

Conducting Research Interviews

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Research Approach and Data Collection

Qualitative or Mixed Methods

Research Interviews

open-ended questions

Quantitative

Surveys

closed-ended questions

Conducting Research Interviews: Scope

Included in Scope

- **Qualitative Interviews** (included in Mixed Methods)
 - Individual
 - Structured
 - Unstructured
 - Semi-structured
 - Focus Groups
 - Standard Approach
 - Dump, Lump, Name (DLN)

Excluded from Scope

- **Conducting Surveys**
- **Analyzing Interview Data**

Interview Fundamentals

Interviews – different from casual conversation, and considered by Timothy Lincoln as “one of the most powerful data collection techniques in the qualitative research arsenal.”

- **Purposeful Conversations** between individuals or with groups
- **Have distinct roles**
 - Interviewer
 - **Researcher**, who wants to gain pertinent information (data) on a particular study
 - Ethical obligation to protect participants from harm
 - Follows an interview protocol (set of questions), ensuring consistency between interviews and data set integrity
 - Open to unforeseen turns and asks clarifying questions

Interview Fundamentals

Interviews continued

- **Have distinct roles** continued
 - Interviewee
 - *Participant*, who has direct knowledge and/or experience in the area of the researcher's study

Interview Planning & Considerations

- **PRAY – this is Kingdom work!**
 - Wisdom, Discernment, Protection
 - Process
 - People
 - Outcomes
- **Number of Interviews**
 - Fewer participants, multiple interviews (richer data)
 - Multiple participants, single interviews (project deadlines/time limitations)
 - Time commitment for conducting and transcribing an hour-long interview is five or more hours

Interview Planning & Considerations

- **Setting**

- **In Person**

- **Private**

- **Safe** – physically, psychologically, emotionally

- Covid protocols

- Convenient location for participant

- Accessibility (wheelchair accommodations)

- Familiar location for participant's mental, physical, and emotional comfort (let them choose)

- **Confidential**

- **Minimal distractions**

- Interruptions

- Background noise

Interview Planning & Considerations

- **Setting** continued
 - **Online**
 - Access to internet
 - Internet connection stability
 - Recording capabilities
 - Reading body language challenges
 - **Audio Only**
 - Establishing a personal connection/rapport
 - Conversation flow
 - Body language unknown
 - Comment serious or tongue-in-cheek?
 - Go deeper or move on?
 - Gauging comfort level of participant

Interview Planning & Considerations

- **Interview Protocol**

- Written set of questions consistently asked of each participant, which:
 - Signals to the participant where the journey is going and when it will end
 - Disciplines the researcher to ask each core question the same way to all participants
 - Helps researcher keep track of the interview

- **Consent Forms**

- **Individual**

- Statement that project is research and participation is voluntary
- Summary of the research, including: purpose, duration, procedures
- Reasonable, foreseeable risks or discomforts
- Reasonable, expected benefits

Interview Planning & Considerations

- **Consent Forms** continued
 - Organization
 - Institutional Review Board (IRB)
- **Recording**
 - Audio
 - Video
 - Note-taking
- **Communication**
 - Language barriers
 - First language, native tongue
 - Hearing impaired

Interview Planning & Considerations

- **Plan, Plan, Plan**

- **Good interviewers move smoothly through the process because of advanced preparation of the setting and the interview protocol**
- **Prepare for and minimize common problems:**
 - Awkward first few minutes
 - Managing time and note taking
 - Clarifying meanings – asking for clarification is not rude; it let's the participant know you are engaged with them and their experience is valuable to the study.
 - Potential strong emotions/reactions triggered by questions
 - Remember your role: researcher, not pastor or clinician. Interview is not about the researcher; you are collecting data from a participant.
However, you have an ethical obligation to treat participants as fully human. They have made the choice to share something of their life with you. Meet them where they are; fully human, bearing the image of God, and not simply a data source.

Interview Type: Individual

- **Individual**

- **Benefits**

- Ability to probe individual's experiences in depth
- Scheduling involves only you and one participant
- Variety of locations: in person, online, phone
- Meaning clarifications
- Conversation flow, turn-taking easier
- One-on-one comfort level for inexperienced researchers

- **Drawbacks**

- Data collection is one person at a time
- Participant is responding to researcher only, no others to trigger additional thoughts

Interview Type: Focus Group

- **Focus Group**

- **Benefits**

- Group understandings
- Discussion can yield new insights
- One session provides maximum data in minimum amount of time
- Asynchronous online focus group expands the study's reach and immediately captures data as text

- **Drawbacks**

- Scheduling a group and ensuring attendance
- Logistics – physical location accommodations
- Researcher's skill level to guide group conversation
- Maintaining participant engagement in asynchronous online focus group

Interview Approach: *Individuals*

■ **Structured**

- Interviews strictly adhere to the interview protocol (questions) to guide the researcher
- Only the questions on the interview protocol are asked

■ **Unstructured**

- Interviews take place with few, if any, pre-determined interview questions
- Often progress in the manner of a normal conversation
- Relatively formless interview style that researchers use to establish rapport and comfort with the participant
- Extremely helpful when researchers are discussing sensitive topics.

