

- uses and types of rapport builders, prompts, and responses (nondirective, directive)
 - determining the number of interviewers and respondents: one on one, two on one, and so forth
 - determining the location of the interview: normal context or special circumstances
- Let's explore these options in the following material.

INTRODUCTION

Qualitative researchers often gather data by interview; interviews and observations interact—observations provide meanings to the interviews, and interviews suggest things to look at or attach new meanings to the observations. Interviews are particularly useful in the following pursuits:

- exploring, probing, and searching for what is especially significant about a person or situation (e.g., how would you describe your advisor–advisee situation?)
- determining how individuals perceive their situation: its meaning to them, what is especially significant about it, what might be significant to others but is less important to them, how it came to be what it is, how they think it will be changed in the future (Tell me about your advisor, and how you came to choose her. How did your adversarial situation arise? How do you now perceive her? How do others perceive her? How do those perceptions affect your relationship to her?)
- identifying the cause in causal relationships (What do you believe really lies behind this adversarial relation?)
- finding explanations for discrepancies between observed and expected effects (I'd expect you to be very disturbed about this situation, but you don't seem to be. Why?)
- finding explanations for deviations from common behaviors by individuals or subgroups (Many students would be seeking another advisor. Tell me your thoughts about that possibility.)
- providing clues to the processes and mechanisms called into play by the situation (What factors do you think contributed to your situation? Milieu? Personal characteristics? What?)
- making sure the respondent correctly understands what was asked (I've described this situation as adversarial. How else might you describe it?)
- following up incomplete or nonresponsive answers (Tell me more about the latter. I'm not sure I understand you correctly. Are you saying that . . . ?)
- getting responses from individuals who might not respond to or might not understand a questionnaire

These are some of the obvious reasons to interview; you'll undoubtedly think of others. It is the major means of tapping thought processes to gain knowledge of a person's perceptions, feelings, or emotions, or to study complex individual or social behavior.

STRUCTURING INTERVIEWER AND RESPONDENT ROLES

Interviewer and respondent roles can be structured beforehand to suit the interviewer's purposes. For instance, in order of increasing structure, the interviewer may be given: no structure (responsibility for on-the-spot formulation of questions covering any content, in any order, and in whatever form seems appropriate), a little structure (advance choice of general areas to cover), more structure (specific information to obtain), or still more structure (an interview schedule to follow). Similarly, respondents' answers may be recorded verbatim, may be summarized, or may be coded into given alternative responses. Respondents may be asked which of a set of responses best represents their answers to the question. The structure of respondent answers roughly parallels the interview structure.

Strictly speaking, no interview is unstructured. Even if it is simply an exploratory interview, researchers always enter with at least a focus of interest, or sometimes a list of issues to be covered in a free-flowing conversation. Each rejoinder follows the lead of the previous response, as interviewers gently bend the conversation so as to cover the topics in which they perceive there may be useful information. The columns of Table 14.1 on the following page contrast the implications of lack of interview structure with those of high structure. Obviously, this is a continuum with many positions between the extremes.

Reflecting on the skill required with less structure, Ely's (1991) student, Ewa Iracka, says:

There were times when I used to . . . [think] Barbara Walters, the alleged interviewer of all time, . . . was overpaid. After all, she would merely sit comfortably in a lovely setting and glibly and effortlessly ask poignant questions that would elicit informative and sometimes sensational replies. Anyone can do that. After having indulged in this communication art form for the first time, [I realize] . . . perhaps I had judged Barbara Walters too harshly.¹ (pp. 63–64)

Clearly, more structure is appropriate for a preplanned research study than an emergent one. The ultimate structure is a standardized interview with even clarifications, prompts, and elaborations built into the interview plan and interviewers trained in their questionnaire administration to minimize interviewer effects and interview time. Structuring both respondent and interviewer roles facilitates larger-scale data gathering.

Obviously, the unstructured end of the continuum is closer to the qualitative tradition concerned with the respondent's view of the world; interviewing allows us "to enter the other person's perspective" (Patton, 1987, p. 109). The interview is seen as a negotiated dialogue to which both parties actively contribute, blurring the distinction between interviewer and respondent (Fontana, 2002).

The contrast makes clear that the researcher must choose among many trade-offs such as: the division of professional time between gathering interview data and its analysis, between using that time to analyze open-end responses, or to devise closed-end questions that get meaningful responses, and between selecting skilled interviewers or training unskilled ones.

