



# **GETTING QUALITY DATA FROM INTERVIEWING**

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# Seminar Aims

- TO DISCUSS THE NATURE OF QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWING, WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT IS NOT.
- TO DEVELOP AND AWARENESS OF THE INTERACTIVE NATURE OF THE QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW AND THE ROLE AND INFLUENCE OF THE INTERVIEWER ON THE QUALITY OF THE DATA GENERATED.
- TO LEARN HOW WE AS RESEARCHERS CAN WORK TO MAKE OUR INTERVIEWING SKILLS/TECHNIQUES MORE EFFECTIVE.
- TO LEARN ABOUT INTERVIEWER BIAS AND HOW TO AVOID IT.

# Content

- **What is Qualitative Interviewing?**
- **Interview Questions and Probing**
  - **The Interview Process**
- **Researcher Issues/Interviewer Bias**
- **10 Essential Rules of Interviewing**

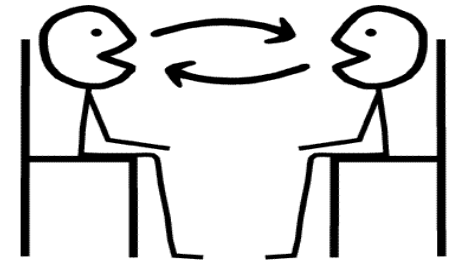
# WHAT IS QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWING



# Qualitative Interviewing: Some Definitions

“.... the quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer” (Patton, 1990: 279).

**interview**



“Overall, qualitative interviewing requires more intense listening than normal conversations, a respect for and curiosity about what people say, a willingness to acknowledge what is not understood, and the ability to ask about what is not yet known” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005: 14).

The purpose of a qualitative interview “is not to put things in someone’s mind (for example, the interviewers preconceived categories for organising the world) but to access the perspective of the person being interviewed” (Patton, 1990: 278).

# Some CHARACTERISTICS of Qualitative Research Interviews

- *Interviews are completed by the interviewer* and based on what the respondent says (although the interview is interactive in nature).
- Interviews are *a far more personal form of research* than questionnaires (interaction, discovery).
- In the qualitative interview, *the interviewer works directly with the respondent.*
- Unlike with surveys, the interviewer has *the opportunity to probe or ask follow-up questions.*
- Interviews are time consuming and they are resource intensive.
- *The interviewer is considered a part of the 'measurement instrument'* and needs to be well trained in how to respond to any contingency.

**GOOD QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWING IS NOT EASY!!**

# Interviewing Beyond Conversation

- Qualitative interviews and ordinary conversations have much in common.
  - However, to conduct 'good' interviews and hear the meaning of what people say requires skills beyond those of ordinary conversation.
  - Qualitative Interviewing: A Conversation WITH A PURPOSE
- 
- ❖ How specific should a question(s) be?
  - ❖ What kinds of questions can be asked?
  - ❖ Is the wording too biased?
  - ❖ How do we get people to elaborate on what they say?
  - ❖ When do we take on-scene notes and when should we rely on memory?
  - ❖ Do we use an audio recorder or a video camera?

# THE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (The Research Instrument)

- Qualitative interviewing is an open-ended and interactive process but we always embark on an interview with an Interview Schedule.
- The Interview Schedule is essentially a list of topics/questions that we want to pose to our respondents.

## How to Develop an Interview Schedule

- Pay close attention to the research questions.
- Pay close attention to existing research literature on the topic under investigation (there will be learning here).
- Be mindful of the importance of ordering the topics/questions effectively (ease into the interview; don't approach sensitive topics immediately).
- Provide 'orientation' to the interviewee and close the interview effectively (not abruptly)

# Sequence of Questions: Some Notes

- ❑ Get the respondent involved in the interview as soon as possible.
- ❑ Before asking about controversial or sensitive matters, first ask about some facts.
- ❑ Intersperse fact-based questions (if and where relevant) throughout the interview.
- ❑ In general, ask questions about the present before questions about the past or future (life history interviewing is an exception).
- ❑ The last questions might allow respondents to provide *any other information* they feel is relevant to their lives or experiences. Respondents can also be invited to give their views on the interview.

