

Interview Tips

Planning:

1. Make sure that your questions relate directly to your purpose or goal and are focused on what you really need to know.
2. Decide how you will capture the answers (note taker, tape recording, and video tape). Be prepared with back up (extra batteries, tape, note pads, pens.) If you record or videotape, be sure to get permission from those you interview. If someone objects, don't record or videotape.
3. Have all of your questions written out before you do the interview.
4. Start with easier and less sensitive questions.
5. Develop questions that are neutral and unbiased. (See examples at the end)
6. Create probes to extend the conversation, clarify the question, or help respondents who don't have much to say.
7. Enlist the help of colleagues to pilot test the questions to make sure that they are clear and will elicit responses relevant to the intent of your questions.
8. Train others if you are not conducting the interviews. Prepare a clear set of directions for conducting the interviews and asking the questions.

The Interview

1. Arrive at the interview ahead of time and well-prepared. Make sure you have the tools you need: your questions and probes, permission form, a notebook for recording, pen or pencil, an audio or video tape recorder, back up batteries, extension cord, tape, etc.)
2. Ensure that the interviewee understands that comments are confidential and anonymous. If, however, you intend to use salient quotations to capture the essence of a point, get formal written permission before starting the interview.
3. Build trust and establish rapport. Explain purpose of the interview. Engage in some small talk to make person comfortable.
4. Allow the interviewee the option of not answering a question. Don't pester or push. It's a good idea to say this at the beginning—e.g. "If there are any questions that you do not want to answer, you do not have to."
5. Maintain a neutral demeanor when listening to answers. Negative reactions can result in defensive responses or a complete shutdown. Overenthusiastic responses can result in the interviewee providing socially desirable responses (SDR) to say what they think you want to hear.
6. Stay in control of the interview. However, be flexible so that interviewees can answer the question but not get too far off topic.
7. Be gentle and sensitive, especially if the interviewee is sharing personal and perhaps painful information.

8. Maintain eye contact to engage the interviewee and indicate your interest in what they have to say.
9. Ask only one question at a time and allow time for a response. Silence is often an indicator of thought. If it seems like the interviewee may not understand the question, use clarifying or prompting statements or questions.
10. Take detailed notes of what was said, not your interpretations of what was said.

After the Interview

1. Thank the person for the time he or she is giving to assist you.
2. Allow plenty of time to transcribe and analyze your data.

Examples of questions: “Creating Good Interview and Survey Questions”

Biased: Wording that encourages participants to respond to a question in a certain way.

- Biased: Don't you agree that the new curriculum is tedious?
- Revised: Tell me what you think of the new curriculum.

Questions that assume what they ask: Lead participants to agree or respond in a certain way.

- Biased: Some students have commented that classes are too long, wouldn't you agree?
- Revised: What do you think about the length of classes?

Double-barreled questions: Questions with more than one question embedded. Participants might answer one but not both, or may disagree with part or all.

- Double-barreled: Do you agree that the new curriculum doesn't meet your needs and that the director should consider making a change?
- Revised: Is the new curriculum working for you? (If the participants respond no). What is the problem with the new curriculum?

Ambiguous questions: Question may not be clear depending on its nature or person's point of view.

- Ambiguous: Do you think the teacher makes good use of technology? (What is meant by good? What type of technology—computers, tablets, apps, video, etc.)
- Revised: What is your opinion of the way the teacher integrated computer technology into the instruction?

Too many questions: Can lead to confused participants who are not sure how to answer or which question to answer.

- Confusing: Have you ever encountered problems in classes? What do you think the administrator need to do to solve the problem? (Confusing because what are the problems—parking, lack of childcare? And respondent may not have an answer for the administrative question.)
- Revised: What is your opinion of what our classes have to offer you? What suggestions do you have that can improve them?

Helpful References:

1. <http://ag.arizona.edu/sfcs/cyfernet/cyfar/Intervu5.htm> The Use of Qualitative Interviews in Evaluation, Meg Sewell, (8 pp.)
2. <http://qualitative-researcher.com/blog/?p=1577> The Interview Guide
3. http://qualitative-researcher.com/in_depth_interviews.php Qualitative Research Methods: In Depth Interviews (2 pp.)
4. <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/559/06/> Creating good interview and survey questions. Purdue's OWL. (2 pp.)
5. <http://qualitative-researcher.com/blog/?p=1414> 10 suggestions for skillful listening, good for interviews and focus groups (blog)
6. http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/1997/nsf97153/c3app_b.htm Sample of an interview guide (2 pp.)
7. <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/559/04/> Good summary of types of interviews, how to set up an interview, and do's and don'ts (2 pp.)
8. <http://www.humankinetics.com/excerpts/excerpts/explore-four-methods-for-collecting-qualitative-research> Nice summary of kinds of qualitative research, includes interviews and focus groups (short)
9. <http://learningstore.uwex.edu/assets/pdfs/G3658-5.pdf> University of Wisconsin (8 pp.)