

Interview questions

Introductory questions –

- Can you tell me about ... ?

Follow-up questions –

- What happened then?
- Please say more about that.
- Can you give me more details?
- What is it about ...?
- Tell me more about ...
- What is your experience with ...?
- Describe ...
- Imagine ...
- What caused you to ...?
- What features of (the topic) do you particularly like/dislike ...?
- How...When....Where....How often do you...?
- You could also nod or say 'mmmm' to encourage the person to continue

Probing questions – note that we do not use “why” questions

- Could you tell me a bit more about that?
- Can you give me an example?
- Can you say more about ...?

Examples of questions which elicit content (without suggesting an answer)

‘Grand’ and ‘little tour’ questions –

- Tell me about a busy work day...
- Can you describe what is normally done...?
- How would you get from x to y?

Typology/classification questions –

- What are the different types of x?
- Can you give me other examples of that type of x?
- What else do you do (is done) as part of that activity?

Ranking questions –

- Which do you think is more important?
- Which comes first?
- In which order does that happen?

Specifying questions –

- What did you actually do when that happened?

Direct questions –

- Do you know where xxx is? (can be followed with a probing question).

Indirect questions –

- Do people in this area go to xxx? --Can be followed with a direct or probing question about the respondent's own behaviour.

Structuring leads to questions –

- Can we move on to another topic?
- Now I would like to talk about...

Interpreting questions –

- So you mean that xxx?
- have I understood correctly that x means...?

Issues to consider

Pauses and silence are OK- By allowing pauses the interviewee is given time to respond and add more information or reflect on what has been said. You don't necessarily need to fill the silence with another question, and note that it is appropriate in some settings to have longer periods of time where nothing is said in the course of a conversation!

Avoid questions with obvious answers -

For example, if you need to know the respondent's gender you usually don't need to ask. You don't need to ask if there is a road near someone's house if you are sitting at their house by the road. Use your judgment, as obvious questions can frustrate respondents or demonstrate a lack of attentiveness.

Be careful not to ask leading questions that suggest the 'correct' answer or **closed questions** which might be answered with a single word answer, unless this is definitely what is wanted.

Example of leading questions

Interviewer: Could you tell me something about your religious background?

Respondent: As I was saying, my mother was Catholic and insisted we should go to a Catholic school...

Interviewer: So she was quite strict, was she?

Respondent: Well, yes, in a way, but at the time, I didn't really think of it as strict.

Sensitive questions - Sensitive questions often evoke normative answers, that is, answers that show that the person complies with the norms or rules of their group.

For example, in a society where church or mosque attendance is the norm then questions about church or mosque attendance might generate positive responses whether people attend or not.

A question like, 'How many units of alcohol do you consume a week?' is a well-known question for generating incorrect answers, in many countries.

Questions on sexual behaviour again, often result in incorrect answers.

Questions about possessions or land size may also be sensitive, particularly if a government is carrying out or plans to carry out an exercise related to taxation.