# **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND PROBING**

# Types of TOPICS in Questions

- ***Background/demographic*** – standard background questions such as age, education etc.
- ***Behaviours*** – what a person has done or is doing.
- ***Opinions/values*** – what a person thinks about the topic.
- ***Feelings*** – what a person feels rather than what a person thinks.
- ***Knowledge*** – to get facts about the topic.
- ***Sensory*** – what people have seen, heard etc.

# KINDS OF QUESTIONS used throughout the interview

- **Direct Questions**: “What are your primary responsibilities in this job?”. “Where were you living at that time?”
  - Direct questions seek to elicit facts that are relevant to the research questions.
- **Follow-up Questions**: This is when you follow up on what has been said by the respondent through direct questioning.
  - I: When did you first learn about the course?
  - R: Oh, that happened when I started going to the book club.
  - I: So, did someone tell you about it?
- **Probing Questions**: “Could you say some more about that?”, “What do you mean when you say ...?”
  - Probing is crucial in qualitative interviewing.
  - It creates opportunities to gain a better or more in-depth insight into the respondent’s views/feelings/attitudes etc.
- **Specifying Questions**: “How did X react when you said that?”.



# KINDS OF QUESTIONS used throughout the interview

- **Indirect Questions**: “What do most people around here think about how that issue was dealt with?”.
- **Structuring Questions**: “I would like to move on to a different topic”.
  - It is important to ‘steer’ the interview and to let respondents know what is coming next.
  - It is also important to signal that the interview is coming to an end.
- **SILENCE**: Pausing signals that you want to give the respondent the opportunity to reflect/elaborate.
  - By ‘jumping in’ with another question when the interviewee pauses or there is a silence, the interviewer may miss out on important data.
- **Interpreting or Clarifying Questions**: “When you say ..., do you mean that ...”.

# Asking Questions: Some Basic 'Rules'

1. Questions should be short and precise.

What is your role here?

2. Ask only one question at a time.

Did you look for help then? How did you feel at that time?

3. Be cognisant of the interviewees use of language (i.e. dialects, idioms, jargon, slang). Use language that is understandable and comfortable for your informants.

Be well-informed before entering the field.

4. Avoid questions in which the answer is given or implied.

You must have been very upset when that happened?

5. Avoid WHY questions (in many cases at least).

Why did you respond in that way?

# The Importance of Probing

“The key to successful interviewing is learning how to probe effectively ...

... that is, to stimulate an informant to produce more information ...

... without injecting yourself so much into the interaction that you only get a reflection of yourself in the data”

Bernard, H.R. (1995) *Research Methods in Anthropology*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.  
London : Sage Publications.

# Some Generic Probes

- “You mentioned \_\_\_\_\_ , can you tell me more about that?”.
- “You have talked about \_\_\_\_\_ , what was that like for you?”
- “Earlier you talked about \_\_\_\_\_ , could you describe that experience in greater detail/tell me more about that?”
- “How did you feel about that?”
- “It sounds as though that event/experience was important/changed things ... how did you feel?”
- “It sounds like you’re saying \_\_\_\_\_ ”

# Reflecting back what has been said

The interviewer may reflect back what has been said in order to encourage less confident or more reticent interviewees to expand further.

For example:

*“So, you gained experience from that role?”*

*“So, at that time, you felt relief”*

*“You mentioned earlier that you ...”*

This technique is used to show that the interviewer is listening but not making judgements on what has been said.

**THE INTERVIEW PROCESS:**

**WHAT YOU NEED TO DO**

# THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

- Finding and selecting respondents: how many?/sampling (snowball, purposive, convenience sampling)/variability across the sample/the search for 'good' informants.
- Establishing Rapport: trust?/sensitivity of the topic under investigation/age of research respondents/confidentiality.
  - The researcher-respondent relationship is subject to continuing negotiation and re-working throughout the research process.
- Initial Contact: explain the purpose of the research/try to establish rapport/encourage the prospective respondent to ask questions.

# THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

- The Interview: finding a suitable location/ privacy/ the respondent's right to terminate the interview/duration.
- Recording: make sure your audio recorder is working!/the respondent's right to refuse/ background noise.
- Ending the Interview: should not happen suddenly/give the respondent the opportunity to offer final thoughts or opinions.



**Not so good qualitative interviewing:**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgUZbwT\\_IL8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgUZbwT_IL8)

**Better qualitative interviewing:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KnBX0ShbYxQ>

# Other Considerations

## Before Conducting an Interview:

- Be very familiar with your interview schedule.
- Ensure that you have reliable equipment.
- Where possible, try to make arrangements to use a particular room/space in advance. Consider noise levels here.

## After the Interview: Take notes about:

- Where the interview took place.
- The setting (busy/quiet)
- How the interview went (was the interviewee talkative, nervous etc.).
- Other feelings about it (did the interview open up new avenues of interest).
- Ideas for revising the interview schedule (if applicable/appropriate).

# WHY RECORD/TRANSCRIBE?

- It helps to correct the natural limitations of our memories and of the intuitive glosses that we might place on what people say in interviews.
- It allows more thorough examination of what people say.
- It permits repeated examination of the interviewees' answers.
- It opens up data to public scrutiny to by other researchers, who can evaluate the analysis that is carried out.
- It therefore helps to counter accusations that an analysis might have been influenced by the researcher's values and biases
- It allows the data to be reused in other ways from those intended by the researcher – for example, in light of new theoretical ideas or analytic strategies.

***\*\*\* Transcribing IS time-consuming and needs to be built into the time-line for your research.***



**RESEARCHER ISSUES**

**RESEARCHER BIAS**

# Interviewer/ing Issues

You may have participants who do or say things that require you to respond in some way in order to maintain the integrity and focus of the interview.

- **Non-talker/Reluctant interviewee**

- **Rambler**

- **Strong Emotions Expressed by Interviewee**

- **Confused**

- **Personal Questions/Inquisitive**

- **Seeking Advice**

# INTERVIEWER EFFECTS

While advocates of non-standardised interviewing value and analyse the part played in the discussion by the interviewer, proponents of standardised approaches regard these effects as undesirable.

## Researcher effects CAN be undesirable:

- Leading questions
- Open disapproval of particular kinds of responses
- Over-rapport
- The researcher relating his/her point of view.
- The researcher talking too much!

# Interviewer bias ... beware!



**WHAT  
IS  
BIAS  
IN  
QUALITATIVE  
RESEARCH?**

- ❑ Bias distorts truth, thus affecting the validity and reliability of research findings.
- ❑ Bias slants and skews data in qualitative research.
- ❑ We need to recognise and be aware of bias and take every possible step to eliminate it.
- ❑ The qualitative researcher collects the data through interaction and can have a major impact on the quality of the data.
- ❑ The researcher's facial expressions, body language, tone, manner of dress, and style of language may introduce bias. Similarly, the interviewer's age, social status, race, and gender can produce bias.
- ❑ Some of these influences are unavoidable, but you can control some of the physical influences. Remain as neutral as you can in dress, tone, and body language. And don't give your opinions while interviewing.



# Leading Questions

*Leading questions are phrased to suggest a particular answer or to imply that one answer is expected or more correct.*

*It is incredibly easy to introduce bias to an interview and researchers frequently do this inadvertently or without knowing.*

