



Handout

22 questions to complicate the narrative

Journalist Amanda Ripley and the Solutions Journalism Network (SJN) promote an approach to conducting interviews on polarizing issues whose roots lie in conflict mediation. Called “**Complicating the Narrative**”, it aims to introduce more complexity into conversations and help journalists get at the deeper reasons people feel the way they do. SJN has put together a list of 22 questions that can help reporters get beyond the usual talking points and defensive positions common in interviews on hot-button topics.

Amplify contradictions and widen the lens

- What is dividing us on this issue?
- How do you decide which information to trust?
- What is oversimplified about this issue?
- Where do you feel torn?
- Is there any part of the (other side’s) position that makes sense to you?

Understand people’s motivations

- Why is this important to you?
- Which experiences have shaped your views?
- What do you want the other side to understand about you?
- What do you want to understand about the other side?
- How has this conflict affected your life?
- What would change in your life if more people agreed with your stance?
- What would it be like if people didn’t agree with your stance?

Listen more and better

- Tell me more about that.
- How do you feel, telling this story?
- Where does that (feeling, emotion, position, distrust, paranoia) come from?
- Can I interrupt you? I want to make sure I have everything right.
- What’s the question nobody is asking?

Expose people to the other tribe and counter confirmation bias

- What do you think the other group thinks of you?
- What do you think the other side wants?
- What do you already know, and want to understand, about the position on the other side?
- Help me make sense of this. Because a lot of other people are saying 'X'...
- Is there anything about how the media portrays you or people with your views that feels inaccurate?

Source: Solutions Journalism Network