

● **Planning and conducting interviews checklist**

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| 1 Decide what you need to know. | List all the items about which information is required. |
| 2 Ask yourself why you need this information. | Examine your list and remove any item that is not directly associated with the task. |
| 3 Is an interview the best way of obtaining the information? | Consider alternatives. |
| 4 If so, begin to devise questions in outline. | The final form of questions will depend on the type of interview. |
| 5 Decide on the type of interview. | A structured interview will produce structured responses. Is this what you want, or is a more open approach required? |
| 6 Refine the questions. | Write questions on cards. Check wording (see questionnaire checklist). |
| 7 Consider how questions will be analysed. | Consult Chapter 12 before deciding finally about question type and question wording. |
| 8 Prepare an interview schedule or guide and draft a summary sheet. | Consider the order of questions. Prepare prompts in case the respondent does not provide essential information freely. |
| 9 Pilot your schedule and summary sheet. | Both need to be tested, and you need practice in asking questions and recording responses. |
| 10 Revise the schedule, if necessary. | Take account of pilot respondents' comments. |
| 11 WATCH FOR BIAS | If you have strong views about some aspect of the topic, be particularly vigilant. If someone else asked the same question, would they get the same answer? |

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| 12 Select who to interview. | Interviews take time. Try to select a representative sample. Decide what to do if selected people are not willing or able to give an interview. Be realistic about the number of interviews that can be conducted in the time available. |
| 13 Try to fix a time and place where you will not be disturbed. | |
| 14 Make sure official channels have been cleared, and let interviewees see any protocol documents beforehand. | A letter from your supervisor, head or principal, explaining the purpose of the research may be helpful. |
| 15 Introduce yourself and give interviewees the opportunity to ask for any necessary clarification. You will, of course, have already sent a letter and a statement outlining the purpose of the research. | Say what will happen to the information provided by the interviewee. Clarify the meaning of anonymity in the context of the study. |
| 16 Agree with the interviewee how long the interview will last. | Do your utmost not to exceed the time limit. |
| 17 Try to check the accuracy of your notes with interviewees, particularly if some items might be quoted in the report. | But don't promise to check with respondents after the interview if this is likely to prove difficult. |
| 18 If you wish to tape-record the interview, you must obtain permission from the interviewee. | Remember that it takes a long time to transcribe a tape-recorded interview, if this is what you intend to do. Write up as you go along. Don't wait until all interviews are completed. |
| 19 Honesty and integrity are important. | Make no promises that cannot be fulfilled. Respect respondents' views about anonymity. If you know a respondent has been indiscreet in revealing confidential information, <i>never</i> take advantage. |

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| <p>20 Common sense and good manners will take you a long way.</p> | <p>People who agree to be interviewed are doing you a favour. They deserve consideration.</p> |
| <p>21 Don't queer the pitch for other researchers by disenchanting respondents with the whole notion of research participation.</p> | <p>There are many ways in which participants can become disenchanted. Appointments not kept or the interviewer arriving late; taking longer than promised; promising to check for accuracy; promising a summary of findings but not delivering; conducting the interview in a hostile manner – and failing to thank the interviewee.</p> |

Further reading



- Bowling, A. (2002) *Research Methods in Health: Investigating Health and Health Services*, 2nd edn. Maidenhead: Open University Press. Chapters 11 and 13 in Section IV discuss interviews and their response rates in quantitative research, including techniques of survey interviewing. Chapter 16 in Section V deals with unstructured interviews and focus groups in qualitative research.
- Darlington, Y. and Scott, D. (2002) *Qualitative Research in Practice: Stories from the Field*. Buckingham: Open University Press (originally published by Allen and Unwin Australia, 2002). Chapter 3 considers the various stages of in-depth interviewing. It is perhaps unlikely you will have the time to become involved in such interviews but time is not the only pre-condition. As Darlington and Scott make clear, considerable skill, experience *and* training are required. If you have these attributes and feel you would be interested in considering this approach, it would be advisable to consult your supervisor and to read this chapter before making up your mind.
- Denscombe, M. (1998) *The Good Research Guide for Small-scale Social Research Projects*. Buckingham: Open University Press. Chapter 7 'Interviews' is an excellent chapter, including when it is appropriate to use interviews for research, types of research interview, group and focus interviews, interviewer effect, planning and recording the interview – and much more. Helpful checklists are provided. If you have very