SI 501: Interview Protocol
[Team Assignment – due Oct. 4]

Objectives

- To prepare for your interview sessions by creating a framework for your interviews.
- To think in advance about what would help you better understand the following:
    - For client-based projects: A client's existing information workflow; what the workflow is supposed to be, what is or isn't working, where there are workflow breakdowns, and how people work around them.
    - For design challenges: details about actions or behaviors surrounding a target group's problem that would help you define their needs and design a solution.
- To create an initial set of interview questions for each of the people you will interview.

Assignment

- Refer to Chapters 3 and 4 of *Rapid Contextual Design*. (You read both already – these chapters are in Canvas.)

- Create **at least three *separate protocols***, one for each of your interviewee categories (or job roles). It's OK to repeat a lot of the questions from one protocol to another, but interviewees with different job roles should be asked at least some questions that are unique to their role. (Also, see *Scoping Note* below.)

- Write an **introduction script**. Refer to the Sample Interview Protocol provided separately in Canvas, which you can use as a template. Generally, this will apply for all the protocols, so you probably only need to draft one – then, you can copy it across all the protocols. It should include…
    - The purpose of the interview
    - Introduction of the two team members and their roles
    - What you will do during the interview and why; mention time expected
    - Your stance as a learner
    - That they can stop if they feel uncomfortable
    - Confidentiality statement. If you signed a formal non-disclosure agreement, mention that. Either way, you can promise that you will not reveal proprietary information, but you should say that you are part of a course and may discuss general work flow concerns with your instructors or classroom colleagues.
    - How you will follow up
    - Get permission to make an audio recording of the interview, if possible.
    - No gifts! The textbook discusses gifts as incentives to participate, but we don't do this in SI 501, so don't mention them.

- Write **one overarching question**. This question is the main one you will keep in the back of your mind during the interview to guide the direction of the interview. The overarching question should be broad enough to cover the information you want to hear from the interviewee, but focused enough that it is specific to the interviewee category.

Across interviewee categories, the overarching questions may be very similar, but they shouldn't necessarily be exactly the same.

- For each interviewee category, **write about 10 key questions** (5 is too few; 20 is probably too many). Tips for key questions…
  - To the extent possible, ask interviewees to talk about *concrete details of specific events or instances*. **Good examples** (key phrases are italicized):
    - "*Tell me about the last time* you performed this process."
    - "*Can you walk me through a specific time* when X happened?"
    - "*Could you tell me how* you responded *to that instance*, from the beginning?"
  - In contrast, questions that ask the interviewee to answer what happens "typically," "usually," or "in general," are *not* asking about concrete instances. They are asking the interviewee to generalize their own experience. It's OK to ask such questions occasionally, or in follow-up questions, but they shouldn't be the majority of your key questions. You want to elicit concrete details! (It's your team's job as researchers/consultants to do any generalization from specific examples.)
  - Otherwise, avoid key questions…
    - that are closed-ended (e.g., "Did you like the process?" → a better question would be: "How did you feel about the process?");
    - that are leading (e.g., "How did that frustrate you?" → better: "How did you feel as a result?"); or
    - that could be perceived as judgmental (e.g., "Why couldn't you finish that task?" → better: "What made the task difficult?").
  - Some of the key questions should prompt the interviewee to walk through the relevant work flow and talk through the process as you observe them (to the extent this is possible).

- **Cluster the key questions by theme, and order them in a sensible way.** This helps both you and the interviewee. Think about the ordering of the clusters, and also the ordering of questions within each cluster:
  - Topics should flow in a way that is easy for interviewees to follow.
  - Questions that are more open-ended should precede more specific questions about the same topic. This allows the interviewee to respond first with the way that *they* think about the topic.
  - Questions that might be sensitive should be asked toward the end of a cluster, or even toward the end of the interview. If a question might erode rapport with the client, you want to do it later in a cluster of questions or later in the interview.
  - Sometimes, it helps to include transitions, such as, "Let's switch to a different topic."

