

Designing an Interview Guide

Qualitative Methods: Interviews
Chickasaw Nation
September 11, 2017



The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA
Health Sciences Center
College of Public Health



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



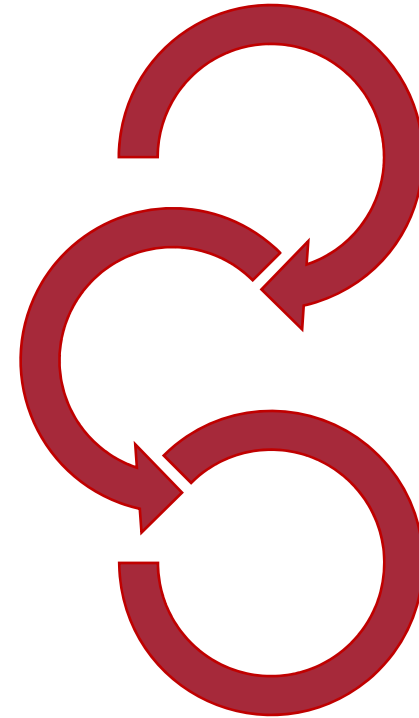
Introduction / Opening Script

- 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.

