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How to Interview Someone Who Is Terminally Ill.

September 17, 2008 · [No Comments](#)



Over the years I've recorded the life stories of a number of terminally ill people. I'm also a Hospice volunteer. I've learned some things through my work and hope these tips may be useful if you're working with someone gravely ill.

- Negotiate how much time your subject feels he/she can handle in any one interview.
- Carefully monitor the strength of your subject while conducting the interview. If you sense he/she is fading, ask if you should stop or continue.
- People at the end of life can't always be at their "charming best." If you find that you're sometimes met with sharpness or even anger, don't take it personally. It's not about you.
- Be calm and mindful, even if you're not!
- Time is of the essence. Cover the most important topics first. You may not have time to complete the whole story.
- If you can't find a quiet space and must be in a room with others, check with your subject about confidentiality. He/she may feel uncomfortable talking if others can listen in.
- Some medications can make people forgetful, so make sure you know what material you've been covering. You may need to remind your subject that he/she has already spoken on a particular topic.
- Your subject may have difficulty hearing. Remember to sit close - no more than 3 feet away and to speak clearly and with sufficient volume to be heard.
- Be flexible. Don't be surprised if an interview session you've arranged has to be canceled at the last minute. A terminally ill patient's condition can change dramatically in a short period of time.
- Take care of yourself. Working with someone who is dying is emotionally draining. Make sure you do things that bring you nourishment and strength, such as listening to your favorite music, meditating, doing a vigorous workout or

taking a long relaxing bath.

Photo by [kenna takahashi](#)

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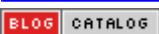
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