

Interviewing About Genre: Advice

The biggest key is to ask the person about two things: how they communicate with the people they work with and what kinds of texts they use to do so.

In terms of the first, I might think about what groups of people the person you are interviewing would be working with, and then ask the how he/she talks to each of these groups of people, and specifically what the purpose of those conversations (be them written or spoken) are, what the tone is, and how the person has to adapt to each audience in unique ways. What does he/she have to think about or be conscious of when speaking to each group of people he/she interacts with? What kinds of things do they talk about? How/when does the communication take place?

As far as the second topic (what texts are produced), I'd ask the person to actually show you some examples. If you are meeting in person, I might even mention this in advance as something you are especially interested in-- so that the person has some texts ready to show you. Talk with the person about what they see as unique about each form of writing and ask questions about it. You might know some of these texts already, and can ask specifically about them. Or you might want the person to tell you about other types of writing he/she does that you haven't thought of. Either way, when speaking to the person about a particular kind of writing he/she does, try to ask as much as you can about genre-- what make the writing done in that kind of text different than other kinds of texts. How is the genre (the kind of text) unique?

In this way, although communication is important (and seeming the focus of many of your questions), you also really want to focus on the ways the person writes. Talking about spoken language/texts is good, but thinking about written texts might be more useful to your project.