- **Write follow-up questions.** These will probably follow most of the key questions you've written above. You will almost certainly not ask all of these questions – they are meant to help you, in case your interviewee's responses to your key question did not cover everything you want to hear.

  - Follow-up questions are meant to fill holes in information, or to hear more about interesting issues that the interviewee raises. The goal is either to make sure the interviewee has really addressed the key question to your satisfaction, or to follow up on leads that you may not have anticipated, but which are relevant to the problem.
  - It's OK for some of the follow-up questions to be leading, because sometimes you really need to hear about that issue, and the interviewee may not bring it up on their own.
  - See the Sample Interview Protocol for examples.

- Overall, avoid these common errors:
  - Including too many closed-ended, short-answer questions. If most of your questions are closed-ended, you will have a short interview in which you learn very little. (However, it's OK to have some short-answer questions, especially during warm up, or when you need concrete information to ask an open-ended follow-up question.)
  - Not asking about specific, concrete instances. It's OK to have some questions that ask interviewees to summarize what they know, but these should not dominate the protocol. (People often do not summarize accurately, and summaries in interviews are not as credible as concrete information. It's *your* job to analyze and summarize, not your interviewees'.)
  - Having too few interviewee categories / question sets. Less than three suggests that you need more variety among your interviewees. See *Scoping Note* below.
  - Not tailoring questions to the job function.
  - Asking about basic information that you could easily have found out through an online search, etc.
  - Asking irrelevant questions that don't contribute to the overarching question, or which aren't pertinent to your understanding of the problem.
  - Adopting a tone that could be interpreted as doubting the interviewee, or evaluating the interviewee's competence. "Why isn't this a problem you can solve by looking up online help?" could sound accusatory. A better way to phrase this question is, "When you encounter obstacles like this, how do you go about addressing them?"
  - Asking too many leading questions that include an assumption that may not be true, or which influence the interviewee to answer in a particular way. Examples…
    - "Isn't this a poor user interface?" (This is almost badgering the person to agree with you; also, it might not get at *how* the UI is "bad.")
      - Instead, try: "What do you think of this user interface, and why?"
    - "Is it because of an inefficient process that this task is difficult?" (This nudges the interviewee to think about how the process is bad, when it might be something else entirely.)
      - Instead, try: "What do you think makes this task difficult?"

- Write a conclusion script. Ask them if they have any other things to tell you. Let them know the interview is over. Thank the interviewee. Let them know what will happen next.

Scoping Note

Although you focused on scoping during the initial client contact, you may not realize scoping problems until you start thinking about the interview protocol. If any of the following issues arises, speak with your GSI or professor, and do it soon!

As a team, you should plan for *at least* six interviews from a variety of users. Most teams complete exactly six interviews, but some teams in the past have conducted as many as twelve interviews. As long as the quality of interviews is high, more is better until you stop learning new things.

If you find that you need *many* more than six interviews in order to understand the problem, your project may be too broad and need re-scoping.

If you find that you need fewer than six interviews, or if you struggle to have at least three interviewer categories, your project may be too narrow and may need re-scoping.

The textbook encourages you to spend two hours on each interview, but for this class, 60-90 minutes per person is sufficient. If you think you need more time (or dramatically less time) per person, your scope may be too large (or too small).

Submission

- Due: Oct. 4, *before* lecture.
- As a team, submit your document – with at least three separate protocols – as a file (in .pdf, .doc, or .docx format) to Canvas. (Do not submit a link to Google Docs or any other site that would allow for editing to continue post-submission.)

Rubric

Grading is out of 100.

- Good introductory script. [10%]
- Each page of interviews identifies the job role or function of the interviewee(s). [5%]
- Good overarching question for <u>*each*</u> stakeholder type. [15%]
- The key questions are good. The number of questions per interviewee is appropriate. They are clustered in a sensible way. The questions are focused on issues that will help you understand the problem and make recommendations to solve the problem. They avoid the common errors noted above. [50%]
- There are appropriate follow-up questions under some of the key questions. [10%]
- Good conclusion script. [10%]
- Extra credit for exceptional work. [5%]