

---

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

**OUR THANKS TO LAUREN DOCKETT**, who provided editorial support at Columbia University Press for the fifth edition, and to her very capable successor, Jennifer Perillo, who was instrumental in seeing the book through to publication. We are also indebted to Jane Linzmeyer, the librarian at the University of Wisconsin–Madison School of Social Work, for her gracious assistance with references, and to Kristin Beebe, for her expertise in preparing and formatting the manuscript.



---

## INTRODUCTION

**MANY PEOPLE** in many different professions conduct interviews. Social workers are only one such group. But for social workers, interviewing is a pre-eminently important activity. In fact, carrying out most of their responsibilities depends on interviewing. Social work interviews differ from those of other professional groups in some crucial ways, reflecting what is unique about social work. This book describes the general art of interviewing as adapted and used by social workers in a social agency setting. Both experienced and inexperienced practitioners, struggling with the recurrent problems of interviewing and seeking specific guidelines and answers, may profit from an explicit examination of the interview. We hope this book will stimulate self-assessment.

A major part of the book is concerned with the techniques of social work interviewing. *Technique* has a bad sound—cold, mechanical, inhuman, manipulative: applicable to things but not to people. The word deserves to be rescued, its image refurbished. Techniques are devices whose application enables us to accomplish our purposes, to carry out our professional responsibilities. They are clear formulations of what we should do in a given situation to offer our service effectively and efficiently.

Technical skill is not antithetical to spontaneity. In fact, it permits a higher form of spontaneity. The skilled interviewer can deliberately violate the techniques as the occasion demands and apply techniques with greater discrimination. Awareness and command of technical knowledge have other advantages. To be technically skilled is to be prepared; to be prepared is to experience less anxiety; and less anxiety increases the interviewer's freedom to respond fully to the interviewee.

Competent artistry requires mastery of technology. The French have a saying: "It is necessary to know geometry to build a cathedral; building a