

Slide 1



Welcome to this short video on interview methodology.

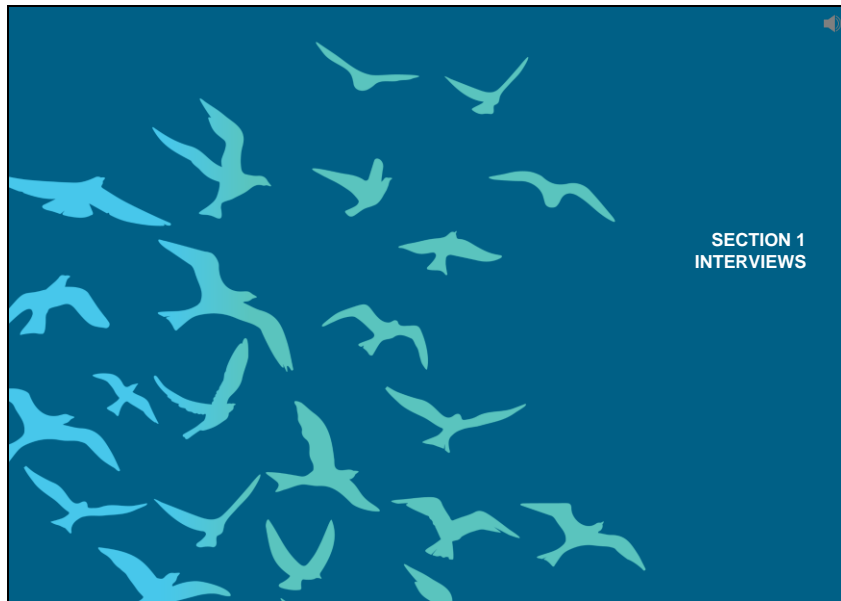
My name's Dr Ben Silverstone and I'd like to take this opportunity to share with you my experiences of using interview methodology in practice.

Slide 2




Within this short video lecture we'll be having a look at what interviews are, the benefits of interviews, some of the potential drawbacks and some important considerations to make when using interviews. The purpose of this particular presentation is to give you some insight that you can use whilst writing your research proposals. The information may also be useful when you come to employing these methods in your dissertations moving forwards.

Slide 3



So firstly, let's have a look at what interviews are.




The slide is titled "What are Interviews?" in blue text, followed by a horizontal dotted line. Below the line, there are two bulleted lists. The first list contains three items: "Similar in some ways to surveys", "An interviewer and participant", and "Interviewer asks questions and records responses". The second list contains three items: "Structured", "Semi-Structured", and "Unstructured". In the bottom right corner, there is a logo for Arden University, which features a stylized blue 'A' with a tree inside it, and the text "ARDEN UNIVERSITY" below it. A small speaker icon is located in the top right corner of the slide frame.

What are Interviews?


- Similar in some ways to surveys
- An interviewer and participant
- Interviewer asks questions and records responses

- Structured
- Semi-Structured
- Unstructured




Now interviews can be considered similar in some ways to surveys, in that what we're doing is we're taking a series of questions and we're administering them to a population in an effort to find consistent answers. Where they're different though, is that within an interview we have an interviewer and a participant, normally within a one on one situation, where the interviewer asks questions and then records the responses from a participant.

There are three main types of interviews that can be used: Structured, Semi-Structured and Unstructured. I'll explore each of these three to have a look at some of the positives and negatives of them.



Structured Interviews

- Value in both quantitative and qualitative research (Doody and Noonan 2013)
- Standardised set of questions, along with context, to ensure participants are asked the same questions in the same way (Corbetta 2003)
- Requires a schedule and a protocol for questions (McKenna et al 2006)
- Analysis should be straightforward (Holloway and Wheeler 2010)
- No room for respondents to elaborate on answers (Berg 2009)
- Become a spoken questionnaire
- Misunderstanding



So firstly, let's look at structured interviews. Now structured interviews have value both in quantitative and qualitative research. So that is research that is statistically based and research that focuses more on opinion. The way the structured interviews work is that we take a standardised set of question, along with a standardised context and this helps to ensure the participants are asked the same questions in the same way. So we have a rigid schedule and protocol for asking questions. So a structured interview is built around taking specific questions that don't differ from participant to participant and asking those questions specifically. Now what's useful is that this should then give us fairly straightforward analysis, because we can have a limited number of responses to questions and therefore it makes it straightforward to analyse, either statistically or through simple descriptive work.


