busy person, a telephone call might be a better idea (although a letter has more documental value)

### **tips concerning content**

- a letter suits well-defined questions in the hope for informative answers
- in the introduction the author may want to explain and apologise in case of damage
- process or meaning related questions make high demands on the artist when he/she is expected to answer them in a letter; oral communication seems to be a better alternative (such as face to face conversation or interview)

## **2. Questionnaire**

### **purpose**

- to ask highly specific questions about particular artistic approaches and types of objects

### **features**

- a list of well-defined questions
- written or oral, or a combination of both
- substantial time investment for the artist; moderate time investment for the interviewer (in case of a written and standardized questionnaire); substantial time investment for the interviewer (if oral and not standardized)
- reason: acquisition, conservation management, research
- preparation: in case of a written and standardized questionnaire: none; if oral: acquaintance with the works of the artists
- output: filled-in questionnaire and if possible: annotation by the interviewer

### **tips**

- in case of sending a questionnaire to the artist an introduction letter is indispensable (motivating the artist to send it back)
- in most cases a better option is to visit the artist personally (guaranteeing a filled-in questionnaire and possibly extra information)
- preparatory search for existing questionnaires is recommended as they might comply with your aims; the INCCA website provides questionnaires developed by partners
- when developing a new questionnaire a well-thought out structure and a clear formulation of the questions need extra attention
- it is impossible to conceive of a questionnaire that can elicit useful responses for all artists' approaches and all types of work – one cannot expect the outcome to be definitive
- make questionnaires as rigorous as possible, minimising 'any other information' boxes

### **tips concerning content**

- material/technical and conservation aspects lend themselves to a written questionnaire
- process or meaning related questions make high demands on the artist when he/she is expected to answer them in a questionnaire; oral communication seems to be a better alternative when deeper layers of information are involved as they allow for the complexity of the answers provided by the artist

### 3. Phone call<sup>1</sup>

#### purpose

- specific, immediate clarifications; timely immediate response
- a phone call gives the opportunity to communicate on all sorts of issues as it is a direct and interactive form of communication

#### features

- one or few specific questions
- oral
- short time investment for interviewer and artist
- reason: urgent problem, e.g. with conservation or installation
- preparation: accurate wording of the problem
- output: notes by the interviewer and, if possible: annotations by the artist

#### tips

- the artist may experience a phone call as an invasion of his/her privacy; to prevent a rejection to co-operate it might help to mention this in the introduction
- clarify the reason/motivation for your call
- ask accurate and short questions
- put the most important question first to be sure not to miss it (the artist might allow you only a few minutes)
- it is recommended to take notes during or shortly after the phone call
- consider sending these notes to the artist for corrections and comments
- if, for any reason, no notes are taken, do register a few things: who made the phone call, when was it and on which subjects (this will enable others to consult you instead of the artist in the future)

#### tips concerning content

- in case of damage of one of the artist's works explain the origin of the problem and apologize to the artist
- there seems to be no problem with asking process or meaning related questions during a phone-call, although face-to-face conversation or interview - especially when in front of the art work(s) - seems to provide more of an opportunity for the artist to speak freely about these matters

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<sup>1</sup> If a phone call is expanding towards an interview (accidentally or on purpose) guidelines as listed under Brief or Extended Interview may also be applicable

## **4. Working together with the artist**

### **purpose**

- observing the artist working and during installations

### **features**

- improvised and coincidental questions
- short time investment for artist and considerable time investment for the interviewer (depending on the purpose)
- preparation: acquaintance with the work of the artist
- output: report by the interviewer and if possible: annotations by the artist, and/or video tape, photographs, installation plans

### **tips**

- the artist might feel reluctant to answer complex questions during his/her working process
- if you cannot proceed with your questioning as far as you think is necessary, ask for an interview at a later date
- the most objective and informative registration is on videotape
- the artist's permission must be sought beforehand if audio/video registration is desired

### **tips concerning content**

- try to collect the relevant information concerning working processes, materials and techniques, etc. without disturbing the artist



## 5. Face to face conversation<sup>2</sup>

### purpose

- specific clarifications

### features

- few specific questions
- moderate time investment for interviewer and artist
- reason: e.g. the artist visits the museum or institution; specific interest in the techniques and materials used by the artist (in relation to meaning); specific interest in installation/presentation of the work
- preparation: foreknowledge about the works of the artist
- output: if specific information is given: report, if possible: photograph(s) of the works

