

Research Interviews

Systematic approach

- Data collection
- Analysis
- Description

Interview structure

○ **The Introduction**

Appropriate information - Informed consent

○ **Interview Schedule - the form of questions and responses**

- Semi-structured interviews

A number of topics to cover

- questions and their order are not fixed
- some wording might differ as a result of the responses

Types of questions – use open-ended questions

Avoid

1. Double-barrelled questions (Do you think whaling and seal-culling should be banned?)
2. Questions following an introduced assumption (Do you think the cruel practice of seal-culling should be banned?)
3. Questions using complex or jargon words (Do you consider yourself to be eco-conscious?).
Different definitions of the term?
4. Leading questions (I suppose you know what eco-conscious means?) Participants might not want to say no, so will be led to say yes
5. Questions including double negatives (Do you think now that not many people would understand the term eco-conscious?) Could we be certain what a no response meant?
6. Questions that act as catch-alls (Tell me everything you know about the Green movement and how it has influenced you) You will be unlikely to elicit much and will need a series of planned prompt questions to achieve anything useful

Sequence of questions:

Essential for maintaining the flow of the interview and eliciting the maximum amount of information

At end of interview link to the collection of:

- Demographic data
- Scales

Beginning the interview

Seating

Refreshments?

Explanation for the interview

Ethical issues

Recording of the interviews

Informed consent

How will you lead in to your first questions?

Concluding the interview

Conclude the interview graciously, even if the participant has been less than forthcoming, or has irritated or annoyed you. Do not allow the interviewee any cause to complain about the interview....or you!

Remember to thank the participant

If asked what the responses and/or scores reveal, remain non-committal

Decide how you'll respond to such questions in advance and use this response consistently

Piloting your interview

Question construction and question order need to be tested

Piloting can be very valuable – you can refine your interview schedule so that every question works as part of the interview and that nothing is missed out

Stage 1

Test whether your explanation for the interview is understood

Pilot sample participants will:

- Explain the reason back to you in their own words
- Express any doubts or queries
- Provide feedback on the amount of information you have given

Stage 2

Test how well the individual questions are understood e.g. ambiguity, terminology, perceived relevance etc.

Test that the questions are constructed properly

Test whether the participants felt that the interview flowed – that the interview made sense to them

Is the research question being appropriately addressed?

Stage 3

Make amendments as necessary

Document any changes you make so that you can write this in your method section with a justification for the changes

Take care not to move away from your research interest

Stage 4

Pilot the resulting interview schedule again (new subsample) to ensure you have made the correct amendments

Do fine-tuning if necessary

Stage 5

With a new subsample, use the interview schedule again to ensure that, following your changes, the questions are getting the responses you seek – that the schedule is working for your study

If the schedule is working, proceed to main data collection

Conducting the Interview

- Ensure that you are familiar with your questions
- Ensure that you ask all questions of all participants
- Know what information each question is meant to elicit
- Take notes – body language and paralanguage might be important

Recording interviews

Benefits	Costs
• Need only take selective notes • A comprehensive record of verbal information	• Partial note-taking might miss important information • Transcription is time-consuming

○ **Reliability and Validity**

Ensure that you address issues of reliability and validity of interview methods in your method section

Focus Groups

Focus groups address PROCESS (how, why) as well as CONTENT (what) questions

- Remember! Participant's responses are not always individual, reasoned and rational
- Sometimes they are co-constructed during the focus group session – they are a result of the group discussion and interaction

Appropriateness of the focus group method

A range of purposes – in this case it is to generate conversation worthy of analysis in its own right

What type of evidence do focus groups produce?

Essentialist position

- There is 'truth' to be found
- Emphasis on content (thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values, knowledge, ideas etc.)
- need to recognise that even if there is truth to be found, people may choose not to tell it

Inhibition (e.g. silence)

Self-presentation (e.g. exaggeration, invention)

Debates:

- a. Do groups of participants who have something in common facilitate the disclosure of truth more than groups of divergent members?
- b. Do groups of individuals who know each other produce better quality data?

Social Constructionist position

Focus Groups are communication events in which the interplay of the personal and the social can be systematically explored

Focus groups cannot provide a window on reality

Reality represented by FGs is collaboratively produced through a process of context-specific meaning making

The Focal Stimuli

Broad range of possible stimuli e.g. a concrete event – driving and young people's risk-taking (Basch, 1987), or a concept contained in children's comics/magazines and gendered messages

Focus Group Design and Planning

No 'one 'right' way to do focus groups' (Morgan, 2008)

- Group size – approximately 8
- Suggested by some to use between 6 and 8 (Albrecht et al, 1993; Wilkinson, 2003)
 - a. Ease of transcription
 - b. Ease of management of group
 - c. Less likely for subgroups to emerge

Sampling and Recruitment

Need to mention how sampling normally reflects those who can provide the most meaningful information on a given topic

For the purposes of the study, the relevant groups will be identified within the student population

Location, setting and length of session

- Table – can be small, but will need to hold juice, paper cups, plates of biscuits – and the audio recorder
- Chairs – a prime consideration for participants is comfort
- Recorder
- Identification cards (e.g. A to H) for identifying each speaker. Also serves to reassure re. anonymity

Focus Group Implementation

Key aspects for successful implementation:

- Preparation materials and setting
- Good people skills - maximise disclosure by actively engaging all participants in the discussion

Facilitator Style and Skill

Need to make clear to the whole group – confidentiality, respect, validity of opinion etc.

Guide the proceedings in a subtle, unobtrusive way – intervene only to maintain a productive group

The smaller the degree of your control, the smaller your opportunity to lead the discussion yourself (potential bias)

But - If two more dominant group members– need to take active steps to diffuse the situation, refocus the group, balance out the discussion process to include all members

If looking at content, three additional criteria for ensuring 'focus' is maintained:

Specificity – the extent to which detail is sought in people's responses and reactions. It is your task to elicit meanings and differential responses

Range of coverage – your skill in actively facilitating transition from one area of discussion to another

Depth – this is about the personal context of the response or reaction. Eliciting in-depth response involves expanding on superficial descriptions etc. to provide detailed elaboration

Need to listen to the content and flow of the discussion:

e.g.

Is it flowing?

Are all members taking turns to speak?

Are they on topic?

Are the responses sufficiently detailed?

Topic Guide

Usually only suggestive, not be set in the form of strict questions – leeway to improvise

****BUT** – A general question list will need to be approved for the dissertation

Listening and questioning skills

Ensure questions require detailed and elaborated responses – not yes or no answers or very brief replies e.g. 'What are your thoughts about....?'

Consistent use of open questions that allow people to respond in the way they want to will encourage engagement and participation

Smooth transitions from one sub-topic to another

Assess silences – sub-topic/question finished, or are contributions being mulled over?

Don't be tempted to fill all silences, but don't allow too much wasted time, as you need material to analyse!

Make notes regarding body language, paralanguage, anger, sudden quietness and lack of participation, dominance, continued sarcasm etc.

Notes taken from:

Breakwell, G. M., Smith, J. A., Wright, D. B. (Eds.). (2012). Research Methods in Psychology (4th edition). London: Sage.