■ **Semi-structured**

- Uses an interview protocol to help guide the conversation between the researcher and participant
- Provides the researcher with the ability to probe the participant for additional details

Interview Protocol Development

- **Important considerations for developing your set of questions**
 - **Good literature review**
 - Makes you a more knowledgeable questioner
 - Helps inform your questions for the gaps in published content
 - **Number and type of questions**
 - Compose questions for responses that will best help move your study forward - narrow and deep
 - Avoid leading questions
 - Refine the questions to fit your time constraints; consider follow on interviews

Interview Protocol Development

- **Important considerations for developing your set of questions**
 - **Order of the questions:**
 - Some questions provide background information and may be relatively unthreatening, allowing the participant to get comfortable and relax in the process, and reduce any anxiety or nervousness. Begin the interview with these types of questions.
 - Logical order, asking only one question at a time
 - Before concluding, always ask: What else would you like to say?
 - **Intersectionality**
 - Consider the ways that intersectionality (race, class, gender, culture, age, etc.) and life experience may shape the content and dynamics of the interview
 - Review questions for unintentional bias

Interview Protocol Development

- **Exploratory or probing questions during the interview**

- Can you give me an example of that?
- How does what you told me just now relate to [X]? X is something said earlier in the interview.
- You have talked about [unclear phrase]. I'm not familiar with that term. Would you define that for me, please?
- Can you recall an event about [X] that really stands out?
- How did [X] make you feel?

Important reminder: when a person talks about their feelings, you are still a researcher capturing data. **Do not** indicate your feelings in response – surprise, disagreement, agreement, etc.

Interview Process: *Individuals*

1. Preliminaries

1. Arrive early
2. Have all materials at hand: consent form, recording devices, handouts, timer
3. Test recording devices (have a backup) and check batteries

2. Introduction

1. Welcome the participant and introduce assistant, if applicable
2. Establish rapport through initial small talk to break the ice and make the participant feel relaxed and comfortable – **avoid controversial topics like the plague – literally!**
3. Make a deliberate change in voice tone to indicate the formal interview process is beginning
4. Provide a brief overview of the study (*calling card*: elevator pitch about your study)

Interview Process: *Individuals*

3. Obtain Consent and Background Information

1. Provide two copies of consent form and give ample time for participant to read the form and ask any questions before signing. Give the participant one copy for their records.
2. Record background information includes applicable characteristics such as gender, church affiliation, age, etc.

4. Questions and Answers (Interview Protocol)

1. Remind participant of the following:
 - Participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn during the interview, if they feel uncomfortable
 - You will be recording the session

Interview Process: *Individuals*

4. Questions and Answers (Interview Protocol) *continued*

- You will be taking a few notes along with the audio recording
 - Helpful for noting body language changes or when facial expressions occur that are not captured on audio
 - Handwritten notes are preferable to a laptop, which can be distracting visually and by the sound of typing
- 2. Remember to keep eye contact as much as possible; ideally, there is a separate person there for note-taking so you can be fully engaged (and not distracted yourself) in the interview
- 3. Turn on recording device
- 4. Put timer in your line of sight

Interview Process: *Individuals*

4. Questions and Answers (Interview Protocol) *continued*

5. Make a note of (or record) the full name of the person you are interviewing, along with the date, time, and place of the interview, so that you can create proper citations for the interview in your paper.
6. Ask your set of questions, considering good interviewers:
 - Make it enjoyable – for you and the participant
 - Display interest
 - How to win friends and influence people – but not their responses! You need accurate data.
 - Ask all the questions
 - Refrain from anticipating responses, interrupting, contradicting, advising
 - Honor time limits
 - Listen 90% of the time, talk 10% of the time

Interview Process: *Individuals*

5. Thank You

- As the interview concludes, thank the participant and reinforce the value of her contribution to the study

6. Follow-up

- Compile notes as soon after the interview as possible to remember nuances, thoughts, emotions, etc. Especially if you're doing more than one interview that same day. You think you'll remember later, but you won't! 😊
- Back up recorded data
- Safely store consent form and background information forms
- Send a formal thank you note – email is fine
- Record background data from paper forms/notes into database/spreadsheet

Interview Process: *Focus Group*

1. Preliminaries

- Arrive early
- Have all materials at hand: consent forms, recording devices, timer, handouts, white boards, display monitors, name tags, refreshments
- Arrange the space with name tags and refreshments near the door
- Test recording devices (have a backup) and check batteries