### tips

- do not open the conversation as soon as you see the artist, but try to gain a little time for a minimum preparation and look for a quiet place for the conversation
- preferably the conversation takes place in the presence of the artwork(s)
- introduce the reason for the conversation and mention explicitly the subject(s) you want to discuss
- if the conversation is a preparatory step for further contact, don't hesitate to state a date for a future interview or a phone call

### tips concerning content

- in case of damage give an explanation of the origin of the problem and apologise to the artist
- a face to face conversation is an excellent occasion for putting process or meaning related questions

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<sup>2</sup> Sometimes this type of communication may happen during an unexpected meeting with the artist

## 6. Brief or limited<sup>3</sup> interview

### purpose

- to ask focused questions related to a particular art work(s), or ways of making

### features

- a few questions
- yes/no questions and/or open questions
- structured questions or free conversation based on a checklist
- considerable time investment for interviewer and artist
- reason: problem with e.g. conservation or installation, acquisition, conservation management
- preparation: foreknowledge about the works of art, photo documentation, conservation documents, checklist or questions for the interview and, if applicable, accurate wording of the problem
- output: audio/video tape, transcript, report by the interviewer and if possible: annotations by the artist, edited version of the interview, photograph(s) of the works
- depending on the form of registration the information can be made accessible by:
  - a written report
  - audio or video mastertape (plus copies)
  - a transcription of the audiotape or videotape (time consuming!)
  - extended abstract of the interview (time consuming!)
  - keywords and short abstract
  - several procedures may raise the quality of the information collected:
    - check doubtful information provided by the artist (like brand names, dates, etc)
    - invite the artist to comment on the videotape or transcription giving him/her the opportunity to adjust incorrect information (this should be annotated in the report or other form of registration)
  - an edited version of the mastertape and/or transcription offers a surplus value to the information, such as brand names, art historical information, interpretation of non verbal expressions of the artist, etc.
  - an edited version or transcription should be approved by the artist (it might even be signed by the artist) and recognised as an authorised source document
- for security reasons make copies of the mastertape
- most artists will appreciate receiving a copy of the tape or transcription
- preparation and reworking of the interview demands good time management

### tips

- in most cases two interviewers are recommended
- depending on the information required, the interviewer(s) should attempt to represent the following professionals: conservator/restorer, curator/art historian/interpreter, technician/art handler
- if the interviewer is not familiar with the artist's work ensure that he/she has sufficient time to prepare the interview, and support this preparation
- when requesting an interview with the artist, often the person in close professional contact with the artist is more likely to get a positive response; this is not necessarily the interviewer him/herself
- inform the artist beforehand about the purpose and content of the conversation, preferably by means of a letter
- decide where the interview should take place; ideally in the presence of the art works in question, either at the artist's studio, or the museum or conservation studio - if this is not possible photographic documentation can be a workable substitute

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<sup>3</sup> Limited in terms of preparation (time) which will determine the level of questioning

- decide whether you will just take notes or record the interview (depending on the artist's agreement preferably audio or video recording)
- decide whether it will be recorded on audiotape or videotape; audio registration is less of an intrusion for the artist and easier for the interviewer to handle, but transcribing the audio tape is time consuming; videotape is advantageous for the visual information, but an extra person has to be in charge of the registration (it is a good option to combine both for reasons of failing equipment)
- test the sound quality of the equipment beforehand
- for video registration: decide beforehand whether you prefer to use a fixed camera position or a moving camera
- for audio or video registration ask the artist for permission before the interview takes place
- do not expect a brief interview to be longer than one hour

### **tips concerning content**

- choose a well-considered range of subjects and formulate the questions [see further: Extended interview]

## 7. Extended interview<sup>4</sup>

### purpose

- to ask general, exploratory questions as well as focused ones related to a particular art work(s), or ways of making; opportunity to explore artists' oeuvre

### features

- many questions
- largely open questions, but closed questions too
- structured questions and/or free conversation based on a checklist
- large time investment for interviewer and artist
- reason: acquisition, conservation management, problem e.g. with conservation or installation, research, backlogs in information
- preparation: extensive foreknowledge about the works of art, literature search, archival research, photo documentation
- output: audio/video tape, transcript, report by the interviewer and if possible: annotations by the artist, edited version of the interview, photographs of the art works