There are certain drawbacks to be considered here, in that well first off it can just become a spoken questionnaire so we may actually achieve little more in our structured interview than we would if we were to ask the questions via a questionnaire, and there's also no room for responders to elaborate on their answers, because we're only looking for specific answer sets. So we could actually miss out on a lot of useful information. There's also a lot of potential for misunderstanding within the questionnaire, due to the fact that things can't be clarified.

So let's consider this an example, a simple interview question may well be, how many pieces of furniture do you have in your living room? Now on the face of it, that seems like a very straightforward question and people could go away and count how many pieces of furniture they have in the classroom or their living room. Now I've used this particular question as an example in a number of classes, and what you tend to find is that well everyone first off will come up with a different answer, and we

can go round and we can find all those different answers and we can record them. But we might not necessarily have the same context.

So do all the participants consider the same things to be furniture? So would say consider a television set to be furniture? So it may actually be necessary to set out some criteria by which we consider what furniture is. So we could tell a participant initially what would constitute furniture and then we can ask them if they have, well how many items of furniture they have in their living room. Unfortunately, this could then generate some forms of bias, because those people will only be thinking about the examples that have been provided in the guidance.


So whilst structured interviews may seem safe and straightforward and a lot of people consider them to be a nice comfortable way of conducting interviews, they do actually have to be quite meticulously planned in order to take into consideration any of the potential misunderstandings or potential requirements for additional information that participants may have.



Semi-Structured Interviews

- Pre-determined questions with scope to expand on answers (Holloway and Wheeler 2010)
- Initial questions are the same and prompts are generated to delve further as needed
- A guide can be used to enable some consistency without being overly restrictive (David and Sutton 2004)
- Running order can be altered to allow for natural direction and spontaneity (Ryan et al 2009, Power et al 2010)
- Much richer information (Hand 2003)

- Consideration needs to be given to planning – shift in focus due to a lack of planning damages results (Diefenbach 2009)
- Tendency to refine the approach as the interviews progress means later interviews are different (Diefenbach 2009)




Now moving on, semi-structured interviews are probably the most common form of interview that we use, and what we do is similar to a structured interview, we take predetermined questions but this time we allow for scope to expand upon those answers. So, we keep the initial questions the same on a given topic and then we could use prompts to delve further as needed into a particular topic. Now what an interviewer would use in this case is a guide, which will allow some consistency without being overly restrictive. So for example, we could go back to the furniture question, how many items of furniture do you have in your living room? So, a semi-structured interview approach then could take that number and say, what have you included as items of furniture? The responder could then report back, and then there may be prompts. What about item X have you got one of those? Which would allow to delve a little bit more deeply. Or even if we were just testing perception, we could ask, what items did you consider to be furniture and what items didn't you?

And one of the beauties of a semi-structured interview is that we can alter the running order to allow for natural direction and sometimes a spontaneity within the discussion. So we don't necessarily have to be rigidly wedded to the order of questions that we set ourselves initially, and what we get then from this whole process is much richer information from participants. We're able to explore things in more depth. However the headline topic areas remain the same because we still apply that initial structure.


Now, consideration needs to go into planning quite significantly. There is a shift in focus due to a lack of planning and that can damage results. So, it's really, really crucial that whilst we do allow a more open discussion to take place, that we don't allow it to go off track too far, and as with any of these kinds of discussions that we allow to evolve organically, there is a tendency to refine our approach. So as the

interviews progress, so as we move from participant to participant, there is the potential and also the temptation to refine what we're doing, and this is going to mean that as we progress through, the later interviews are actually different to the earlier ones, which reduces our ability to compare them.



Unstructured Interviews

- Only broad questions about a topic are devised, the discussion can go wherever it flows naturally (Holloway and Wheeler 2010)
- Guides tend to focus on themes rather than specifics
- Lots of potential for generating rich information about a topic (Ryan et al 2009)
- Can suffer from difficulties in interpretation
- Lack of ability to easily code the outputs and therefore introduce bias (Ryan et al 2009)



