

Interview

Week 12



Fall Term, 2021

Interview

- Usually, interviewing is defined simply as a conversation with a purpose. Specifically, the purpose is to gather information.
- Unfortunately, the consensus on how to conduct an interview is not nearly as high. Interviewing and training manuals vary from long lists of specific *do's* and *don'ts* to lengthy, abstract, pseudo theoretical discussions on empathy, intuition, and motivation.
- Research, particularly field research, is sometimes divided into two separate phases—namely, getting in and analysis (Shaffir et al., 1980). *Getting in* is typically defined as various techniques and procedures intended to secure access to a setting, its participants, and knowledge about phenomena and activities being observed. *Analysis* makes sense of the information accessed during the getting-in phase.

Types of Interviews.

- No consideration of interviewing would be complete without at least some acknowledgment of the major interview structures.
- At least three major categories may be identified (Babbie, 1995; Denzin, 1978; Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1996; Gorden, 1987; Nieswiadomy 1993): the standardized (formal or structured) interview, the unstandardized (informal or non-directive) interview, and the semistandardized (guided-semistructured or focused) interview.

How to begin the process?

- The first step to interview construction has already been implied: Specifically, researchers must determine the nature of their investigation and the objectives of their research. This determination provides the researchers with a starting point from which to begin developing a schedule of questions.
- Selltiz et al. (1959), Spradley (1979), Patton (1980), and Polit and Hungler (1993) suggest that researchers begin with a kind of *outline*, listing all the broad categories they feel may be relevant to their study.
- Following this, separate lists of questions for each of the major thematic categories were developed.

The organization of questions.

- The specific ordering (sequencing), phrasing, level of language, adherence to subject matter, and general style of questions depend on the educational and social level of the subjects as well as their ethnic or cultural traits, age, and so forth. Additionally, researchers must take into consideration the central aims and focuses of their studies.
- In order to draw out the most complete story about various subjects or situations under investigation, four types or styles of questions must be included in the survey instrument: essential questions, extra questions, throw-away questions, and probing questions.

Types of Questions.

- **Essential Questions.** *Essential questions* exclusively concern the central focus of the study. They may be placed together or scattered throughout the survey, but they are geared toward eliciting specific desired information.
- **Extra Questions.** *Extra questions* are those questions roughly equivalent to certain essential ones but worded slightly differently. These are included in order to check on the reliability of responses (through examination of consistency in response sets) or to measure the possible influence a change of wording might have.
- **Throw-Away Questions.** Frequently, you find throw-away questions toward the beginning of an interview schedule. *Throw-away questions* may be essential demographic questions or general questions used to develop rapport between interviewers and subjects.
- *Probing questions*, or simply *probes*, provide interviewers with a way to draw out more complete stories from subjects.

Effective communication.

- Perhaps the most serious problem with asking questions is how to be certain the intentions of the questions have been adequately communicated.
- Researchers must always be sure they have clearly communicated to the subjects what they want to know. The interviewers' language must be understandable to the subject; ideally, interviews must be conducted at the level or language of the respondents.

Problems

- **Affectively Worded Questions.** Affective words arouse in most people some emotional response, usually negative. Although these questions may not be intended as antagonistic, they nonetheless can close down or inhibit interview subjects.
- **The Double-Barreled Question.** Among the more common problems that arise in constructing survey items is the double-barreled question. This type of question asks a subject to respond simultaneously to two issues in a single question. For instance, one might ask, "How many times have you smoked marijuana, or have you only tried cocaine?"
- **Complex Questions.** The pattern of exchange that constitutes verbal communication in Western society involves more than listening. When one person is speaking, the other is listening, anticipating, and planning how to respond. Consequently, when researchers ask a long, involved question, the subjects may not really hear the question in its entirety.

Long and Short Interviews.

- Interviewing can be a very time-consuming, albeit valuable, data-gathering technique. It is also one that many uninitiated researchers do not fully understand. This is particularly true when considering the length of an interview.
- If potential answers to research questions can be obtained by asking only a few questions, then the interview may be quite brief. If, on the other hand, the research question(s) are involved, or multi-layered, it may require a hundred or more questions. Length also depends upon the type of answers constructed between the interviewer and the subject. In some cases, where the conversation is flowing, a subject may provide rich, detailed, and lengthy answers to the question.

Developing Rapport.

- One dominant theme in the literature on interviewing centers on the interviewer's ability to develop *rapport* with an interview subject.
- There is little question that, as Stone (1962, p. 88) states, "Basic to the communication of the interview meaning is the problem of appearance and mood Clothes.

The Ten Commandments of Interviewing

- 1. *Never begin an interview cold.*
- 2. *Remember your purpose.*
- 3. *Present a natural front.*
- 4. *Demonstrate aware hearing.*
- 5. *Think about appearance.*
- 6. *Interview in a comfortable place.*
- 7. *Don't be satisfied with monosyllabic answers.*
- 8. *Be respectful.*
- 9. *Practice, practice, and practice some more.*
- 10. *Be cordial and appreciative.*

Analysis of Data

- Analysis of interview data cannot be completely straightforward or cut and dry, but it is still necessary to understand what to do when you reach this phase in the research. The most obvious way to analyze interview data is *content analysis*.
- *Developing Interview Script.*
- *Axial Coding*
- *Selective Coding*