Table 14.1 Comparison of Extremes in Interview Structure

Relatively Unstructured Interview	Structured Interview
Requires a researcher-interviewer who can point the interview in directions that may be rewarding. Questions are adapted to the immediate situation and individual differences so as to increase rapport.	The interviewer may be a clerk with good social skills who can comfortably follow a script while recording answers with check marks on well-designed forms.
The nature of the sample may not be predetermined but may unfold as each interview suggests where leads may next appear. Unless the interviewer is exploring the characteristics of some particular group, emphasis is not on generality but on understanding.	The nature of the sample will be carefully predetermined to reflect an emphasis on generality to a target population; it will be representative of the widest types within the population.
Compilation of data is labor intensive and results in extensive records.	Compilation of the data is easy and, if computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) is used, results may be continuously compiled as the interview is conducted.
Analysis of the data requires professional skill to catch "pay dirt."	With preplanning, most of the analysis can be carried out by a technician.
Professional expertise is required to catch unexpected findings in data collection, context, etc., as well as analysis. Often the most exciting part of the research, this aspect requires professional time regardless of how the data are collected.	Same as relatively unstructured interview.
The profitability of such interviews depends directly on the skill in interviewing, the "nose for pay dirt," and the keen recognition of insights.	The profitability of such interviews depends on skill in anticipating where "pay dirt" lies during interview development and doing sufficient pretesting of the interview.

Content of the Interview

Patton (1987, pp. 118–119) notes there are six basic kinds of questions that can be asked of people, and they can be used with any topic. These are questions about

- *experience/behavior*—actions the interviewer would have observed if present;
- *opinion/belief*—people's thoughts about the interview's target(s) revealing "goals, intentions, desires, and values";
- *feelings*—emotional responses to the target(s);
- *knowledge*—facts about the target(s);
- *senses*—what is seen, heard, tasted, touched, or smelled (the "stimuli" to which the respondent is subject); and
- *background/demographics*—location of the respondent relative to others.

This typology of questions may be suggestive when framing an interview schedule. Patton (1987) further notes that each may be asked about the past, present, and future. An

experienced interviewer, Patton finds the sequence of the above topics a useful ordering for schedules. (See also the section on querying sensitive topics in chapter 24.)

The Focused Interview

Exploratory and emergent studies start by searching broad areas to find what is significant. As the study progresses, questioning focuses on increasingly narrow areas, probing in some depth for detail. An interview format that encompasses both ends of this structure in a single interview, allowing exploration and targeted information gathering in the same sitting, is the **focused interview** (Merton, Fiske, & Kendall, 1956, 1990).

The focused interview begins with broad questions and with nondirective responses (discussed in the section after next), then moves to semi-structured questions, and finally to structured ones. The last section tests the researcher's ideas about what was significant and its effects. For example, in a voting literature study the researcher might ask early in the interview: "What did you think of the brochure?" But toward the end, the questions are quite structured. Early interview material provides focus for the structured parts so that the questions are continually evolving—for example, having learned that fear of being an outsider was an important reaction: "Did the cartoon on the back page that showed neighbors poking fun at the protesting nonvoter make you want to prevent that from happening to you?" Later questions corroborate insights from early ones.

- ▶ Interviews can range from being highly structured to relatively unstructured.
- ▶ Unstructured interviews are useful for exploring issues. They must be conducted by skilled personnel and analyzed by professionals. The nature of the sample may be progressively determined as responses suggest new leads.
- ▶ Highly structured interviews can be used with less skilled personnel and are easier to analyze than less structured interviews. They require professional time in planning, devising, and pretesting. When they are used for measuring the responses of a population, the nature of the sample is generally carefully specified.
- ▶ Focused interviews can combine exploration and structure, starting broadly and then narrowing.

Using Rapport Builders

No interview succeeds unless the interviewer builds a relationship with the respondent in which both are comfortable talking with one another. The ability to develop rapport at the same time one gets the information desired is one of the most important skills of an interviewer. The initial experience of Ely's (1991) student, Ewa Iracka, is not uncommon: "My first interview can be compared to taking a puppy for a walk. In the attempt to make the respondent feel comfortable, I wound up being led everywhere except for where I had intended to go" (p. 64). Studying men who were primary caregivers of their children, another of Ely's (1991) students, Steve Spitz, found it important to adapt to the interviewee:

During the next few interviews I was reminded of the never-ending variability among people. Not every participant was as open and articulate as Barry. Ira, for example, was much harder to get to know. . . . In the end it became a matter of . . . adapting the questions and probes to each participant's style. . . . My experience with Ira . . . heightened my sensitivity to each participant's unique style. (p. 68)

The rhythm of questioning, taking turns speaking so that the flow is natural and sustained, is important to develop. Various things can throw you off—a waiter drops a tray of dishes, or you are prepared for one person and find that another was substituted. Ely's (1991) student, Patricia Thornton, remarks: "Interviews suffered because I was busy trying to regain my equilibrium and switch gears . . . to ask appropriate questions for that [unexpected] person" (p. 63).

Avoid questions that can be answered with just a "yes" or "no"; they will stop the conversation—what else is there to say? To break this unproductive rhythm of interchanges, you might ask, "Tell me how you felt in that situation" rather than "Were you happy in that situation?"