2. Arrivals and Hospitality

- Welcome each participant as he or she arrives
- Offer refreshments
- Ask each participant to wear a name tag
- Mingle with the group and develop rapport with small talk, **avoiding controversial subjects!**

Interview Process: *Focus Group*

3. Call to Order

- Transition participants from the refreshment area to the work area
- Formal welcome and brief overview of the study
- Provide two copies of consent form allowing for appropriate reading time and questions
- Participants complete form with background information
- Introduce assistant, if applicable

Interview Process: *Focus Group*

4. Overview of Session and Ground Rules

- Describe purpose of session
- Communicate ground rules, which establish boundaries

Example:

- Everyone gets to have his/her own opinion
 - Everyone in the group is worthy of respect
 - Not here to solve a problem or try to reach a consensus
 - Important for everyone to feel safe to speak freely without worry of repercussions
- Remind participants the session will be recorded
 - Invite participants to ask questions

Interview Process: *Focus Group*

5. Session

- Turn on the recording device
- Guide participants through the protocol discussion
 - Facilitation is key to productive discussion for gathering data
 - A facilitator who demonstrates to the satisfaction of the group that she has been tracking discussion accurately will be seen as trustworthy by the group

6. Thank You

- As the session concludes, thank the participants and reinforce the value of their contribution to the study

Interview Process: *Focus Group*

6. Follow Up

- Back up recorded data and safely store consent forms
- Collect any artifacts produced by the focus group
- Write field notes and debrief with assistant
- Send a formal thank you note to each participant – email is fine

Interview Process: *Focus Group - DLN*

Dump, Lump, Name (DLN) is useful when the researcher takes an open-ended approach to a study and can conduct one or more focus groups followed by individual interviews. With the exception of step 5 (including the use of index cards), and the addition of a post-group analysis and developing an interview protocol, the process steps are the same as the regular focus group (steps 1-4, 6, 7).

5. Session

- **Guided Imagery**
 - Used to introduce the main topic
 - Researcher says, “tell me about [main topic] and write one word or phrase at a time on your index cards. Every idea is welcome.”

Interview Process: *Focus Group - DLN*

5. **Session** continued

■ **Silent Brainstorming (Dump)**

- Participants write their ideas on the topic on cards
- Researcher provides more cards as needed

■ **Lump**

- All cards are moved to a table and laid out in columns; order doesn't matter
- At the direction of the researcher, without talking, participants arrange cards into clusters of words or phrases that go together

■ **Name**

- Researcher discusses each cluster of cards with the participants; goal is to name each cluster
- Group assigns a preliminary name for each cluster

Interview Process: *Focus Group - DLN*

8. Post-group Analysis

- Researcher refines the names of themes identified by the group and writes definitions for each refined theme

9. Interview Protocol

- Researcher writes an individual interview protocol using the themes and definitions discovered by the focus group

A Final Consideration: An Assistant

Advantages of using an assistant

- **Complexity**
 - Focus groups are more complicated than individual interviews because the researcher is working with several people at the same time, each of whom deserves the researcher's attention
- **Many moving parts in a focus group session**
 - Move furniture, check in participants, help with name tags, collect consent forms, distribute handouts
 - Critique researcher's performance: what went well, what didn't
 - **DLN**: collect cards during silent brainstorming, place on main work table

Resources

Qualitative Research: a field manual for ministry students

Lincoln, Timothy

<https://books.atla.com/atlapress/catalog/view/24/178/666>

Study Design in Qualitative Research—1: Developing Questions and Assessing Resource Needs

Frankel, Richard; Devers, Kelly. Education for Health; Mumbai Vol. 13, Iss. 2, (May-Aug 2000): 251-261.

<https://www.proquest.com/openview/ddbe9585b92d5ebf50997e39d591878c/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=33821>

9 Important Tips for Conducting Research Interviews

Schenke, Katerina

<https://katerinaschenke.medium.com/the-dos-and-donts-for-conducting-research-interviews-a30a2a461d64>

A Short Guide for Conducting Research Interviews

University Writing Center at Appalachian State University

<https://www.csus.edu/indiv/o/obriene/art116/readings/guide%20for%20conducting%20interviews.pdf>

Resources

Sample Informed Consent Forms for Qualitative Studies

Individuals

Stanford University

https://web.stanford.edu/group/ncpi/unspecified/student_assess_toolkit/pdf/sampleinformedconsent.pdf

The University of Edinburgh

https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/imports/fileManager/Interview_Consent_Form.pdf

Focus Groups

World Health Organization

<https://www.gfmer.ch/SRH-Course-2011/research-methodology/pdf/InformedConsent-qualitativestudies.pdf>

Sample Consent Form for Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Medical College of Wisconsin

<https://www.mcw.edu/departments/human-research-protection-program/researchers/consent-form-templates>