### tips

- tips listed under brief interview are also applicable to the extended interview (see Brief or limited interview)
- it is recommended that a conservator and a curator/art historian work closely together preparing for the interview; if the museum practice is so organised that a curator conducts the interviews most of the time, the input of the conservator should be made clear to this person before the interview; in some cases it might be of interest to work with an external art historian, as there may be occasion when the close contact between curator and artist distracts from the conservation/restoration aspects
- preparations for an extended interview are time consuming, but assistance by registrars, students (for instance on literature or archival research) is considered a good alternative
- the duration of an extended interview should not exceed 2-3 hours (after two hours most interviewees lose concentration)
- consider the option of more than one interview or even a series of interviews; for instance by differentiating between an extended interview and one or more brief interviews (beforehand); or for reasons of lack of time (as might occur during the interview); ask the artist for a follow-up interview on the spot; if possible state a date

### tips concerning content

- a fixed list of questions may hinder a dialogue with the artist, but a well-considered structure for the interview definitely helps in obtaining the information required
- it is recommended that the questions are organised into categories (even if you forget certain questions in the heat of the conversation, this way you will ensure that the topics you wanted to discuss have been covered)
- for example these categories could be a good starting point:
  - materials and techniques and their meaning to the art work

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<sup>4</sup> The extended interview differs from the brief interview by the type of questions and accessibility of the artist. An extended interview provides the opportunity to explore deeper layers of information (excellent chance to ask process or meaning related questions). A strict time schedule based on a list of questions is less of a requirement, although even an extended interview benefits from having a well-structured interview. The extended interview invites the artist to speak freely about his/her work. Questions may refer to the oeuvre of the artist. Consequently, preparation not only involves specific art works, but a profound foreknowledge of the artist's oeuvre (extended time investment!).

- creative process
  - art historical context
  - installation/presentation (conveyance of meaning to the public)
  - preventive conservation (e.g. storage, packing and transport)
  - conservation/restoration, deterioration/ageing, patina, appearance of the art work
  - including influence of previous conservation on the later appearance of the art work
- preparation of an interview may include the following actions (for the extended interview at a deeper level than for a brief or limited interview):<sup>5</sup>
- literature search (biographies, exhibition catalogues, previous interviews and other sources)
  - archival research and collecting object-oriented data (such as extensive photo documentation, conservation documents, if available scientific analysis of used materials, etc)
  - investigation into the condition of (several) art work(s)
  - it is recommended to have a look at the artist's works outside the collection as well
  - foreknowledge of specific works; a deep understanding of the artist's oeuvre
- (a differentiation between periods or groups of works) may be useful
- a selection of works to be dealt with in the interview
  - transformation of the list of questions into a logical structure for the conversation and a check on these questions with a colleague
  - if relevant, arrangements between interviewers beforehand (for example a division of tasks: one interviewer keeps an eye on the checklist while the other is merely focused on interviewing the artist)
  - some artists prefer to see the questions beforehand (this, of course, brings along the risk of over-preparation by the artist and consequently a lack of spontaneous response)

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<sup>5</sup> How well preparations will succeed depends on how well the institution is organised in general; it might be necessary to contact libraries, archives or other collections. It is a different starting point to prepare an interview with a young unknown artist; the interviewer should then merely focus on the primary sources (art works).

## 8. The interview under great pressure<sup>6</sup>

### purpose

- fact-finding for highly specific purpose, e.g. display, treatment (may be urgent)

### features

- a few, highly specific questions
- reason: **the art work is in need of prompt care**; time pressure may result from an accident, unexpected conservation/restoration/curatorial tasks, such as during installation, transportation or within the context of a conservation treatment with a limited time schedule
- preparation: whatever possible
- output: report, if possible: photograph(s) of the works

### tips

- the art work is endangered by time consuming questions on other than the most relevant
- concentrate on the essentials, but remain receptive for unexpected information (as long as the work by the artist or others is not hindered)
- if there is time for any organisation of the situation you might want to ask for assistance (like a secretary taking notes)
- if there is no possibility to take notes during the interview, try to make them later on (fix a date for taking notes yourself under better conditions)
- consider the possibility of having the artist annotate your notes and ask him/her to allow you to interview him/her at a later date

### tips concerning content

- under great pressure try to keep the following five questions in mind:
  - Have similar problems occurred before and of what is the artist aware?
  - Is the artist capable of providing essential information on the material(s) used in the creation process and their interaction?
  - Is the artist ready to give a short explanation of the meaning of the art work relating to its physical condition?
  - What alteration/deterioration is significant?
  - What is the artist's view on future maintenance (desires and suggestions)?

