A Cheatsheet for User Interview and Follow Ups Questions

When I prepare user interviews (or usability tests), I end up coming back to the same resources again. I put together this cheat sheet to help me write interview questions, follow ups and usability test protocols.
Those are fragments of questions to help you get started with your own. I organised them by "needs". I hope it will help you in some ways.

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User Interview Questions

Open discovery questions

- Tell me about ...?
- Why do you ...?
- How much/many...
- How often do you...?
- Could you describe to me how you... / your experience with...?
- What ... do you use / do ?

Understanding user tasks / activities

- Can you describe how you / how you would ...?
- What are all the things you need to do in order to...?
- Walk me through ..., how would you?
- What is the difference between ... and ...?

Performing / showing

- Can you show me how you ... ?
- Can you guide me [to do the tast]?

Recalling the past / anticipating the future

- Can you recall a situation when you ..., what did you do?
- Can you tell me about your most significant/ memorable experience/interaction with...?
- How do you think ... is going to help you?
- Could you describe the ideal product / experience...?

Opinions / points of view / attitude and projections

- What do you think about ...?
- What do you like/dislike about...?
- What would your friend/partner/colleague think of that?
- Some people ..., other ..., what is your opinion on that?

Talking about problems and pain points

- How does this problem impact you?
- If you had a magic wand, what would you change?
- What's the hardest / most frustrating part about ...?
- If you had a magic wand, what would you change?

Sentence completion and drawing

I sometimes ask people to complete a sentence. I also ask them to draw something like a process, how they recall the interface, etc. Some people are more visual thinkers than others so it can really help.

Follow Up Questions

Bouncing back

- You mentioned [xxx], can you tell me more about this?
- What do you mean by [xxx]?
- That's interesting. Tell me more.

Digging further

- Why?
- You mentioned [xxx], what's the reason for that?
- How come?

Asking for clarification

- What did you mean by [xxx] ?

Rephrasing / interpreting / mirroring

- Sooooo, you are saying that [xxx] "?
- Repeating part of the sentence with a question mark.
- It sounds like you are saying [xxx], is that correct / did I understand correctly?

Recalling past experience

- Can you give me / think of an example of [xxx]?
- Can you show me how you did [xxx]?

The "Maybe not the end of the interview

- Is there anything you would like to add?
- Any questions you would like to ask me about the project?
- Would you like to talk about a specific topic before we finish?

The power of Silence

Silence is powerful. An interview is about actively listening. The person you interview might sometimes need time to collect their thoughts. Wait for the person to complete or continue. It might feel awkward but it's powerful. Most people will say no. Wait... a little bit. Usually the "no" turns into a "actually" + interesting conversation about a point you didn't cover in your interview.

User Interview Questions

Here is a list of helpers I use when I build my user interview questions. I usually prefer to conduct semi structured interviews. It means that I write a guide with the main questions and topics I want to ask about. But I might not totally follow this guide and dig into topics that users will bring up while talking to them. This makes it feel more like a conversation than guided interviews do. I also usually ask a few questions during usability tests, so here again, those questions are handy.

1. Open discovery questions

To keep the conversation going I want to ask open questions. Those questions are questions that require more than a single word answer (like yes/no). Avoid starting questions by "did you" / "have you" / "were you" and replace them by "why", "how" "tell me about".

- "**Tell me about** …"

- "Could you **describe to me** how you… / your experience with…?"

- Frequency and quantity: "**How often** do you…?" "**How much/many**…" (how much can also be used to probe level of knowledge like "how much do you know about this topic?"

- "**What** … do you use / do ?"

- "**Why** do you …"

2. Understanding user tasks / activities

Here are a few starter questions that help me understand how people perform tasks and activities. Most of the time I work on digital product, but those can apply to any type of task or activity.

- "Can you **describe how** you / how you would [task]?"

- "What are all the things you need to do in order to [task]?"

- Sequence: "**Walk me through** [task], how would you?"

- Comparison: "**What is the difference** between [task 1] and [other task]?"

3. Performing / showing

User interviews don't have to be limited to questions you can also ask people to perform tasks.

- "Please / can you **show me how you** … " them to perform the task, share their screen, etc.

- Role playing: "**Let's pretend** I'm a colleague who knows nothing about this, **can you guide me** so that I could do it myself afterwards?" (a friend of mine likes to use "explain to me like I'm a five years old", I like the idea but it might not be good in some situations ^^)

4. Recalling the past / anticipating the future

You can ask people about events in the past. Be careful though: any event prior to a few days in the past might be distorted. People are [Lazy, Forgetful Creatures of Habit](). Also note that people have a hard time projecting in the future so, again, treat the replies to those kinds of questions lightly.