**Allow people to answer in their own terms,  
voicing their own views, values and  
experiences.**

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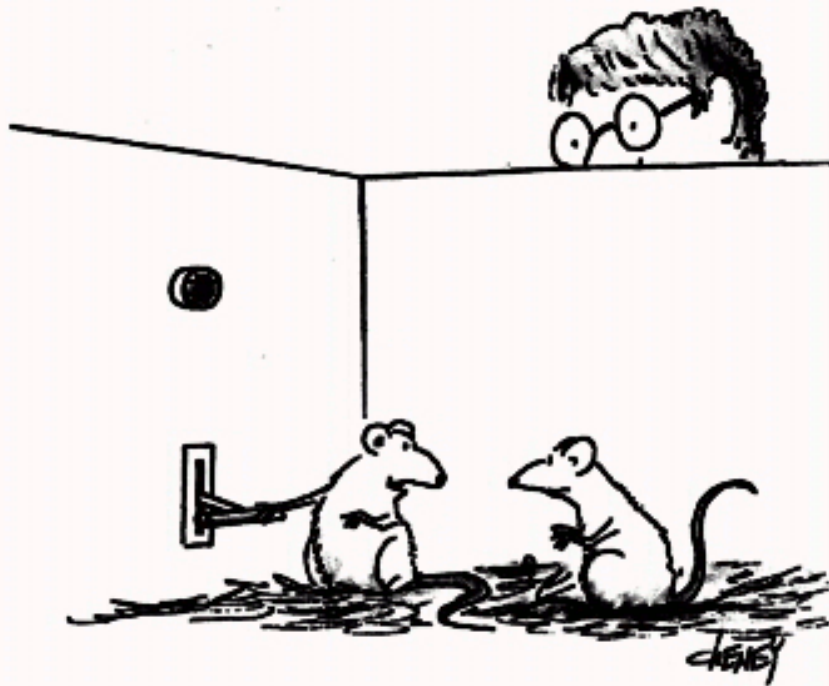


"QUICK, WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A CHARDONNAY  
AND A CABERNET?"

# Examples of Leading Questions/Comments

- ❑ “The organisation clearly has X philosophy; so do you hold this philosophy?”
- ❑ “I wouldn't want to ..., what about you?”
- ❑ “I'm guessing you got on with your previous boss?”
- ❑ “You must have been furious/upset when that happened ...?”
- ❑ “A lot of people think that fast food is bad for them. What do you think?”

# cat and mouse?



It's a rather interesting phenomenon. Every time I press this lever, that post-graduate student breathes a sigh of relief.

**10 ESSENTIAL “RULES”  
OF  
INTERVIEWING**

# 10 Essential “Rules” of Interviewing

## 1. Never begin an interview cold.

- ❑ Chat and make small talk with interviewee (IE). The goal is to put the IE at ease and establish rapport.

## 2. Remember your purpose.

- ❑ You want to obtain information. Try to keep the IE on track. Always have a copy of the interview schedule in front of you – even though you should have your questions memorized.

## 3. Present a natural front.

- ❑ Even though your questions are memorized, you should be able to ask each one as if it popped into your head. Be relaxed, affirmative, and as natural as you can.

## 4. Demonstrate active listening.

- ❑ Offer IE appropriate non-verbal responses. If they describe something funny, smile. If they tell you something sad, look sad. Do not present yourself as uninterested or unaware.

# 10 Essential “Rules” of Interviewing

## 5. Think about appearance.

- ❑ Dress appropriately. Convey the message that this interview is important to you.

## 6. Interview in a comfortable, non-threatening place.

- ❑ Somewhere the IE feels comfortable expressing her/himself and free of distractions. Also a place where the IE knows s/he is to be taken seriously.

## 7. Don't be satisfied with monosyllabic answers.

- ❑ Be aware when subjects begin giving yes-and-no answers. If this starts to happen you must try to probe.

## 8. Be respectful.

- ❑ Make sure the IE feels that s/he is an integral part of your research and that their answers are respected and appreciated.

# 10 Essential “Rules” of Interviewing

## 9. Practice, practice, and practice some more.

- ❑ The only way to get really good at interviewing – establishing rapport, making smooth transitions from one question to the next, eliciting in-depth responses, making good use of probes, etc. – is to practice. Be patient with your ‘mistakes’ and missed opportunities for follow-ups. Your interviewing skills will improve over time.

## 10. Be cordial and appreciative.

- ❑ Remember to thank the subject when you finish and answer any questions he or she might have about the research.

**FROM: Berg, B.L. (2004) *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. 5<sup>th</sup> Ed. Boston: Pearson. pp. 110-111.**