

CHAPTER SEVEN

of facilitating a conversation, rather than only a sequential interview, is increased. Depending on the characteristics of the participants, the e-researcher should use a writing style that is more conversational and friendly academic.

Sample Welcome Message

Hello [first name of participant]:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. Further to my invitation letter, I would like to arrange a date to begin the interview. I was hoping we might begin Monday of next week and take longer than about 10 minutes each. I also thought we could cover one question every second day, but I am flexible and could make an alternate arrangement if this is inconvenient.

If you need to contact me other than by email, you can call me at [area code and phone number] during the day or [area code and phone number] during the evening.

I look forward hearing from you!

Regards,

[first name of e-researcher]

We suggest the questions should not be presented to the participant at this point in the interview process. The rationale for this is that, typically, in unstructured and semi-structured interviews, the questions change based on earlier responses. As the interview progresses, for example, the e-researcher may wish to build on previous comments or rephrase questions so that they conform to the language of the participant. Moreover, during the interview, the e-researcher may discover an unexpected area that needs further exploration and is extremely relevant and enlightening to the topic.

ASKING THE QUESTIONS

Asking good interview questions is considered to be an art, because getting meaningful answers is often difficult and depends to great extent on the wording and tone of the questions. Fontana and Frey (1994) maintain that no matter how carefully we word the questions(s), there is always a residue of ambiguity. This problem is magnified in text-based asynchronous interviews. One of the most effective ways of reducing this ambiguity is to use good questioning techniques, which in turn will enable the e-researcher to obtain more accurate information from the participants and garner useful.