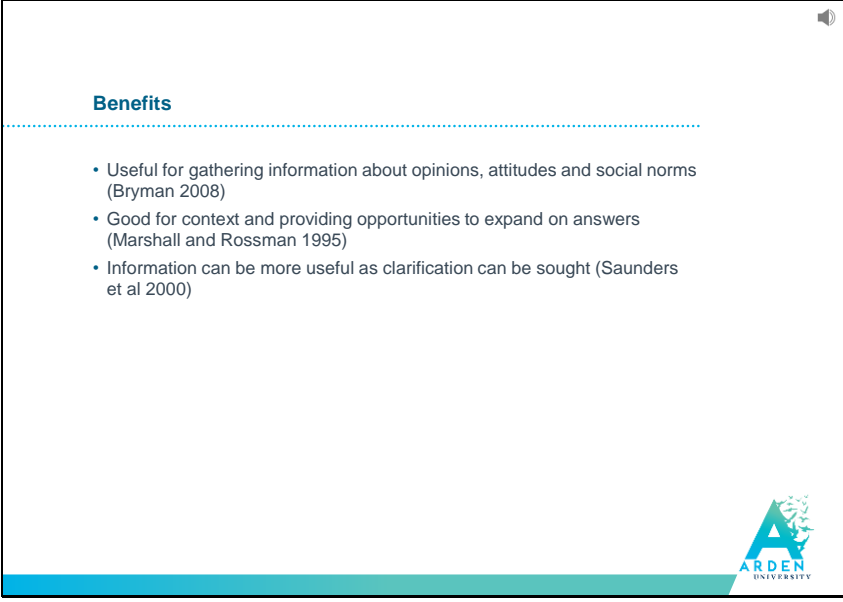
Now finally we see unstructured interviews, and within this we may be able to think about very broad questions about a topic and we allow the discussion to go wherever it flows naturally. So, we could just ask somebody to tell us about their furniture. And the guides will tend to focus on themes rather than specifics. Now there's a lot of potential for generating very rich information about a topic from those, if we can get the participant talking.

These can be used very, very effectively if we know that we want to explore a particular area, but we're not sure exactly the direction that we want to take with our research. Using unstructured interviews can allow us to explore some of the themes and allow them to come out naturally so that we can identify directions for our research to take.

Slide 8




So, let's consider some of the benefits of the interview methodology.



Slide 9 is a presentation slide titled "Benefits". It features a blue header bar with the title "Benefits" in white. Below the title, there is a list of three bullet points. The slide is framed by a thin black border. In the bottom right corner, there is a logo for Arden University, which consists of a stylized 'A' and the text "ARDEN UNIVERSITY".

Benefits

- Useful for gathering information about opinions, attitudes and social norms (Bryman 2008)
- Good for context and providing opportunities to expand on answers (Marshall and Rossman 1995)
- Information can be more useful as clarification can be sought (Saunders et al 2000)



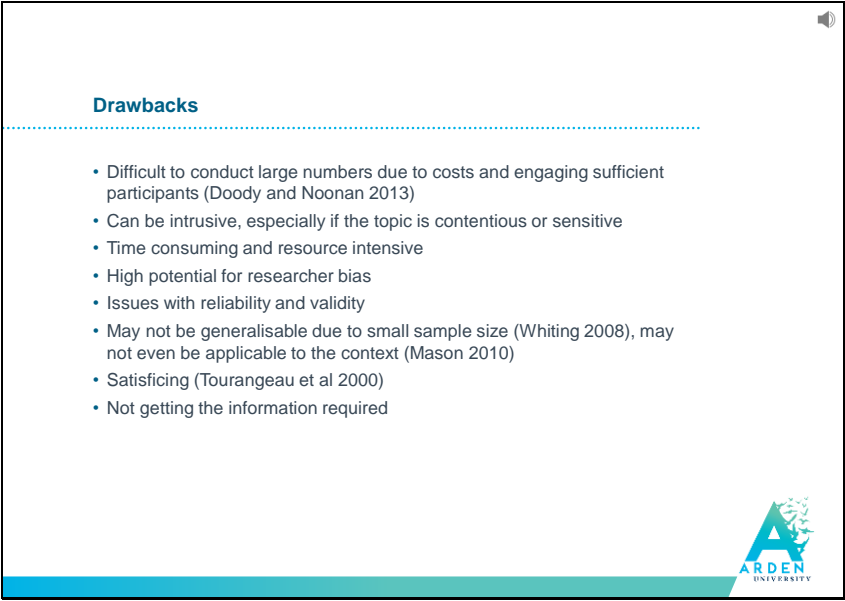
Now firstly, interviews are really, really useful for gathering information about opinions, attitudes and social norms, and they're really good for context and also for providing opportunities to expand on answers. We can allow that spontaneity and that further investigation to take place that simply cannot happen in methods like surveys. It also can't happen through methods like observation because we're not participating with those involved in the research.

Now it could be argued as well that the information is actually more useful as we can seek clarification before we move onto the next question. So it'll actually allow us to have our questions answered rather than have the potential for them to go unanswered.

