



ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

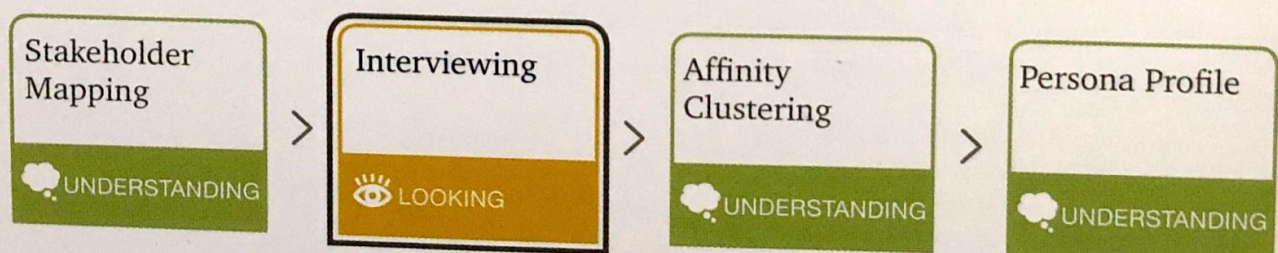
Interviewing

A technique for gathering information through direct dialogue

PEOPLE GENERALLY enjoy telling stories about their experiences. A good interview helps you take advantage of this natural inclination in order to gather valuable information. Interviewing gives you an opportunity to speak directly with the people who can help you make informed decisions. Through these interviews you gain a better sense of people and their views of the world by subtly eliciting their true feelings, desires, struggles, and opinions through a few carefully crafted questions. An additional sensitivity to the unplanned and unscripted aspects of an interview can allow for equally illuminating discoveries.

A good interviewer needs to be attuned to the interviewee to know when to probe for more information, when to redirect the conversation, and how to parse what is *meant* from what is *said*. In other words, one must, as journalist Lawrence Grobel said, “converse like a talk show host, think like a writer, understand subtext like a psychiatrist, [and] have an ear like a musician.”

A SAMPLE COMBINATION: This a good sequence of methods for making decisions about whom to interview, then analyzing and summarizing your findings.



Here's an example of an interviewer asking a commuter about her use of public transportation. She learned that the commuter was highly motivated by environmental concerns.



QUICK GUIDE

- Identify a topic for investigation.
- Prepare your questions and recording equipment.
- Determine your criteria for selecting interviewees.
- Identify the people you will interview.
- Set a time and place to meet them.
- Introduce yourself and the purpose. Obtain consent.
- Start with easy questions, then draw out specifics.
- Listen carefully and take good notes.
- Thank each participant.

HELPFUL HINTS

- Try to choose a location with minimal distractions.
- Don't put words into the interviewee's mouth.
- Resist the urge to conduct an analysis at this stage.

BENEFITS

- Helps you gain information directly
- Challenges your preconceptions
- Deepens your empathy for others
- Builds credibility with stakeholders

