



On 7 September 2018, RIF Asylum Support presented “Preparing to Testify at Your Asylum Interview,” an educational workshop that provides asylum seekers with the tools, strategies, and confidence to be better prepared for their asylum interview.

Below are the main points made during the presentation:

Tell the truth during your asylum interview.

Before starting the interview, you will make a legal promise to tell the truth during your interview. If you purposefully lie in order to try and obtain asylum, not only will the US government deny your asylum case, but they can also prohibit you from receiving other immigration benefits.

Spend time reviewing all the names, dates, and addresses on your asylum application.

The interview will begin with a review of the first half of your asylum application. The asylum officer will expect you to remember when and where you entered the United States, your address history, work history, and education history, and information about your family members. If you need to make any corrections to this information, you can do so at the interview.

Be able to provide the asylum officer with a clear overview of your case.

When it is time for the asylum officer to ask you about why you are applying for asylum, they usually ask a big question like “Why are you applying for asylum?” or “Why did you flee your country?” or “Why are you afraid to return to your country?” Instead of trying to start at the beginning and tell your whole story, it is helpful to provide the asylum officer with a clear overview of your case. This overview should include:

1. **What** happened to you in your home country, or **what** you fear will happen to you if you return
2. **Who** harmed or threatened you in your home country, or **who** you fear would harm or threaten you if you return
3. **Why** those people did those things to you, or **why** you fear they would do those things to you if you return

Let the asylum officer know if you don’t understand a question.

It’s OK if you don’t understand a question. Just let the officer know and they will ask the question a different way.

If you don’t know the answer to the asylum officer’s question, say “I don’t know.”

Remember that you made a legal promise to tell the truth. So, if you don’t know the answer, you should not make up an answer. The asylum officer may ask you to provide an estimate instead, and that is fine.

Listen closely to the question the asylum officer is asking and answer that question directly.



There are generally three types of questions the asylum officer will ask you:

1. A **“Yes” or “No”** question. Your answer should be “Yes” or “No.”
2. A question asking for **specific information**, such as when an event occurred, how many people were in a room, or the name of a person who harmed you. Your response should directly answer that question, with the date, number, or name.
3. A question asking for a **description**, such as “What happened that day?” or “Please describe the room you were in.” Your answer should include a lot of details that describe the event or location the officer asked you about.

Details are very important!

The asylum officer may ask you to describe a certain event (such as a time you were harmed or threatened) or describe a location (such as your neighborhood, a detention facility, or the place where you attended a gathering). It is very important that your answer includes as many details as possible. The more details you can include in your answer, the more the asylum officer will be able to picture what was happening to you or where you were at a certain time. Remember that the asylum officer was not there and is relying on you to provide enough details to make them feel like they can really picture what you are describing. In order to help you recall these details, ask yourself:

- What did I see?
- What did I hear?
- What did I smell?
- What was I thinking while this was happening?
- How did this affect me physically?
- How did this make me feel emotionally?

Allow yourself to take a short break if you are feeling overwhelmed.

When you are telling someone about something scary or violent that happened to you, it is natural to feel overwhelmed emotionally. Remember that while you are remembering the details of past trauma, those things are not actually happening again. The asylum office is a safe place, and the asylum officer will not harm or threaten you. If you want to pause to allow yourself time to take some deep breaths, drink some water, pause to collect yourself, do it! You are the one with all the power in the room. Give yourself the time you need to feel more calm and in control, and then continue telling your story.

Say everything out loud.

Your asylum interview will not be video recorded. So, don't just nod your head, say “Yes.” And don't just point to your arm when you are asked where you were harmed, say “On my arm.”

Trust the asylum officer with your emotions.

It can be very difficult to let a stranger see your fear and your pain after others have already harmed or threatened you because of who you are or what you believe in. But it is very important that you show this part of yourself to the asylum officer, and that you tell them about your fear and your pain. Be confident knowing



that being vulnerable is one of the strongest things you can do, and you will survive telling your story. You will walk out of the interview even stronger.

Believe in yourself!

You are a survivor. You are strong. Applying for asylum is one of the most difficult things a person can do. It is also one of the most courageous. Remember that you are the expert in your own story and you are the only one who can tell it. Feel powerful and confident about this.

