



# CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

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# Agenda

- 1) Interview design and access
- 2) Interview process

# 1. Interview design and preparation

- Design depends on research aims / questions / purpose
- Design should be flexible and open to changes
- Do your 'homework'
  - Preliminary research (internet, document analysis, news, etc.)

# Sampling/selection process

## 1) Identify a sample frame

- Who is your 'population'? Who is needed for your research?

## 2) Choose and set priorities on selection criteria

- How will you choose your participants? Based on what criteria?

## 3) Design a sample matrix

- What is the size of sample you will need? What categories of interviewees do you need to include?  
How many participants from each category will you need?

## 4) Gain access

- How will you gain access to your participants? How will you present yourself and your project?  
What are some access barriers? How will you overcome them?

## 5) Document outcomes

- Who was left out from participation? Transparency of strengths and weaknesses of the process

### Convenience sampling

- The nearest or the most accessible individuals

### Complete sampling

- Captures the entire group

### Snowball sampling

- identify a small number of individuals; these identify or recommend others and these, in turn, identify yet others (saturation point)

### External sampling

- The inclusion of interviewees outside the focal group/organisation, but with knowledge, alternative perspectives

### Theoretical sampling (grounded theory)

- Theoretical purpose and relevance: pick an initial sample, analyse data, select a further sample to refine emerging categories, theoretical saturation

# What motivates people to participate?

**Altruism:** a desire to support researchers or make contribution to a scientific advancement

**Psychosocial motives:** a lack of competent people to talk to

**Instrumental interests:** access to research results, knowledge exchange, competitors, new knowledge assisting with decision-making or innovation

**Enhance their own status and image:** promotion, reputation of the research institution etc.

**Social situation:** interests in standing out

# Barriers to access

- The higher the social class, the greater access barriers
- Gatekeepers: secretaries, personal assistants, etc.
- Lack of time (academic research not a high priority)
- Vulnerability to political or legal harm
- Organizational policies
- Inferiority complex

# Minimizing barriers to access

- First contact has to be well prepared
- Provide your professional credentials and standing
- Emphasize academic neutrality and professional competence
- Use personal contacts
- References to commonalities (e.g., the same university, coming from the same city, etc.)
- Importance of networks and recommendations (snowball sampling)



# Participant recruitment

- Include:

- Presentation of the researcher/interviewer
- Presentation of the research, purpose, aims
- Terms and conditions of the interview
- Confidentiality and data usage
- Date, place, duration

## 2. Interview process: arrival

- Greetings and introductions (remember cultural sensitivity and norms)
- The participant might feel anxious and hostile (refuse to give answers, giving short answers): need to feel like they have control over their territory
- The researcher is a guest
- Avoid the research topic until the interview begins (if possible)

# Introduce your research

- Introduce research topic, purpose and nature of the interview
- Consent form and confidentiality (signing the consent form)
- Seek permission to record the interview
- Ensure the environment is suitably quiet, private, and comfortable
- Minimize interruptions

# Begin the interview

- Small talk and icebreakers
- Opening question(s)
- Choose topic the participant is familiar with
- An indicator of how the rest of the interview will go (talkativeness and openness, level of trust, relationship, emotions, cooperation)

# During the interview

- Guide the participants through questions/themes
- Deal with planned/anticipated as well as emergent questions and themes
- Consider following where the participant wants to lead
- Take notes of important issues, follow-ups, turns and their influence on your data
- Explore emerging issues in-depth (follow-up and probes)

# Probing

Encourage	Non-verbal: silence, pause, gestures, facial expressions Verbal: <i>"Go on..."</i> , <i>"Tell me more..."</i>
Elaborate, explain and unpack	<i>"Tell me more about this..."</i> , <i>"what happened then?"</i> <i>"Why is that?"</i> , <i>"How did you respond to that?"</i>
Clarifications	<i>"This might sound like an obvious question, but ... "</i> <i>"So if I understood correctly..."</i>
Returning	<i>"Can I take you back to something you said earlier?"</i>
Permission for controversy	<i>"Some other experts/media say....."</i>

# End the interview

- Signal that the interview is coming to an end (5-10 minutes before)
  - *“The final topic...” “One last thing...” “One last question...” “Before we finish...”*
- Summarize the topic and what others have said
- Check that there is no ‘unfinished business’
- Avoid opening entirely new topics (unless the participant does so)
- Gradually return to everyday level of social interaction
- Thank the participant and repeat how the interview will benefit research; reassurances about confidentiality and data usage

# A good working relationship

- Put the participant at ease and create climate of trust
- Express interest and attention
- Ethical treatment, respect and dignity
- Flexibility, patience
- Respect rights and boundaries (trauma, personal ethics, sensitive areas, legal requirements, etc.)
- Reciprocity – what are you giving back?



# Interview context

- Gender in interviewing
- Power imbalance
- Cultural implications
  - Appropriateness vs. inappropriateness
  - Relationship establishment and management differ across cultures

# Interviewer: key qualities

- Active listening and concentration
- Clear, logical mind and quick thinking
- Good memory
- Efficiency (get relevant information, stick to the purpose)
- Time management (pacing the interview)
- Curiosity, confidence, composure, modesty, empathy