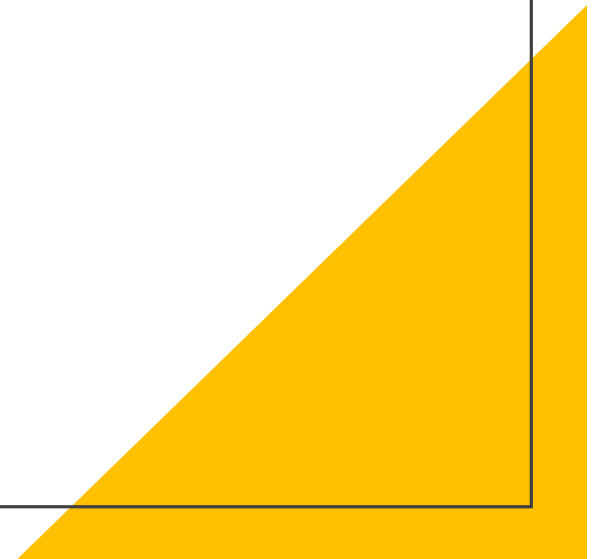# Interviews

Doing Political Research

What is an Interview?

- Purposeful conversation with participants
- Dyadic interaction, with clearly defined roles: interviewer/interviewee
- Usually between strangers - formal
- 'Inter' – 'view' suggests an exchange of views between two people, but usually quite one-sided

Types of Research Interview

- Structured
- Semi-structured
- Unstructured/informal
- Specific sub-types, for example:
    - Life history
    - Oral history
- Focus groups (later this term)
- Elites: specific issues that will be covered later in term

Who Will You Interview?

Who Will You Interview?

- Who do you want to interview?

- What is the target population?

- How can you get access to them?

- How representative a sample can you obtain?

- How much does representativeness matter?

Finding Interviewees

- Personal networks
- Direct contact
- Advertising
- Use of intermediaries (organisations or individuals)
- Research companies
- Snowball sampling
- Purposive sampling

But who isn't interviewed? Could this skew your results?

Who Interviews?

Who Interviews?

What characteristics can be identified about the interviewer(s)?

How might these characteristics influence interviewees' responses?

What might be assumed about the intentions of the interviewer?

Positionality of the interviewer

Interviewer Effects

- Social desirability, stereotype threat, desire to please
- Early research on (survey) interviewer effects focused on race in the USA
  - Black respondents were more likely to say they would vote to a co-racial interviewer
  - Black respondents got fewer answers correct in factual questions about politics when interviewed by white interviewers
  - White respondents gave more liberal, less racist answers when interviewed by black interviewers
- Other interviewer effects: gender, age, religiosity, who is running the study
- Practical issues: use of interpreter or intermediary
- How to minimise?
  - Multiple interviewers
  - Clear statement of research goals at the beginning
  - Present as neutrally as possible

Where Will the Interviews Take Place?

Where Will the Interviews Take Place?

Will the interviews be in person, by phone/Zoom or by email?

If in person, where will they take place? In interviewees' homes or workplaces, a café, on the street, a meeting room?

How might the format and/or physical location affect the interview?

Interview Formats/Location

- Often depends on practical issues and types of population you are interviewing
- Aim should be to make the interviewees comfortable
- Be aware of how the format/location could affect the interview
- Could a variety of formats be useful? Pilot your interview design

How Will You Conduct the Interview?

How Will You Conduct the Interview?

- How structured will you make the interview?
- What specific questions will you ask?
- Will you ask follow-up questions?
- How will you respond to interviewers who are evasive, go off-topic, repeatedly change their mind?
- Will you use vignettes or hypotheticals?
- How will you record the interview?
- How might all of these choices affect interviewers' responses?

Conducting Interviews

- There is a lot of advice in textbooks, articles etc

- Two key issues: preparation and flexibility

- Pilot studies can be useful to refine your approach

Remember, all of your decisions can affect the content of the interview

Preparing an Interview Guide (*Bryman's Social Research Methods*)

- Create a certain amount of order in terms of the topic area
- Formulate interview questions or topics in a way that will help you answer your research questions
- Use language that will be comprehensible and relevant
- Avoid leading questions
- Ask for relevant contextual information
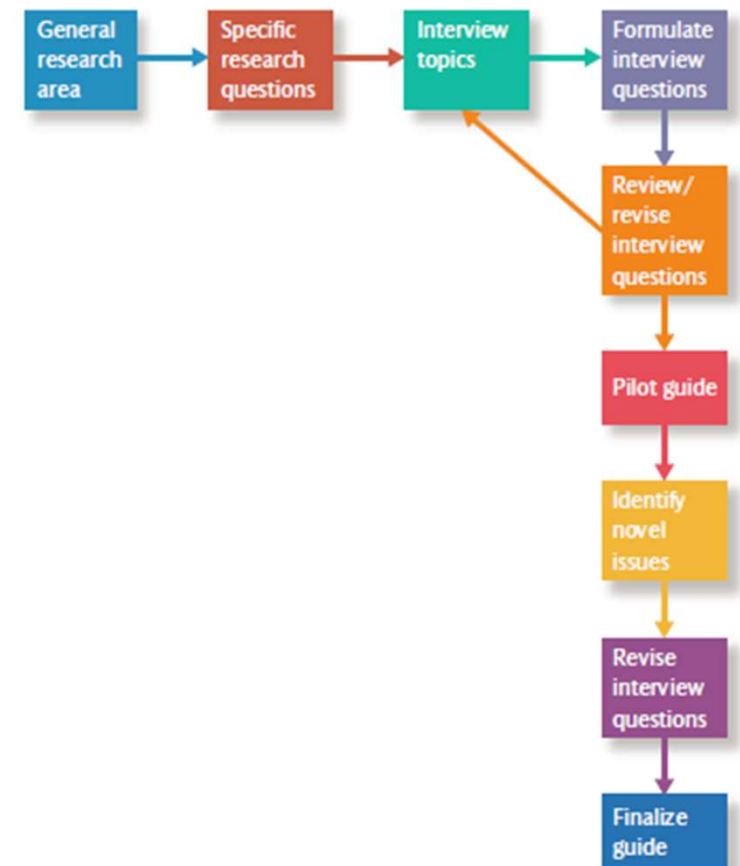
How Will You Analyse the Data?

Analysing Interview Data

- What data have you collected?
  - Recordings
  - Transcripts
  - Notes (during, after)
- Thematic analysis: finding patterns in the data
  - Inductive
  - Deductive
- Computer software can help with organising and coding data eg NVivo, MaxQDA, Atlas.ti

Ontology and Epistemology (Mosley)

- Positivists
  - Use interviews to test hypotheses and establish causal relationships between social phenomena
  - Interviewer effects should be minimised and/or controlled for
  - Data should be replicable

- Interpretivists
  - Use interviews to explore participant's understand of social phenomena
  - Sensitive to the 'double hermeneutic': replicability more difficult to achieve
  - Interviews as a process not a product
  - Positionality and power relationships are central

- But dividing lines are not always strict

INTERVIEW RESEARCH
in Political Science

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LAYNA MOSLEY

Conclusion

- Many issues to consider in designing interview research: interviewees, interviewers, mode/location of interview, type/style of interview, deductive or inductive coding of data

- These choices will affect the answers you receive

- Preparation, flexibility and piloting are key