Designing an Interview Guide

Qualitative Methods: Interviews
Chickasaw Nation
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Session Overview

• Overview of a semi-structured interview guide

• Components of Interview Guide:
  1. Introduction/Opening Script
  2. Main Questions
  3. Probes/Prompts
  4. Demographics Questionnaire
Types of Interviews

- Unstructured Interviews
- Semi-structured Interviews
- Structured Interviews
  
  (Informal Interviews/conversations)
  (Surveys / self-administered questionnaires)
Unstructured Interviews

• Formal interview with scheduled time
• Interviewer has clear plan of focus and goal
• No structured interview guide
• Open-ended questions with little control over responses
• Questions are open to revision based on responses
Structured Interviews

• Interviewer asks respondents same series of questions
• Questions are written prior to interview with limited set of response categories
• Questions are standardized and order and phrasing are consistent
• Interviewer is casual and friendly but does not provide opinion or comments
Semi-structured Interviews

• Formal interview with an interview guide
• Guide is a list of questions and topics to be covered usually in a certain order
• Interviewer follows the guide but has flexibility to follow different paths or drift from guide if appropriate
• Following guide ensures some consistency across interviews but flexibility allows interviewer to gather additional data or probe deeper
Benefits to Semi-structured Interviews

• Questions are prepared ahead of time – no need to think “on the spot” and recall all important topics or questions to address

• Provides reliable, comparable qualitative data across multiple interviews

• Allows conversation to flow more naturally and not seem as rigid; interviewer can develop rapport with respondent
Importance of the Guide

• Ensures alignment of questions with overall goal
• Gives adequate time for interviewer to prepare and/or review prior to interview
• Ensures key points are delivered
Developing the Interview Guide

• What is your overall goal / research question?
• What do you want to learn?
• How much time do you have?
• What do you already know?
• What could be asked using a survey?
Interview Guide Components

1. Introduction/Opening Script
2. Main Questions
3. Probes/Prompts
4. Demographics Questionnaire
Introduction / Opening Script

• Describes the purpose of the interview
• Provides context to the respondent
• Ensures that there are no right or wrong answers
• States that information will remain confidential and that no names will be used in any reports
• Describes audio recording process
• Asks participant one more time if it is ok to continue
Writing Questions

• Iterative process
• Begin with larger research questions
• Develop outline of key questions
• Draft questions and then refine them to be more open ended
Close- vs Open-Ended Questions

• Close ended questions result in one or two-word answers
  • Usually yes or no questions
  • Choose from a list or provide one-word response

• Open-ended questions provide opportunity to give details
  • How?
  • Why?
  • Could you describe?
  • Tell me about...
Main Questions

• Keep respondents in mind as you write questions
• Questions should be simple – one at a time
• Phrase questions in neutral way so as not to lead respondent to certain opinion
  • Ex: Leading – How angry were you when...?  
    Neutral – Tell me how you felt when...
Good Open-Ended Questions

• Motivate respondents to answer completely and honestly
• Ask respondent to describe or give as much detail as possible
• Are expansive and provide as little direction as necessary
  • Start out with a general question and then direct with probes if needed
Truly Open-Ended Questions

• Some questions appear to be open-ended because they lack response options

• “How satisfied were you with the program?”

• Respondent will answer with the degree of satisfaction (pretty satisfied, somewhat, not satisfied)

→ How did you feel about the program?
Describe Both Sides in Question

• To avoid a directional question, you can describe both scenarios and ask which one fits respondent
• Can also be used with potentially socially unacceptable behaviors

Ex:
Some people ...... while others .... Tell me what you...
Tell Me About....

• Common phrase used in open-ended interviews
• Asks respondent to tell a story about a topic
• Useful phrase to make sure question is simple

Ex: Are e-cigarettes safe?
   ➔ Tell me what you know about e-cigarettes.
   Probe: Tell me what you know about the safety of e-cigarettes.
Types of Questions

• Direct questions
  “Do you...?”

• Indirect questions
  “What do most people...?”

• Follow-up questions
  “Could you say more...?”

• Specifying questions
  “What did you do then...?”

• Interpreting questions
  “Do you mean that...?”
Probes or Prompts

• Create bullet point probes or prompts underneath each question
• Guide the interviewer to ask more specifically about areas in the literature
• Probes are read only when necessary
• Can redirect respondent if needed
• Can ask for more detail to something brought up by respondent. “You said ... tell me more about that.”
Example:

**Main Question**

1. Tell me about the first time you ever smoked a cigarette, even just a puff.

**Probes**

- How old were you?
- Why did you decide to try your first cigarette?
- What about smoking appealed to you?
- Tell me more about that.
Close-Ended Questions

• Some close ended questions or probes can be helpful

• Ex: what age were you when you....?

• Keep close-ended questions to a minimum so interview will not be like an interrogation

• Too many close-ended questions at beginning can set tone for short answers
How Many Questions/Probes?

- Depends on the type of respondents and types of questions
- Generally interviews should be around 30 minutes to an hour
- May need more questions and probes for group that is likely to provide short or brief answers
Question Order

• Should be logical and flow
• Begin with a warm up question or two – something the respondent can answer easily and with some details
• Difficult or sensitive questions should be placed towards end
• Closing question to wrap up interview
Transitions

• Let the respondent know when interview is shifting topics
• Provide transitions and context
• “Now I would like to move on to a new topic…”
• “Now I would like to ask a few questions about…”
Pilot Test Interview Guide

• Conduct interviews with a small number of individuals
• Pilot interviews should ideally be with individuals similar to your participants
• Take note of length of pilot interviews
• Debrief after pilot interviews and revise questions or probes as necessary for flow, clarity, and to fill gaps
Demographic Questionnaire

• Useful to shift simple close-ended questions that are important to a small survey conducted at beginning or end of interview

• Can collect age, gender, race, education, income, etc. through a survey rather than during interview

• Can add other types of questions for a mixed-methods approach
Example Interview Guides

• Physical Activity
• Tobacco Use and Cessation
Questions?
Before you go to lunch, write your **name** and your **top 2 topic choices** on a notecard.
Activity 3: Drafting the Interview Guide

- As a group, develop an interview facilitation guide to answer your research question(s). Be sure to include probes where needed. Keep in mind that revision of both the guide and research question are a natural part of the qualitative research process.
- Test the facilitation guide internally in your group and revise where necessary.