

Conducting Interviews

Qualitative Methods: Interviews

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The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA
Health Sciences Center
College of Public Health



Session Overview

- Interview logistics
- Preparing for the interview
- Conducting the interview
- After the interview



Logistics

- Work hard to accommodate the participant's schedule
- Choose a comfortable, neutral location to conduct interviews
- Explain purpose of interview and intended uses of information
- Assure participant of confidentiality and inform them of IRB approvals, etc.
- Start with factual questions, save opinions/attitudes for later in the interview



Logistics

- Test recorders ahead of time and make sure that you can transfer the audio files for transcription
- Set up the recorder close enough to capture everything
- Use two recorders when available – 1 as backup
- Note taker, if possible



Preparation

- Know the material!
- Train interviewers in both interviewing techniques and background of the study
- Be very familiar with the facilitation guide questions and probes



Conducting Interviews

- The goal of the interview is to gather information during an interaction that, as much as possible, mimics a natural conversation
- This approach makes the participant feel more comfortable and willing to offer honest and forthcoming responses
- Should be more like they are telling a story to a friend or coworker



Conducting Interviews

- The main goal of the opening question is to establish rapport and put participant at ease
- Open with a “grand tour” question
 - A grand tour question should be a broad question about something that the participant knows well
 - Should get the participant talking, but in a focused way
 - Should be:
 - Answerable
 - Meaningful
 - Exploratory



Conducting Interviews

Example opening questions:

1. *Let's start by talking about your history with physical activity.*
2. *Let's start by talking about your role in this organization.*
3. *Let's start by just generally talking about your main health concerns right now.*



Conducting the Interview

- Ask all questions on the guide for consistency even if the topic has already come up
- Be sure and acknowledge that it came up by saying “I know we talked a little about this but...”
- Maintain a neutral attitude
- Allow enough time for participant to answer, silence is okay and sometimes necessary!
- Start and stop the interview on time



Conducting the Interview

- Practice active listening techniques and probe when necessary
- Use the guide as a starting point, but keep the interview conversational
- Follow the natural flow of conversation, don't worry if topics come up out of order
- Use probes to clarify meanings to answers and to request details



Conducting the Interview

- Probe can be a gesture, quick comment, or follow-up question to ask for an explanation or more detail
- You can ask for verification of meaning
- For a more detailed answer, you could ask, “What does this include?” or “What was that like for you?”



Conducting the Interview

- Other probing techniques could include:
 - Repeating part of the question.
 - Paraphrase answer back to respondent to confirm interpretation.
 - Ask neutral questions: “Could you please tell me more about that?” “Can you given an example?” or “Is there an example?”



Conducting the Interview

- Keep your participant aware of how the interview is flowing
 - *“We have two questions left.”*
 - *“We’re almost done. Do you have time for one more question?”*
- Use transitional statements:
 - *“Now I’m going to ask you a different question.”*
 - *“Now we’re going to shift gears.”*



Closing the interview

- Try to reach a natural closing point
- Ask if anything remains unsaid
 - *Is there anything I haven't covered that you thought we would discuss?*
 - *Is there anything else you'd like to add before we wrap up?*
- Express appreciation



After the interview

- Debrief/discuss interview with team if applicable
- Write detailed notes as soon as possible after the interview
- Transcribe interviews as soon as possible
- Write a thank-you note



Interview checklist

Before

- Make sure you understand the study and why the interviews are being conducted
- Study the interview guide & practice
- Audio recorder with available memory & extra batteries
- Have most current interview guide at hand
- Confirm appointment & contact info
- Bring a pen

During

- Introduce self and review/confirm informed consent details
- Relax and be conversational
- Start recording
- Read introduction and ask for any questions
- Begin interview
- Ask for any final questions
- Stop recording
- Thank participant(s)

After

- Send thank-you note
- Debrief (write/record notes, discuss)
- Store data in designated way
- Transmit data to transcriptionist (if relevant)
- Transcribe or take detailed notes soon after interview
- Summarize each data collection episode (optional but recommended)

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Questions?



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Activity 4: Practice Interviews

- Pair up with a partner who was NOT in your Activity #3 group. Use the interview guide you created in Activity #3 to interview your partner. Your partner can respond as themselves or pretend to be another character for the mock interview.
- After no more than 15 minutes, switch roles and conduct the second interview.
- Be prepared to discuss your experience as an interviewer and interviewee. Were the questions clear? Did the respondent provide details or one-word answers? Do any changes need to be made to the interview guide? What went well and what could be improved?

