Designing Stakeholder Outreach
The Art of Customer Discovery & The "Mom Test"

February 12, 2026

Learning Objectives

By the end of the class, you should be able to…

1. Distinguish Generative (Stories) vs. Clarifying (Facts) questions

2. Identify and remove "Validation Traps" (Pitching, Hypotheticals)

3. Refine your interview guide using simulated feedback

Warm-Up: Pick Your Stakeholder and Learning Goal

Individually (2 minutes)

» Pick **one stakeholder** you will contact first

» Write **one learning goal**: "What do I need to learn from them?"

» Write **one assumption** you're making about them

Pair-Share (4 minutes)

» Why that stakeholder first?

» What would you be disappointed to learn is false?

The Golden Rule of Discovery

The Rule: The quality of your insights is determined by the quality of your questions.

Pitc~~h~~ ~~od~~

You aren't here to SELL.
You are here to LEARN.

Ask for stories → Uncover pain points → Find the truth

Generative vs. Clarifying Questions

Generative (stories): Open a narrative and provide context

- » "Tell me about the last time…"
- » "Walk me through…"

Clarifying (facts): Tightens details

- » "How often?"
- » "Who decides?"
- » "What happened next?"

Default Sequence:

Stories first → Facts second

Validation Traps (and Fixes!)
The most common trap is seeking validation

» **Pitching:** "Here's my idea… what do you think?"

» **Hypotheticals:** "Would you use…?"

» **Leading:** "Don't you think…?"

» **"What do you want?":** Wishlist instead of reality

Instead…

» Ask about **past behavior**

» Ask for **specifics and examples**

» Probe **constraints and tradeoffs**

The "Mom Test"

» Talk about their life, not your idea

» Ask about specifics in the past, not opinions about the future

» Don't ask for compliments

» Look for commitment (time, referrals, data, a next step)

Activity 1: Draft Your Interview Guide

» Pick one stakeholder and one learning goal

» Draft 3–5 generative questions and 2 clarifying questions

» Add 2 follow-up probes you can use anytime. E.g.,

> » "Can you give me an example?"
>
> » "What made that hard?"

Check Yo Self! Circle anything that sounds like pitching/hypothetical/leading

Activity 2 – Part 1: AI Role Play
Stakeholder Simulator

» [Link in Canvas](#) module to a custom GPT

» Click on "I'm ready to practice my stakeholder interview"

» Respond to the questions, then begin the interview

» Revise interview guide in real-time (see next slide)

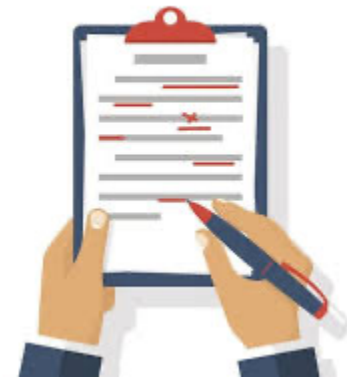» When finished, tell the GPT to go into coaching mode

» Ask for feedback!

Activity 2 – Part 2: Guide Revision
Use the GPT responses to revise your interview guide

1. Ask the draft questions as written
2. After each response, ask yourself:
   » Did I get a **story** or **opinion**?
   » What was missing?
   » What should I ask next?
3. Develop V2 of your interview guide as you go

You can also have the GPT give you direct feedback on your draft!

Debrief: What Improved from V1 to V2?

In small groups…

» Share:
  » Your V1 question
  » Your V2 question
  » Why it's better (1 sentence)

» Example improvements:
  » More past-based?
  » Less leading?
  » More specific?
  » Better "probe" follow-ups?

Your First Contact Plan

Do this NOW, not "someday"

1. Choose your channel (e.g., Email, telephone, in-person, LinkedIn, warm intro

2. Ask for a small, respectful commitment

   » 15 minutes

   » "I'm trying to learn, not pitch"

3. Ethics and respect

   » Informed, voluntary participation

   » No pressure, no deception

   » Don't collect identifying info you don't need

Exit Ticket: Draft Interview Guide
Submit by 11:59PM tonight

Exit Ticket

By 11:59PM tonight (2/12) please submit your **"Exit Ticket" for this class session.** Exit ticket submissions are a significant part of your Process & Engagement (Process Deliverables) grade.

Draft Interview Guide

Overview

This assignment asks you to submit a refined set of interview questions for a key stakeholder you plan to engage. This guide should leverage the principles of effective questioning and the insights gained from our in-class AI-enhanced role-playing activity.

Submission Requirements

For this exit ticket, please submit a **Draft Interview Guide** for **one specific stakeholder** you intend to outreach to. Your submission must include:

1. **Specific Stakeholder Identification:**
   - Clearly state the name or type of the specific stakeholder you are creating this guide for (e.g., "Director of City Parks and Recreation," "Local High School Principal," "Frequent User of Public Transit").
2. **Key Learning Goals:**
   - Briefly outline 2-3 specific insights or pieces of information you hope to gain from this stakeholder that are crucial for your venture. (e.g., "Understand the current budget allocation process for park maintenance," "Learn about challenges in student attendance," "Discover common frustrations with current public transit routes").
3. **Refined Interview Questions:**
   - List 3-5 open-ended questions designed to achieve your stated learning goals. These questions should reflect the "Art of the Question" principles discussed in class (e.g., avoiding leading questions, focusing on past experiences, seeking stories) and incorporate the refinements made during your AI role-playing practice.

Submission

Please submit your response using text entry or by uploading a PDF or Word document (.doc, .docx).

Closing Thought...

Social ventures fail less from bad ideas

and more from

IGNORED PEOPLE