

Conducting Good Interviews

Here are a few guidelines to help you through your first interviews.

1. Test your instrument! You are creating an interview script as a group, thus as a group you should also test out the questions before jumping straight into an interview. This can be as simple as turning to a colleague or spouse/relative/roommate and taking them through the questions. It will help you learn if there are parts where it is not well understood so that you can be clearer or if there are parts where you are stumbling over the words so you can make it simpler.
2. Before you start any interview, get consent first to both conduct it and record it. Though this is not an IRB research project, you do have to gain consent first and you do have to inform your interviewee that their identity will be kept confidential and that they can end the conversation at any time. Right after you say hello and thank them for coming, have them agree to be recorded and sign the consent form.
 - a. For remote interviews, the informed consent document should be sent ahead of the interview after a date and time has already been agreed upon. If you have not received a signed copy (photograph or scan is fine) back prior to the interview, be sure to contact them before it begins and insist on a signed document be sent back to you before you go through with the interview.
 - b. Prior to starting a recording, you must ask if the interviewee agrees to being recorded and then you must inform them as you begin the recording. For this class, all interviews must be recorded. That said, if your interviewee feels more comfortable with just an audio recording, that is fine. In either case, we are not asking you to upload the recording. This will be for your use only so that you can transcribe it later and refer back to it as needed.
 - c. At the beginning of the recorded remote interview, be sure to remind them of the informed consent document they signed and their rights to privacy and to terminate the conversation at any time. Having them state that they read and agree to the informed consent document on the recording is an added bonus to the signed form.
 - d. Do NOT have them state their name at any point during the recorded interview. Please remind them that if they want their information to be kept confidential, they should not self-identify on the recording.
 - e. Do NOT file the informed consent document with the interview recording or transcript. As a group you should all have a folder where you upload your informed consent documents so that you have a record of them. The should not be filed away with recordings or transcripts or linked in anyway with the data from the people you speak to.

- f. As you refer to the research throughout your analysis and synthesis and into your results and recommendations, remember to refer to the interviewee with a code/code name rather than their name.
- 3. Though we are not compensating our interviewees for this assignment, in the future when you are doing this for a company, it is good practice to give your interviewee their compensation up front. This way they have already received what was promised to them and neither of you end up in an awkward situation later if it has to be terminated for one reason or another.
 - a. In future situations where compensation is not possible, providing other options is a nice gesture. For example:
 - i. Internal users? Provide lunch, or a snack for their time.
 - ii. External volunteers? In the past I've provided people the opportunity to state they were a part of a testing team as a short blurb on their resume/LinkedIn. It shows they are valued for their opinion and provides them with social capital.
- 4. Make sure your informant has stopped speaking before you begin
 - a. This interview is about them, not us! As the interviewers, we should have a minimal amount of talking throughout the interview once we've gotten beyond the establishing rapport portion of it.
- 5. If they try to interrupt, let them!
 - a. That said, if the interview gets out of hand because the interviewee is belligerent or abusive in any way, you have the right to terminate it. Simply tell them the interview has now concluded and thank them for their time.
 - b. There are some caveats to this in that depending on the content and context of the interview there may be subjects broached that could be uncomfortable, if it is in the interest of the interview to continue, do the best you can to do so. If it is not, do what you can to bring them back on topic.
 - c. If you determine the interviewee is no longer a good fit, it is ok to find a good spot to end it as soon as possible. There is no reason to continue on with an interview when you are not getting the information you need.
 - i. For this assignment, interviews should be a minimum of 20 minutes in length. If you end up with an interviewee that is not a good fit, you should find a new one as soon as possible. It is recommended that you find 2 or 3 people that fit your target participant needs from the beginning so that you can sub one out as needed.
 - ii. Additionally, you will be conducting two interviews for this course. If you already have recruited the people you need plus a couple of extras, it makes it a lot easier to get them done and over with without having to scramble for volunteers. (I would recommend not conducting your second interview until you have received your critique of your first so that you have feedback to work with when doing it a second time).

- iii. If you have a great interviewee and haven't found a second one, you should ask them for recommendations. This way you are getting further away from your own circle for respondents.
- 6. Make sure you're both talking about the same thing. I always like to start an interview with them defining the subject.
 - a. i.e. When I was doing research on video games, I'd ask the interviewee to define video games at the very beginning. The different answers were particularly interesting.
 - b. If you don't want your interviewee to know what exactly you're interviewing about (this may be the case in situations where it would bias the interview or reveal who the interview is for when that is supposed to be confidential), that's fine. Just find a way to make sure you both understand what you're talking about when it comes to the basic subject matter and the question topics.
- 7. Make sure they understand there are no right or wrong answers.
 - a. Reassure them as needed. Some interviewees will think they need to answer a specific way to make you happy. They should know from the beginning that you don't feel strongly one way or another. You're simply there to learn about how THEY feel.
- 8. It's ok to mess up! This is a learning experience. Your ability to recover and keep going will be what is most important.
 - a. I've had the occasional mess up where I had to say "Wait, let me start over again" or "Hang on, let me rephrase that question". It happens to the best of us. And yes, you'll want to transcribe this as it's important to understand the context of the conversation. I want you to know this is an important part of the learning process and you won't be counted off in any way if it happens.
- 9. Make sure to establish a rapport. You can start out with friendly conversation before you get started with the interview questions. It is highly encouraged to do so.
 - a. Try something like "Thank you for agreeing to speak with me. Before we get started, let's have a little get to know you session. Tell me, if you could be anywhere today other than here right now, where would you be and why?"
 - i. This may have absolutely nothing to do with the interview topic. It's to get them talking and telling stories. It makes it a lot easier to transition into the interview with them prepped and ready to go when they are already in the story telling mode.
- 10. Leave the recorder going. Even after the interview has "ended" do not turn off the recorder until your informant or you have physically left the conversation. There have been MANY times where my conversations have been jump-started another 2 or 3 times after I have ended them.
- 11. Be conscious of your non-verbal cues. Watch your facial reactions and body movements.
 - a. Given that for this class, most if not all of our interviews will be remote recorded sessions, practicing with a mirror behind your computer as you test your instrument will help you recognize when you're reacting non-verbally. I would not

recommend trying to watch yourself on camera as that is a bad habit to get into when you should be focusing on your interviewee.

12. Last but not least, be kind. This person is giving up their time to talk to you for no reason beyond the fact that you asked them to. They are doing you a favor. Treat it as such.