Slide 10




Now that said, there are also significant drawbacks to the interview method.



A presentation slide titled "Drawbacks" with a list of seven bullet points. The slide has a white background with a blue header bar at the top. The title "Drawbacks" is in blue text. The bullet points are in black text. The Arden University logo is in the bottom right corner. A small speaker icon is in the top right corner.

Drawbacks

- Difficult to conduct large numbers due to costs and engaging sufficient participants (Doody and Noonan 2013)
- Can be intrusive, especially if the topic is contentious or sensitive
- Time consuming and resource intensive
- High potential for researcher bias
- Issues with reliability and validity
- May not be generalisable due to small sample size (Whiting 2008), may not even be applicable to the context (Mason 2010)
- Satisficing (Tourangeau et al 2000)
- Not getting the information required



It is very difficult to conduct large numbers due to costs and also engaging sufficient participants. It takes a long time to do an interview, interviews can only be conducted synchronously really, otherwise it simply becomes a survey and also they have to be conducted in real-time. So if you're going to interview for an hour, it's going to take you an hour.

Interviews can also be considered to be intrusive and that can be especially true if we're talking about a contentious or sensitive topic. So for example, it would be more difficult to find participants to respond to interviews about drug use. It will be much more straightforward to find participants for a survey about drug use, for example. Or if we're looking for participants who are going to comment on say, working practices within an organisation in which they're employed.

We've already mentioned that they are time consuming and resource intensive, and some researchers will resort to using more than one interviewer, which in itself can invalidate the results of the interview, because are both interviewers following exactly the same protocol?

There's an exceptionally high potential for researcher bias, and this is why face to face interviews can be extremely, extremely biased. It's very difficult to not communicate your opinion whilst interviewing, even if you don't do it overtly, simple body language can give away your reaction to somebody's answer or how you feel that question should be answered, and this also leads to issues around reliability and validity.

We have to rely on people's recollection and therefore getting them to recall the same things repeatedly would be very, very difficult, and also we have to rely on the fact that they're telling us the truth.

Now there are issues in terms of the results from interviews being generalisable, so normally we have a relatively small sample size. When I did a large piece of research, I had over 1000 survey responses, but only twenty interviews, and twenty interviews is quite a lot.

It may also be that we're unable to draw any kind of generalisation simply within our research itself. Forget about generalising into a population, our sample size of interviews may be so small that we can't even apply it to our context.

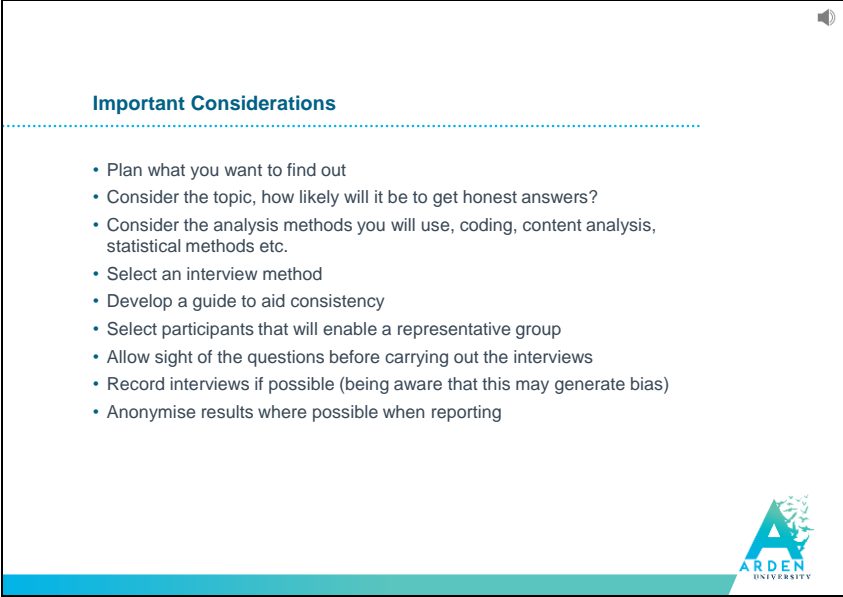
Now a major issue with interview methodology is something called satisficing, and this is where the respondent will tell the researcher what they think the researcher wants to hear, rather than their own opinion and again this can be influenced by the way the questions are asked, the body language of the researcher and simply the topic that's being researched. So we need to bear those sorts of things in mind.

