

Some Guidelines in Conducting an Interview

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW: Preparing the Interview Guide

Regardless of strategy, it is highly suggested to construct an interview guide, with questions, topics, or subtopics, focusing around the objectives of the activity. An **interview guide** serves as an aid to help the interviewer what to ask about, in what sequence, how to pose the question, and how to pose follow-ups. It varies from highly structured to relatively loose.

1. List the topics and subtopics to be covered. This serves as an aid to memory during the interview.
2. Limit the number of topics and subtopics to be covered, but be sure to explore them in considerable detail during the interview. This is to give more chance to the interviewees to express their ideas, experiences, and explanations.

NOTE: Rigid and elaborate interview guide can be self-defeating to the extent that it does not allow the free-flow of thoughts and ideas. Participants/interviewees may feel hesitant or not free to raise possible issues, questions, or ideas. Few initial questions can often generate a fruitful chain of discussions not anticipated by the interviewer.

The above tips can be considered when you opt to have a loose type of an interview guide. Below is an example of a semi-structured type of an interview guide.

| Focus of Interview | Sample Questions* |
|--|---|
| General background, i.e., cultural beliefs, religious beliefs, customs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what country were you born? • How long have you (or your ancestors) been in this country? • What language did you first learn to speak? What language is used at home? |
| Level of acculturation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you identify yourself (in terms of your ethnic/racial background, heritage, or culture)? • What is important for others to know and understand about your background or culture? • How has your background or culture influenced who you are today? • What is the role of spirituality, faith or religion in your life? Do you identify with any formal religion/belief system? • What customs or traditions are important to you/your family? • What does your culture/religion/heritage teach you about <i>aging/growing older/ elders or older people</i>? • What has been the biggest adjustment for you/your family about life in this country? |

Table 1. Sample interview guide about level of acculturation from Yeo, Ed. (2000). Appendix C: Instructional Strategies for Interviewing Elders from Diverse Ethnic Backgrounds. Core Curriculum in Ethno-geriatrics (2nd Ed.).

DURING THE INTERVIEW: Asking questions

1. Introduce yourself politely.
2. **If you are going to record the interview, be sure to let your interviewees know about it.** Tell them to not be intimidated by the recording and that you will use them for the purpose that you've mentioned. Be sure also to **take notes** to serve as a support to the recording. You may want to have someone else to do the note-taking while doing the interview so as to avoid confusion. Keep track of your time.
3. After a brief introduction, **explain briefly the purpose and scope of the interview.** Be sure to make it as simple as possible to avoid any confusion and/or intimidation from.
4. Before going into the main discussion, there is usually a brief warm-up, where you can ask the interviewee/s about anything that would easily catch their interest. This is also to **establish rapport** with your interviewee/s. Aside from asking some personal backgrounds, you can ask non-controversial subjects or anything that you have observed/researched about the community. For example, if you are interviewing a farmer or a group of farmer, you can exchange a few words on their crop status with regards to the current season. Be sure to just limit your conversation so as not to preempt the main discussion.

This opening discussion will also enable the moderator to **identify the participants who are reticent as well as those who love to talk.** The moderator should take note of these differences and by asking more questions of the less talkative, encourage them to express themselves.

5. As much as possible, when conducting an interview with the members of a community, **use simple or layman's terms. Avoid using jargons.** If jargons or technical words cannot be prevented, explain the meaning of these words first to avoid misunderstanding. You may use examples or instances from the community to better explain and relate any difficult concept.
6. **Dress appropriately and accordingly.** Learn to adapt to your audience. Arrive on time.
7. Listen and pay attention very carefully. **Present yourself aware and interested.**
8. Keep your goals in mind. **Keep the conversation on track, do not digress too much.** Be aware of you and your interviewee/s's limited time.
9. Do not take yes/no answers, **learn or practice to ask for some elaboration.** Ask follow-up questions. Ask for clarification for things you do not understand.

10. **Avoid “inflammatory questions” or leading questions** and try to stay polite.

Ex: “Do you always find doing this unproductive?” “Do you discriminate women when joining the organization?”

11. **Be sensitive with non-verbal cues.** Be aware of your body language and your interviewee’s body language.

Examples: Slouched position when sitting or keeping your body away from your interviewee/s may send a message of you uninterested to what they are saying. Smile when they make jokes. Also, silence may also yield information.

12. Make your interviewees feel that their answers are very important and **be respectful** for their time they’re giving you.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW: Collecting and Analyzing the Data

1. After the interview, **transcribe** the recorded interview into word document. You may want to compare them with your notes.
2. **Organize** data accordingly. Group them according to the interview guide.
3. Pay attention to the things that were discussed in the recorded interview. Ask for some follow-up if there is major confusion on the transcription.
4. Be sure to let your interviewees be aware of the outcome of your activity. You may want to give them a copy of your output or update them on the development of the activity.

For more tips in conducting an interview:

Kumar, K (April, 1987). Conducting group interviews in developing countries. US Agency for International Development Program Design and Evaluation Methodology Report No. 8.

Yeo, Ed. (2000). Appendix C: Instructional Strategies for Interviewing Elders from Diverse Ethnic Backgrounds. Core Curriculum in Ethno-geriatrics (2nd Ed.).

Vilela, M. (2016) Chapter 3: Section 12: Conducting an Interview. Retrieved from <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/conduct-interviews/main>.