

Interviews

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Structured interviews

- like experiment- investigator maximizes control

- **questions**
 - clearly worded specific questions
 - read question exactly as on schedule
 - ask questions in exact order of schedule
 - Pre-coded response categories
 - each interview to be identical

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Structured interviews (cont.)

Responses

- short, specific
- either possible answers provided by interviewer
- or open response then categorized by interviewer
- Resembles questionnaire

Pro & con

- | | |
|---------------|--------------------------------|
| • control | can be stilted |
| • reliability | prevents empathy |
| • speed | limits what respondent can say |

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Semi-structured interviews

- use schedule but:
- establish rapport with respondent
 - ordering/ phrasing of questions not so important
 - follow up/ probe interesting areas that arise
 - respondent shares more closely in how interview goes
- | Pro | Con |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| • more natural | loss of control |
| • flexibility | time |
| • (e.g. can go into novel areas) | harder to analyze |
| • richer data | can be personally demanding |

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Constructing the interview schedule

- Questions
- neutral
 - open ended/ expansive
 - avoid jargon
 - redrafting - questions move from being specific to almost bland
 - specific questions can become subsequent prompts/probes
 - get it all on 1 side of A4

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Semi-structured (in-depth) interviewing:

1. There is an attempt to establish rapport with the participant
2. The ordering of questions is less important
3. The interviewer is free to probe/prompt discussion of interesting issues that may arise (e.g. 'How did that make you feel?')
4. The interviewer can follow the respondent's interests or concerns (e.g. 'Can you tell more about that?')

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- 5. Questions to be open-ended, rather than closed (e.g. Not 'Should the PM resign?' but 'What should the PM do now?')
- 6. Questions should be neutral rather than leading (e.g. Not 'Do you think the PM is doing a bad job?' but 'How do you think the PM is doing?')
- 7. Questions to be framed in the language and terms of the participant

In-depth interviewing

- setting - quiet and comfortable
- know your schedule (to be used as guide, do not be dictated by it)
- start with chat to make respondent comfortable
- questions don't have to follow sequence of schedule
- follow up interesting avenues - even if moves away from schedule
- be patient-don't rush in
- listen to what is going on: sequence of questions, where to probe- "can you say more?", is respondent comfortable?

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General good advice:

- Don't plan to ask too many questions [e.g. less than 10]
- Learn your interview schedule in advance
- Find a comfortable 'research persona' for yourself
- Be flexible in how you apply your schedule
- Be nice to your respondent!
- Listen to what you are being told by your respondent
- Resist the urge to interpret what you are being told *while the interview is still underway*

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General good advice

- Actively listen to what's is being said (say as little as possible)
- Avoid leading questions – yes/no, single word answer is problematic
- Check participant is comfortable
- tape record (allows you to listen)
- Always ask for feedback about the interview at the end of the interview
- Repeatedly check for informed consent for specific questions

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‘Ways in’

- What was it like?
- Can you tell me more about that?
- Tell me what you were thinking?
- How did you feel?

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Things to avoid

- *Over-empathic* - I can imagine that your job is quite boring - is that right?
- *Manipulative* - You've described your job as quite repetitive. Is it even worse than that?
- *Leading* - So I don't suppose you'd say that your job is rewarding?
- *Closed* - So you've been working here for 5 years then?
- *You know what I mean?* – do not respond with nods, agreement, use as opportunity to probe further

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Things to avoid

- *Talking to quickly* –your speed sets the norm and the slower you talk the more time you have to think and encourage reflection
- *Aha's/OK's/Nodding*– can be read as 'you've said enough lets move on'
- *Taking notes* – fractures the moment

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I: Okay. Um, you said that, it took time to realize that you could not use any drugs, how have you realized that you cannot use any drugs?
R: Because I tried the alcohol and that didn't work. I came out of rehab, and tried all the drugs, same effect as what had happened with the alcohol. Feeling very ill, all messed up, unable to manage my life, unable to do anything, I wasn't working, I was just getting high all the time. Um.... I was very skinny, ill, I couldn't eat and I felt sick. Again, I felt the same feeling as I did with the buzz.
I: The same feeling?
R: Um, just unhappiness, with my life, emptiness, to be honest, I felt very empty as a person, I had no, I had hopes but I could not achieve anything living my life like that.
I: You felt that you weren't achieving anything?
R: No, no
I: Can you elaborate on that?
R: Um, (hesitates) it wasn't good. (Long pause)...It just, it wasn't a good feeling.
I: Right
R: I went to the meetings and admitted that I was using drugs and that my life was fucked, screwed up. That's when I started making a change.

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Developing an interview schedule

- Identify themes relevant to your question (if appropriate)
- Think about the order of each theme
- Develop specific questions around each theme

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Types of interview questions

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|
| ✗ Introducing | Open ended not closed |
| ✗ Follow-up | Neutral not leading |
| ✗ Probing | |
| ✗ Specifying | |
| ✗ Direct/indirect | |
| ✗ Structuring | |
| ✗ Silence | |
| ✗ Interpreting | |

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Constructing questions

- Descriptive/linear: Can you tell me what happens when you see the consultant, in your own words?
- Narrative: Can you tell me about how you came to be referred?
- Structural: So, what are all the stages involved in getting a diagnosis?
- Evaluative: How did you feel after the first time you saw the consultant?

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Constructing questions (cont.)

- Systemic – circular: What do you think your GP thinks about how this has been managed?
- Systemic – comparative: How do you think things would be different if you had gone to a different hospital?
- Prompts/probes: Can you tell me a bit more about that? What do you mean by “unfair”?

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What’s wrong with these questions?

- Did you join the Navy because you had been in the cadets at school?
- Does Navy-life run in your family at all?
- Can you tell me why you decided to join up, whether you think it was a way out of a particular social background or not, what you hoped to get from the Navy?
- A life in the Navy must be very tough. Was it a shock to your system?
- What is the most frightening thing about being in the Navy?
- Please can you tell me about your career intentions?
- With those prospects in mind, would you say you regret your decision to join the Navy?

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Alternative questions

- What were you doing before you joined the navy?
- How did you come to join the Navy
- What did you expect Navy life to be like?
- Could you describe one of your more typical days in the Navy for me?
- For you, what is the best thing/worst thing about Navy life?
- To what extent has the Navy lived up to your original expectations?
- What are your plans for the future?
- Do you think that you made the right decision?

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