



# Interviewing Practice

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# Lecture Outline

Offer a practical guide to doing interviews

1. Issues
2. Preparation
3. Process
4. Output
5. Conclusion

# 1. Issues

‘Interviewing is rather like marriage: everyone knows what it is, an awful lot of people do it, and yet behind closed doors there’s an awful lot of secrets.’ (Oakley 1986: 231)

(To which might be added: and some are more successful at marriage than others and maybe some are better suited.)

- Provides ‘raw’ data but which must be elicited.
- Is both a social and a socially constructed process.
- Recognition of both issues needs to be addressed both prior to and during the use of the method.
- Jones (1991: 203) refers to ‘the art of good interviewing’.

## 2. Preparation

- Need to do your literature review to identify:
  - what's needed to be known i.e. **what** questions
  - how it's to be articulated i.e. **how** to ask the questions
  - The task is to lever or tease out information – what works?
- Need to think about wording and phrasing of questions.
  - E.g. your field's words vs interviewee's field's words
- Need to order (sequence) and structure (section) questions.
  - E.g. from general to specific or from macro to meso to micro levels
  - Tip: easy openers; difficult/sensitive last with rapport established.
- Need to decide on the type of interview.
  - Structured
  - Semi-structured
  - Unstructured
    - Not exclusive, appropriateness the key
    - Qualitative typically the last two types

## 2. (cont.)

- Need to choose medium of interview.
  - E.g. f2f, telephone, skype
  - Benefits and drawbacks to all.
  - May be drive by practical considerations e.g. cost or availability
- Need to choose a method of recording data.
  - E.g. written notes, audio recording, video recording
  - Tip: agree with interviewee at start as part of 'CAV + informed consent'
- Need to select location of the interview.
  - Best practice vs opportunism
  - Preferable vs possible
  - Tip: check/prepare location beforehand if possible

## 2. (cont.)

- Need to identify appropriate interviewees e.g.:
  - Representative sample
  - Stratified sample
  - Convenience sample
  - Expert sample
  - Random sample
  - Snowball sample
  - Preferable vs possible – i.e. who want vs who's available
  - Tip: be transparent about selection criteria but have a justification
- Need to gain access to interviewees
  - Negotiation takes time, effort and skill.
  - Often need gatekeepers or intermediaries.
  - Tip: factor in negotiation 'costs' to research design.

# 3. The process of interviewing

- Three main issues to be addressed in doing an interview:

## 1 Interviewer characteristics



Interviewer effect #1 – bias, discrimination



## 2 Interviewee characteristics

- Demographics, dress, language codes etc. play a part in the process and its outcomes.

## 3. (cont.)

- Some argue for a ‘matching’ of interviewer and interviewee, particularly race/ethnicity.
  - Is a double edged sword:
    - More broadly, beyond power issue, different fields have different ‘doxa’ or ways of seeing - ‘a particular point of view’ (Bourdieu 1998: 57). Can researcher understand?
    - Being different can lead to interviewee explaining things in more detail than they would to an ‘insider’ or simply thinking about it more. Gain better data (Talmon 1972).

### 3 Interview enactment

Interviewer effect #2 – shape the process and outcomes:

‘The quality of data is dependent on the quality of the relationships you build with the people being interviewed.’ (Measor 1985: 57)

- Tip: try to establish (unforced) commonalities, shared interests.



## 3. (cont.)

- In the field, reflection in practice:
  - Tip: Entering another person's world but be alert to the present world
- Behaviour: formal vs. informal
  - Build rapport
- Language to be employed
  - Tip: try to be conversational
- Learn to listen
  - Typical focus on how to ask not how to listen – academics paid to opine.
  - Tip: remember, not a test of your expertise; leave your ego at the door
  - Tip: most people like to talk about themselves, especially when the private is now public.
- Length of interview
  - Preferable vs possible; aim for 1hr+
- Closing – the 'politics of exit'
  - Ask if you've missed anything; offer transcript; thank interviewee.
  - Tip: leave recording going as long as possible.

## 4. Output

- Check the recording!
- Good practice to write afterwards to thank the interviewee.
  - Polite and politic
- Read the transcripts/notes to gain overview and familiarity.
- Code – should have initial coding from literature review that informed the questions’ development.
- Analysis – of which more later
  - Flag Nvivo: not the quantification of qualitative research; allows you to map and access data easily after initial hard work.

## 4. (cont.)

- Ethics: remember that interviewees trust you, they've given you something and usually for free; don't betray their trust, use data appropriately.
- Paradoxes (after Ribbens 1989):
  - With unstructured give 'power' to interviewee but vulnerable to your use of data.
  - Raw data – it speaks' BUT data mediated by researcher physically, intellectually, subconsciously.
  - Danger of objectifying the people being interviewed.

'I have ... emerged from interviews with the feeling that my interviewees need to know how to protect themselves from people like me.' (Finch 1984: 80)

# 5. Conclusion

## 1. Prepare.

- Assuming who, think about what, how, where
- But be open to serendipity – preferable vs possible

## 2. Be sensitive to the context.

- Requires awareness of self and other
- Requires empathy and adaptability

## 3. Don't be disheartened.

- Practice and learn; repetition and reflection
- Watch and avoid the Charlie Stayt approach
- Take the 'taxi driver test', and frequently

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