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<sup>6</sup> For the exceptional cases where an interview takes place under great pressure it might be relevant to provide a few 'golden rules' that will help to prepare the interviewee under such circumstances.

## 9. Other ways of interaction with the artist

### features

- the artist suggests conditions for the communication
- output: anything such as a letter or other documentation delivered by the artist, a recorded monologue by the artist, or a dialogue by the artist

### tips

- the form of communication agreed upon with the artist may be negotiated, which determines conditions
- if relevant, conditions such as location and use of audio and/of video equipment are determined in collaboration with the artist.
- professionals with a receptive attitude and acquaintance with the artist's oeuvre may obtain the best results
- match your preparatory research with the form of communication used

### tips concerning content

- the artist may decide which subjects are considered, do not try to change the subjects against his/her will
- as a critical evaluation of the information given it might be valuable in some cases to subsequently research on the artist's oeuvre, the art historical context and technological aspects relevant for the work under discussion

GUIDE TO GOOD PRACTICE:  
ARTISTS' INTERVIEWS

SWOT ANALYSIS by JO CROOK

(DRAFT)



## Guide to Good Practice: Artists' Interviews

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### Introduction

The INCCA project has developed The Guide to Good Practice: Artists' Interviews as a result of the partners experience of conducting interviews with artists, before and during the four year project. As we continue to interview artists we will develop the guide; a process that will continue indefinitely. Your experience will also provide new insights and will contribute to improvements. Please contact us to share your knowledge.

The guide describes different methods of communication with the artist, discussing approaches and issues to be considered in the dialogue with the artist. These methods include:

#### 1 Written communication

- 1.1 Letter
- 1.2 Questionnaire

#### 2 Oral Communication

- 2.1 Telephone call
- 2.2 Interview: working with the artist
- 2.3 Interview: short interview (includes interview under pressure)
- 2.4 Interview: extended interview

Each method is described in terms of its purpose and main features with suggestions for preparation and content. A SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) of the methods discussed has been added to help the interviewer focus on the approach. The difference between one-way communication (written) and interactive communication (oral) will influence the quality of information gathered. It is suggested therefore that the interviewer considers the detail of information required when selecting the method of communication.

Examples of some of the methods discussed are included in the appendix.

## 1 Written communication

### SWOT analysis - written vs. oral communication

<b>Strength</b>	allows recipient time to consider their response
<b>Weakness</b>	single exchange rather than interactive
<b>Weakness</b>	no opportunity for follow-up questions prompted by answers
<b>Weakness</b>	no opportunity to press a question that has not been fully or satisfactorily answered
<b>Weakness</b>	never going to be flexible enough to accommodate the unexpected and valuable twists and turns of the artist's memory
<b>Opportunity</b>	Opportunity to make initial contact with artist to arrange interview
<b>Opportunity</b>	Exchanges via email can be more interactive than letter or questionnaire, lending itself to rapid exchange (falls between written and oral)
<b>Threat</b>	Written correspondence can be easily ignored
<b>Threat</b>	not all questions answered fully or satisfactorily, or at all

### 1.1 Letter

#### Purpose

- to introduce yourself
- clarification of specific points
- confirmation of entire content

#### Features

- one or a few specific questions
- relatively short time investment for the author and recipient
- a letter suits well-defined questions in the hope of informative answers

#### Suggestions

- make the questions short and concise
- include a stamped self-addressed envelope for a reply

### SWOT analysis – letter

<b>Strength</b>	Introduces you and establishes your credentials
<b>Strength</b>	Weight of the letterhead reinforces the seriousness of the project
<b>Strength</b>	Allows the recipient time to reflect on the question/s
<b>Strength</b>	Allows you to focus tightly on a particular point
<b>Weakness</b>	Not appropriate for a large number of questions
<b>Opportunity</b>	Opportunity to use any influence the organisation might have, e.g. adopt personal approach if artist knows, or has had contact with staff in the organisation
<b>Opportunity</b>	Use the letter as follow-up method of communication after an interview to clarify any points
<b>Threat</b>	Recipient finds letter intrusive as a letter is more personal and usually more specific than, for example, a questionnaire

## 1.2 Questionnaire

### Purpose

- to ask highly specific questions about particular artistic approaches and types of objects, for purposes of e.g. acquisition, conservation treatment, display, etc.