We also may have the issue of not getting all the information that we require. We may not be practiced interviewers and we may not actually dig to the depth that's required to really get the information that we want out of people.

Slide 12




So, let's think of some important considerations that you can use if you choose to apply the interview methodology.



Slide 13 features a title 'Important Considerations' in blue text, followed by a list of nine bullet points. The slide has a blue header bar at the top and a blue footer bar at the bottom. The Arden University logo is in the bottom right corner. A speaker icon is in the top right corner.

Important Considerations

- Plan what you want to find out
- Consider the topic, how likely will it be to get honest answers?
- Consider the analysis methods you will use, coding, content analysis, statistical methods etc.
- Select an interview method
- Develop a guide to aid consistency
- Select participants that will enable a representative group
- Allow sight of the questions before carrying out the interviews
- Record interviews if possible (being aware that this may generate bias)
- Anonymise results where possible when reporting



So crucially, take time to plan what you want to find out. Look at what it is specifically that you want to ask, consider the topic and how likely it is that you're going to get honest answers about your topic. It may well be that you want to look at a different approach. Also look at the analysis methods that you'll use, are you going to do coding and content analysis? Are you going to try to apply some kind of statistical methodology? Which in itself can be very difficult with the small numbers. So we always think about how the answers are going to be used in the future.

Develop a guide that will look at what are the specific questions, and then if you're going to use a semi-structured approach, how can those be backed up with additional prompts?

Try to target and select participants that will enable a representative group for the population that you want to talk about. Now getting people to participate in interviews can often be very, very difficult as we've mentioned, and one approach that I've used in the past to help to get people to participate is to actually ask for volunteers of those who are willing to participate in the exercise, and from there then, participants have been randomly selected. So there is an element of self-selection within the process and it just needs to be recognised.

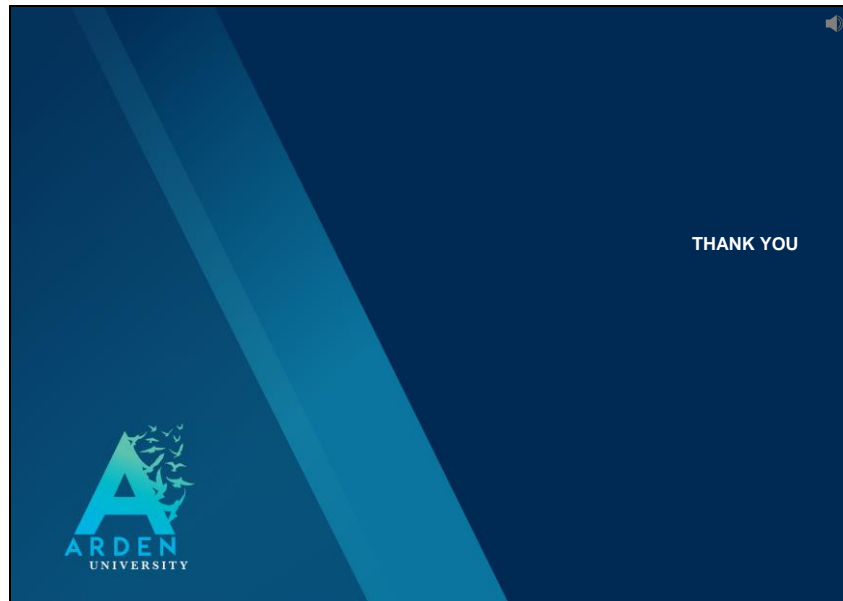
It's also a good idea to allow participants sight of the questions before you actually carry out the interviews. This will just give them a chance to think about their responses and make the whole process run more smoothly and the participant to be more comfortable.

And also, record your interviews if possible. Now, be aware that this could actually generate bias in itself, so if you train a video camera on a participant, then they're

going to have questions about their anonymity and may not participate effectively. Similarly, if you're going to just record them audially. However recording is a very good idea because you can't rely on your own notes being entirely accurate.

Now in the past, I've done a number of telephone interviews and I've just simply used an app on my mobile phone that allows me to record the conversation and I've let the participant know that that's the case and then we tend to ease into it with a few questions that aren't really related to the topic but just help to put people at their ease and help to build a rapport. Afterwards then, the recordings can be transcribed and the interviews can be looked at.

And wherever possible, try to anonymise the results. So, even though we're targeting specific individuals, make sure that we don't know really who they are. So take every step possible to anonymise those results.



So hopefully this has given you an overview of the interview methodology and some of the benefits and drawbacks associated with it.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me. Thank you.

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