Some kind of rejoinder by the interviewer is important to stimulate full responses. Lansing, Withey, and Wolfe (1971) found that typically, only 28% of interviewers gave enough feedback for an adequate response by the interviewee. Unfortunately, a similar percentage (24%) elicited an inadequate response. Still worse, 55% earned a refusal to answer. The 55% may consist largely of probes, but if we consider any interviewer response as positive reinforcement (which their study shows it nearly always is), this pattern reinforces the wrong response tendencies. Remembering to reinforce full and thorough responses is essential.

The emphasis needs to be on the respondent. Patton (1987) quotes Zeno of Citium in 300 BC, who advised, "The reason why we have two ears and only one mouth is that we may listen the more and talk the less" (p. 108). As Dick DeLuca, Ely's (1991) student, put it:

The best advice anyone can give is to LISTEN, LISTEN—AND LISTEN SOME MORE. . . . Take care to observe . . . body language—tone, gestures, posture, eye movements. For example, if a question evokes a startled look, . . . ask, "From that look, I assume you didn't expect that question, could you tell me why?" (pp. 66–67)

Recall that Whyte (1957), when he asked an inappropriate question, was told to be quiet and listen. He did and found the answers to questions he didn't know enough to ask.

Particularly if you have an agenda for the interview, it is easy to slip out of the listening mode. This happened to Rosengarten (1981): "I played over the morning's tape. . . . I was astonished at how little of Ned's talk had reached my inner ear. The problem was, I had set out to question, not to listen. My mind was full of chatter and thoughts about my questions" (p. 124).

The solution reached by Rosengarten is worth noting:

Let the machine record and you listen. Afterwards, listen to the recording with an adversarial ear. . . . [That is what I did.] I got into the pattern of listening deliberately to our tapes the evenings of the days we recorded. In these hours I planned questions, . . . listened for gaps in the stories, . . . for allusions to people or incidents I wanted to hear more about, . . . for extraordinary events [to follow up], . . . and for inconsistencies. (p. 124)

Using the time out of the interview situation to analyze and plan allowed him the best of both worlds, what he called "pure listening" and "deliberate listening." He found that "You need to listen both ways. . . . Whenever I was stymied, I found . . . going back to pure listening had the effect of sharpening my sense of Ned." Thus, he managed to put together Ned's autobiography "in a way that conformed to this sense—or essence—of him" (p. 124).

The interviewer telegraphs messages by body language, voice intonation, and other subtle clues. If the interviewer signals discomfort, the tension often spreads to the respondent. In a nonthreatening situation the reverse may occur, and a secure respondent may put the interviewer at ease. But because setting the mood mostly depends on the interviewer, it is very important to learn the art of building rapport.

Respondents realize they are being interviewed when an interview is requested and its purpose given (Patton, 1980). In an unstructured interview, however, respondents may not even realize they are being interviewed; indeed, if questioned, the interviewer may give a false reason. This tactic is subject to the same ethical and practical problems as covert participant observation.

Interview location can be important. Interviewing in the respondents' home or office allows them to relax in their own territory, but phone calls and other business may create complications. There also may be other distractions; for example, Skipper and McCaghy (1972, from Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) interviewed a stripper in her dressing room. "It was clear to us that the nudity and perceived seductiveness of the stripper, and the general permissiveness of the setting had interfered with our role as researchers" (pp. 239–240). Thereafter, they conducted their interviews in a restaurant.

-
- ▶ Establish rapport to get full and truthful responses.
 - ▶ Establish a comfortable rhythm of back-and-forth conversation.
 - ▶ Use questions that require more response than a mere "yes" and "no."
 - ▶ Be sure to respond positively to the kind of responses you want to encourage.
 - ▶ Interview in a place where you both can be comfortable.
 - ▶ Use body language to set the mood of the interview.
 - ▶ Above all, *listen!*
-

The Nondirective Approach

This is an approach that every interviewer should master. It requires the interviewer to rephrase and reflect to the interviewee the underlying feelings and central significance of the previous response. For instance, in a study of voting literature, the initial question might be, "What do you think of the literature you received on voting?" Respondent: "I don't like people bringing literature to my home that implies I am not a good citizen if I didn't vote; I pay my taxes like anyone else." Interviewer: "I just want to be sure I'm getting this right; you were unhappy with the literature you received? It seemed too preachy?" When followed by the interviewer's look of anticipation, the respondent is encouraged to elaborate on the answer and, if necessary,

correct the rephrasing. Note also, that the interviewer found the underlying feeling of unhappiness as the significant emotion to reflect. In nondirective interchanges, the interviewer is attentive, and the restatement implicitly conveys the personal worth and acceptance of a person whose answer was important enough to rephrase.