### Features

- a list of well-defined questions
- can be presented in written format or delivered orally to the artist

### Suggestions

- letter of introduction and explanation of reason for the questionnaire should accompany the list of questions, as well as a self-stamped, addressed envelope
- include photographic documentation of the work
- in the letter also offer the recipient the opportunity to answer the questions in person in front of the work/s
- in preparing the questionnaire, a well thought out structure is required (see appendix?? for example of general questionnaire)
- make questionnaire as rigorous as possible, minimising 'any other information' boxes

### SWOT analysis – questionnaire

Strength	Questions can be more complex; questionnaire will permit the laying out of questions in a particular way using, for example, multiple choice
Strength	Refining of a standard questionnaire
Strength	The questions presented altogether form a picture of totality – balance between what is being asked in one question making sense in another
Weakness	Objects and artists vary – while you might get a very good questionnaire, you will never write a perfect one
Weakness	Can be an obstacle to achieving a natural and spontaneous dialogue with the artist
Opportunity	Questionnaire provides a good context to use another enquiry with it, combining the general and more specific – opportunity to enhance the big picture which the artist can then reflect on
Opportunity	Opportunity to interest the artist in discussing the details in person ideally in front of the work/s
Threat	Too much work on the part of the artist involved in completing the questionnaire
Threat	Use of standard questionnaire on it's own, likely that details specific to the artist/object will be lost without supplementary questions

## 2 Oral communication

### SWOT analysis – oral vs. written communication

Strength	Permits discussion on all issues as it is a direct and interactive method of communication
Strength	As an interactive method it lends itself to more levels of review; it is more social
Weakness	Immediate, unconsidered off-the cuff statements may be wrong or incomplete
Weakness	Can take up particular time and resource, e.g. time and expense of travelling
Opportunity	Opportunity to prompt indiscretions
Threat	Interviewer might be dealing with more than one person, e.g. the artist and the assistant – this doesn't apply to telephone interview or written correspondence

### 2.1 Telephone call

#### Purpose

- specific, immediate clarifications
- timely immediate response

#### Features

- one or a few specific questions

#### Suggestions

- begin by clarifying the reason/motivation for your call to avoid a rejection
- If possible, book the telephone call in advance to give the artist the opportunity to prepare themselves to answer your questions
- brief and concise questions
- put the most important questions first as the artist might only allow you a few minutes
- take notes during or immediately after the call, always noting the date the conversation took place
- if possible tape record the conversation; if your telephone has 'conference' facility this will make it easier to record the interview

### SWOT analysis – telephone call

Strength	Directly interactive, the artist might be more inclined to talk rather than spend time answering a letter
Strength	Not too much pre-organisation involved
Strength	Telephone interview direct means of communication with artists in other countries
Weakness	Difficulty in recording what is being said if lengthy, descriptive answers are given
Weakness	Lack of visual queues, interviewer has to go by the tone of voice rather than gestures and expressions
Weakness	No object/s or visual documentation to refer to
Opportunity	Opportunity to establish a relationship with the artist
Opportunity	Appropriate for dealing with urgent problem
Opportunity	Opportunity to ask for follow-up meeting/interview
Threat	Intrusive
Threat	Immediate, unconsidered off-the cuff answers may be wrong or incomplete

## 2.2 Interview: working with the artist

### Purpose

- to record interactive communication on all aspects of the work/s during fabrication, installation, etc.

### Features

- short time investment for the artist, longer time investment for the interviewer
- opportunity for unplanned questions despite required research preparation and familiarisation of the work/s

### Suggestions

- a video recording of the interview might be more appropriate for the documentation of this particular method of interview, with the artist's permission – important to keep the set-up informal
- if you cannot proceed with your questioning as far as you think is necessary, request a follow-up interview
- note the names of the manufacturers/suppliers of the materials used while the artist is working
- issues of confidentiality need to be addressed at the beginning – the use of information obtained in this informal way may impact on the manner in which the artist and conservator conduct themselves, thus reducing the desired natural response

### SWOT analysis – Interview: working with the artist

Strength	<b>reveals aspects of the artist's working process that they would not necessarily consider to be important - so much a part of their method it has become invisible to them</b>
Weakness	might be difficult to record the artist's response while working with them
Opportunity	more detail/information will emerge as you are dealing with practical as well as thought processes – opportunity for the unexpected to occur
Opportunity	opportunity for the artist to ask questions, more interactive
Threat	distraction of working may inhibit thorough, well considered response from artist ( <i>applies to all verbal methods</i> )

## 2.3 Interview - short interview (includes interview under pressure)

### Purpose

- specific and immediate clarification; fact-finding for highly specific purpose, e.g. display, treatment (may be urgent)

