

CHAPTER SEVEN

and without jargon. This advice is especially important in text-based asynchronous environments where the ability to clarify is especially important in text-based asynchronous environments where the ability to clarify is reduced. For example, the e-researcher may ask a question to which the participant provides a lengthy reply that completely misses the point of the question. In a face-to-face interview, the researcher will know early on by the response that the question has been misunderstood, and can quickly clarify the misunderstanding. The e-researcher can reduce the odds of misunderstanding and gather useful data by adhering to following guidelines:

Familiarize yourself with the language and culture of the target participants. Using the communication software, pilot the interview question(s) to a few individuals (two or three) who have characteristics similar to (or the same as) the intended participants. Tackling these actions prior to the interview will help identify problems with language usage and avoid faux pas through insensitivity. Ask one question at a time.

This may seem like common sense. But Patton (1987), for example, points out a mistake that interviewers often make—putting several questions together into one question (sometimes referred to as a double-barreled question). Responding to double-barreled questions can be quite difficult, if not impossible. Consider the following question:

Do you agree that the Internet is a useful tool for data collection, or do you think it is most useful as an information tool?

This sample question illustrates three types of problems. First, it asks two questions: (1) Do you agree that the Internet is a useful tool for data collection, and (2) do you think it is most useful as an information tool? Moreover, it might be difficult to answer if the participant does not feel that the Internet is useful as either as a tool for data collection or as an information tool. Alternatively, the participant might feel that it is useful for data collection, and (2) do you think it is most useful as an information tool? Moreover, it might be difficult to answer if the participant does not feel that the Internet is useful for data collection or as an information tool. Alternatively, the participant might feel that useful for both data collection and as an information tool. Hence, the participant might have difficulty answering this question given that there are two questions and an indication that an "either/or" response must be made between the two. The second problem with this question is that it is not an open-ended question. Questions that begin with "Do you" or "Would you" allow the participant to respond with "yes/no" statements and, as such, do not provide the researcher with much insight about why. A better question format for the semi-structured interview is open-ended. Questions beginning with "What do you think about," "Tell me your opinion about," or "How do you feel about," allow the participant to respond in their own terms.

Finally, in the above sample, the question are leading-particularly the first question. A question asking if someone "agrees" is value-laden. The e-researcher should be careful not word question as directive (with words such as agree or disagree) to guard against influencing the participant to respond in a certain way. A better way to word this question is:

What is your opinion about the usefulness of the Internet?