Nondirective interviewing doesn't mean that the interviewer cedes all direction to the respondent. Whyte (1953, as found in Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) gives an example of "steering" in the responses given to a union official handling grievances in a steel plant:

Whyte: I'm trying to catch up on things that have happened since I was last here to study this case. . . . I think probably the best thing to start [with] would be if you could give your own impressions. . . . Do you think things are getting better or worse, or staying about the same? . . .

Whyte: That's interesting. You mean that it isn't that you don't have problems, but you take them up and talk them over before you write them up, is that it? . . .

Whyte: That's very interesting. I wonder if you could give me an example of a problem that came up recently, or not so recently, that would illustrate how you handled it sort of informally without writing it down. . . .

Whyte: That's a good example. I wonder if you could give me a little more detail about the beginning of it. Did Mr. Grosscup first tell you about it? How did you first find out? . . .

Whyte: I see. He first explained it to you and you went to the people on the job to tell them about it, but then you saw that they didn't understand it?

Notice, that, in contrast to reflecting the underlying feelings, which is what is normally practiced in the nondirective approach, the interviewer is responding to the overt content in the responses. He then questions to get more depth and detail. He uses the restating and reflecting of the nondirective approach, which maintains rapport but keeps control of the direction of the discussion in the choice of what is restated.

Nondirective responses build rapport and are particularly valuable in getting respondents to talk about their answers. The implied *is-that-correct?* response has an unfinished quality that calls for further elaboration, yet it conveys the direction of what is significant to the interviewer. If incorrect or inadequate, the respondent can correct it: "I felt really mad." The result is that whereas, on average, structured questions result in more talk by the interviewer than the respondent, the nondirective approach reverses this ratio.

In many instances the best response is minimal—a simple "Uh huh" or "Yes" said with a rising inflection that signifies *tell me more*. "Yes, I see, I never thought of that, but . . ." Sometimes a wave of the hand, a questioning eyebrow, or a similar natural gesture implicitly says "and . . ." At other times more direct probes are needed: "Tell me about . . ." "Could you tell me more about that," "If I understand you correctly, . . ." Note how Whyte's responses start with approving comments: "That's interesting . . .," "That's a good example . . .," "I see." Sometimes materials are used for prompts. For example, Lancy and Zupsic (1991), studying parent-child interaction in learning to read, used a list of activities with which the parent was familiar as the interview basis, asking questions like, "What do you think about item #8, 'Share family stories with your children?'" (p. 16).

- ▶ Nondirective interviewing involves rephrasing and reflecting to the interviewee the underlying feelings and central significance of the previous response. It is an important skill to learn.

ELECTRONIC INTERVIEWING

E-mail, instant messaging, and telephone interviewing (including low-cost voice-over-Internet protocol—e.g., VoIP, like Skype) have advantages and disadvantages over face-to-face interviewing, depending on what is wanted. For instance, all make it possible to interview individuals who would be difficult or costly to access for face-to-face sessions. Besides eliminating travel, these methods may make it possible to discuss sensitive topics, to engage shy individuals, and to access individuals in places that are difficult (e.g., hospitals) or dangerous (e.g., war zones) to enter. All require access to appropriate equipment; e-mail and instant messaging limit the choice of respondents to those with computer familiarity and access. All provide fewer social clues than face-to-face contact; clues successively decrease with telephone usage, instant messaging, and e-mail—with emoticons and without them (i.e., graphics that portray mood, such as ☺ or ☹). There is some evidence that emoticons don't make much difference. Similarly, the likelihood of a spontaneous response is greatest with face-to-face and telephone, and less with answer-when-convenient instant messaging and e-mail. E-mail and instant messaging are less intrusive and self-transcribing, thus eliminating a costly step.

"The best words . . . to separate . . . [face-to-face] from e-mail interviews are FLOW and DYNAMICS [spontaneous slowing down, getting louder, laughing together], both of which . . . contribute to greater depth and quality of information" (Hodkinson, 2000, emphasis in original, as found in Mann & Stewart, 2000, p. 127). Schaefer and Dillman (1998) compared conventional mail and e-mail questionnaire returns in an experimental study involving a computer literate sample (university faculty). They found comparable response rates, but faster returns from e-mail as well as more complete and longer responses, especially for open-ended questions. Web-based questionnaires, with some technical savvy, can appear just as a paper questionnaire would, but open-end questions require some keyboarding skill of respondents. (For more, see Bampton & Cowton, 2002 and Mann & Stewart, 2000; for telephone interviewing see chapter 24.)

SAMPLING INTERVIEWEES

Selecting interviewees is, of course, determined by what information is sought. Purposive interviewing or theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) is the most common pattern—that of selecting individuals who meet some information need or provide special access. The article by Hoffmann-Riem in chapter 1 provides an excellent example of sampling decisions. Wanting a representative sample, she considered using the adoption agency records for a random or stratified sample. But she rejected