

# THE CIVILIANS

## How We Work

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The method we use was derived from an interview method originating with the Joint Stock Theater Company in London, taught to the company by Joint Stock Member, director Les Waters. The method has evolved a lot since the company first started working, but a lot of the practices at its heart have been consistent through the years and the different projects.

If you're starting from scratch, it's important to find a topic that is really intriguing to you: people are saying lots of different things about one issue, or reacting to a particular event in a lot of different ways, or behaving in a way that seems surprising to you. Ask them about it! Ask lots of people about it!

Originally, our artists would interview people, not write anything down, and then take notes about what they remembered from the interview later. This forced a close listening from the interview subject as they also took in personality and broader mannerisms. Interviewers had to catch on to the heart of what the interviewee was saying in order to recreate it later on. However, for more recent shows (beginning with *This Beautiful City*), artists began tape recording the interviews as the subject matters involved enough controversy that an exact replication of a person's words (and the recorded backup to prove it) became necessary.

People are talking in lots of places – on blogs, TV, in the paper... be sure to follow the current conversations that are happening about whatever topic you're working with; there may be something you can use there (with any necessary permission, of course)!

Here are some tips for the interviewing process:

**Come up with a specific set of beginning questions for each interview:** When asking everyone you interview the exact same set of questions, you inherently develop a cohesiveness to all of your material. After this initial set of questions, the interview can and should wander far and wide, but you have immediate comparison material. For instance, with *This Beautiful City*, every interview began with, "what is an Evangelical?"

**Be very clear and polite.** Tell your interviewee in advance what you're working on and what it is about them or their experience that has made you want to talk to them. Always thank them for their time and for sharing with you!

**Try and ask open ended questions.** Something that will lead to a story, rather than a yes or no answer.

**Let the answers lead the questions,** which is also to say, practice active listening! If someone says something you don't understand, ask them more about it. If something seems weird or

wrong to you, try to get more information – sometimes if it seems wrong at first, it'll have some greater insight at the heart of it.

**Resist the temptation to verbally react to what they're saying.** Let the interviewee go on and on if they want to. We've found the longer people talk, the more likely they are to reveal something new and unexpected.

**Be respectful.** What people are saying might be different or even opposed to things you might believe in, but don't fight with them! The goal is to gain a better understanding of those differences, and is *not at all* to convince them of something you know, you think, or you think you know.

**Don't feel like you have to get the whole story.** If there's stuff you feel like you've missed, you can always ask them again later; you may get a completely new story.

**And finally, don't forget to test your recorder.**