### Features

- limited to a few specific questions

### Suggestions

- allow sufficient time to conduct research into the artist's work
- organise the questions into categories, ensuring that the topics you wanted to discuss have been covered - see sample general questionnaire, appendix ??
- or, have a checklist of subjects around which the conversation will be conducted
- when requesting an interview, sometimes the person in close professional contact with the artist is more likely to elicit a positive response
- when requesting an interview inform the artist about the purpose of the interview by letter, telephone call or email
- in most cases two interviewers are recommended, to keep a safe check on the recording and to ensure a continuous flow of questions
- in terms of interpretation of data, the two-person approach is beneficial by being more objective
- try to arrange for the interview to take place in the presence of the artwork/s, either at the artist's studio or the museum - if this is not possible then include photographic documentation
- ask for the artist's permission to record the conversation before the interview
- always familiarise yourself first with the recording equipment
- if the time of the interview does not permit the answering of all your questions, suggest a follow-up interview or telephone call
- check information provided by the artist that you are unsure of, e.g. names of materials, by inviting the artist to comment on the transcript/videotape of the interview once completed
- artists will often appreciate receiving a copy of the interview
- transcripts of the interview must be annotated with the names of the persons involved, the location and date of interview

If the interview is conducted under pressure, try to keep the following questions in mind:

- if the discussion concerns a problem that has occurred, enquire if similar problems have been encountered before
- is the artist capable of providing essential information on the material/s used in the making of the work
- is the artist prepared to give a brief explanation of the meaning of the work in relation to its physical condition
- what alteration/deterioration is significant
- what is the artist's opinion concerning the work's future maintenance

## SWOT analysis – Interview: short interview (Includes interview under pressure)

<b>Strength</b>	most interactive method, face to face lends itself to more levels of review, interaction, more social
<b>Weakness</b>	weakness of any verbal method: can take up particular time and resource, e.g. time and money spent in travelling
<b>Opportunity</b>	insight into the personality of the artist, so approach can be appropriately adjusted for follow-up meeting/interview
<b>Opportunity</b>	opportunity for interviewer to decide if artist is worth interviewing at a later date – treat as a preliminary interview, getting to know the artist
<b>Threat</b>	artist might expect immediate response from you concerning something in particular, without allowing you time to prepare a response

## 2.4 Interview: extended interview

### Purpose

- to ask general, exploratory questions as well as focused ones related to a particular art work/s, or ways of making; opportunity to explore the artists' oeuvre in more depth, exploring meaning related questions

### Features

- not limited in number of questions
- use all types of questions, i.e. open and closed

### Suggestions

as for 2.3 Interview: short interview

- when preparing for an interview that will attempt to explore the artists' oeuvre in more depth, it is recommended that the conservator works with a curator/art historian
- preparation not only involves specific art works, but a profound foreknowledge of the artist's oeuvre
- Research into the cultural and socio-historical context of artists and their work is essential, alerting interviewers of any potential areas of sensitivity
- research for an extended interview will necessarily involve consultation with the following resources: literature search (biographies, exhibition catalogues, previous interviews); archival search and object data (photographic documentation, conservation and scientific reports, etc.)
- a fixed list of questions may hinder a dialogue with the artist, but a well-considered structure for the interview definitely assists in obtaining the information you require - see appendix ??
- some artists prefer to see the questions beforehand (this, of course, bring along the risk of over-preparation by the artist and consequently a lack of spontaneous response)
- it is suggested that the extended interview should not exceed three hours in duration
- consider the option of more than one interview, possibly a series of interviews - differentiate between an extended interview and one or more brief interviews (beforehand), or for reasons of lack of time, as might occur during the interview, ask the artist for a follow-up interview on the spot, if possible fixing a date.

### SWOT analysis – Interview: extended interview

Strength	time to prepare thoroughly
Strength	most interactive method, face to face lends itself to more levels of review, interaction, more social
Weakness	Weakness of any verbal method, can take up particular time and resource, e.g. time and money spent in travelling
Opportunity	Opportunity to use all types of questions
Opportunity	Opportunity to follow-up answers and unexpected information
Threat	the longer and more organised the interview, the more resources involved in research, travel, time, etc. and the threat that they may not be used properly
Threat	Might be dealing with more than one person, e.g. the artist and assistant ( <i>doesn't apply to phone calls or written correspondence</i> )
Threat	as the questions keep coming, danger that the artist might get tired, exasperated or bored