

PLSC 308: Introduction to Political Research

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March 17, 2016

Survey Administration

Goals: Reduce nonresponse and increase response quality...

“Passive” Modes:

- Ensuring target sample / group is reached accurately
- *Follow-up* (varies by mode)

“Active” Modes:

- “Scripting” and pretesting
- Interviewer “soft skills” (by mode)
- Interviewer Bias (conscious + unconscious + respondent-driven)
- “*Probing*”

Interviews

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graph TD; Interviews --> Structured; Interviews --> Semi_Unstructured[Semi- or Unstructured];
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Structured

- E.g. surveys
- Qualitative or quantitative
- Typically "mass"
- Pro: Reliability
- Con: Inflexibility

Semi- or Unstructured

- "In-depth" or "intensive"
- Mainly qualitative
- Mass or "elite"
- Pro: Flexibility, depth
- Con: They're hard

In-Depth Interviewing: Key Concepts¹

- Preparation
- Shared Meaning
- Commitment / Reciprocity
- Flexibility

¹Adapted from Gray et al. *The Research Imagination* (2007).

Things to Ask Yourself:

- What do I need to know from this person?
- Can I get this information elsewhere? Is this the best / only person who can provide me with this information?
- How do I approach this person?
- How much time can I expect this person to give me?
- Can I verify the facts / premises of every question I will ask?
- How will I handle different (likely / possible) answers?

Rule of Thumb:

Preparation Time = $5 \times$ Interview Length

The Challenge: Reaching common understanding about the meaning of the conversation.

Tips:

- Establish a rapport (see “Commitment / Reciprocity,” below)
- Flexibility / willingness to go “off script”
- Varying / ordering question types

Extracting Meaning: Question Types (A Typology)

- Introducing (“Tell me about how you became involved with the Sanders campaign.”)
- Clarifying (“What do you mean by ‘neoliberal’ ?”)
- Follow-up (“What happened after Iowa?”)
- Probing (“Tell me more about that decision.”)
- Interpreting (“So by ‘Goldman Sachs,’ you mean Wall Street in general?”)
- Structuring (“Now I’m interested in your opinions about Secretary Clinton...”)

**Interview subjects are human beings
engaging in a (somewhat) forced
interaction.**

The Interview Schedule

- **Structured / Standardized:** All questions asked in the same way/order of every respondent (surveys, etc.)
- **Nonschedule Standardized:** All questions are asked of every respondent, but in different ways / orders
- **Semi-Structured:** Nonschedule standardized + additional unstructured questions
- **Unstructured:** No standardized schedule of questions is asked

- Gaining Access
- Before the Interview
- During the Interview
- After the Interview