- "Can you **recall a situation** when you …, what did you do?"

- "Can you tell me about your **most significant/ memorable** experience/interaction with…?"

- "**How do you think** … **is going to help you**?"

- "**Could you describe** the ideal product / experience…?"

5. Opinions / points of view / attitude and projections

Those questions usually help me ask about opinions. Still you need to bear in mind that opinions questions are highly susceptible to some biases. For example: like courtesy bias is "the tendency to give an opinion that is more socially correct than one's true opinion, so as to avoid offending anyone".

⦿ "**What do you think** about …?"

⦿ "**What do you like/dislike** about…?"

⦿ "What would your **friend/partner/colleague think of that**?"

⦿ "Some people …, other …, **what is your opinion on that**?"

⦿ "Last week I interviewed people who did // said … **What do you think of that idea** // how do you feel about this approach?

Note: if you want to learn more (and raise awareness within your team) about cognitive biases, Laurence and I created a set of "52 UX Cards to Discover Cognitive Biases". You can download the cards for free and print them. There's a special category called "Interview & user testing" where we select some of the biases that might influence users during your research.

6. Talking about problems and pain points

Sometimes I try to understand the issues and pain points, here are some questions that help.

⦿ "How does this **problem impact you**?"

⦿ "How did you **solve that issue ?**"

⦿ "What's the **hardest / most frustrating part** about …?"

⦿ "If you had **a magic wand, what would you change?**"

7. Sentence completion and drawing

Last but not least I sometimes ask people to **complete a sentence**. I also **ask them to draw something** like a process, how they recall the interface, etc. Some people are more visual thinkers than others so it can really help. How many times did you end up in a conversation where someone just said "wait let me show you" and started drawing a chart to explain to you? :)

Follow Up Questions

Follow-up questions are asked in the middle of the interview to dig further in a topic the person just mentioned. But they can also be asked at the end to come back to a specific topic. Especially if you didn't want to interrupt the thoughts of the person you are interviewing. For the rest of this part, [xxx] will be "something the person said".

1. Bouncing back

Those follow-ups help me bounce back on what people said and sometimes let met ask for clarification

- "You mentioned [xxx], **can you tell me more about** this"

- "**That's interesting. Tell me more.**"

- "**What do you mean by** [xxx]"

2. Digging further

The beauty of interviews is that you sometimes get nice surprises when people bring up topics you didn't think about. Those sentences let me come back and dig a little bit further in those topics.

- "**Why**", yes, the all powerful why, as simple as that.

- "**How come**" also works

- "You mentioned [xxx], what's the reason for that?"

3. Asking for clarification

Sometimes I ask for clarification to get more information on a topic. But sometimes I also need more information to understand the context. Especially when the interview is about a complex business process I don't fully master).

- **What did you mean by** [xxx] ?

4. Rephrasing / interpreting / mirroring

Those sentences help me check if I understood correctly . They also let me give a gentle nudge to again, dig a little bit further a specific topic I am interested in:

- "Sooooo, you **are saying that** [xxx] "? + wait

- "It **sounds like you are saying** [xxx], is that correct / did I understand correctly?"

- **Repeating part of the sentence** with a question mark. For example: "I had problems using that part, I didn't understand what the button did, it was quite frustrating for me" would become "**hum, frustrating?**" (you need to convey the question mark when you talk). Usually this helps dig further into a feeling.

5. Recalling past experience

In the interview questions I sometimes ask directly to recall past events. But this method can also be used as a follow-up question.

- "Can you **give me / think of an example** of [xxx]?"

- "Can you **show me how you did** [xxx]?" (if you can ask them to show them their screen and do the task for example)

6. The power of Silence

Silence is powerful. An interview is about actively listening. The person you interview might sometimes need time to collect their thoughts. **Wait** for the person to complete or continue. It might feel awkward but it's powerful.

7. The "Maybe not the end of the interview"

After I thank the person, I usually finish the interview with an open question. This the user talks about a topic I might not have thought about when preparing the guide.

- "Is there **anything you would like to add**?
- "**Would you like to talk about a specific topic** before we finish?"
- "**Any questions you would like to ask me** about the project?"

Most of the people will say no. So I wait. Then they think a little bit and actually have things to add. So here again, don't underestimate the power of silence, don't turn the recorder off. A lot of people will **give you interesting feedback once the interview is "finished"**. They are more relaxed and might speak more freely. Especially at the end of the interview. Wait... a little bit. Usually the "no" turns into a "actually" + interesting conversation about a point you didn't cover in your interview.

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