

Section III.

Interviewing in Qualitative Research

Things We Do in Qualitative Interviews

- Use open-ended questions
- Avoid leading questions
- Probe issues in depth
- Let the informant lead

Use Open-Ended Questions

Closed Questions: Questions for which the answer choices are either given to the respondent or understood by the respondent

Examples:

“Is your hair black, brown, or red?” [Choices provided]

“Are you interested in research?” [Choice implied: yes/no]

Closed questions limit the breadth of information that a respondent has to offer.

Open Questions: Questions that allow the respondent to answer without presented or implied choices

Examples: “What color is your hair?”

“What are your interests?”

Open Question Words:

What?

Where?

Who?

When?

How?

Why? *

* “**Why?**” Limit the use of “WHY” questions in this type of work because it implies that there is a right answer

Avoid Leading Questions

(From Herman & Bentley, 1993)

- Allow people to answer in their own terms voicing their own views, values and experiences.
- Leading questions are phrased to suggest a particular answer or to imply that one answer is expected or more correct:
 - ♦ *“What fears do you have when your baby’s diarrhea does not stop?”*
 - ♦ *“What actions do you take to stop his/her diarrhea?”*
 - ♦ *“How good was the treatment your baby got at the health center?”*
 - ♦ These questions were phrased to elicit answers related to fears, actions and treatments, respectively.
- Non-leading questions on the same topics could be asked this way:
 - ♦ *“How do you feel when your baby’s diarrhea does not stop?”*
 - ♦ *“What do you do when his/her diarrhea does not stop?”*
 - ♦ *“How do you feel about the treatment your baby got at the health center?”*

Asking Non Leading Questions

Leading	Nonleading
Do you think vomiting during diarrhea is serious?	
Do you give less food when your baby had diarrhea?	
Do you know that children lose water when they have diarrhea?	

Probing

“The key to successful interviewing is learning how to probe effectively...

...that is, to stimulate an informant to produce more information...

...without injecting yourself so much into the interaction that you only get a reflection of yourself in the data.”

(Bernard, 1995)

Probing Techniques

- “*What?*” or “*What?*” questions
 - ♦ a stimulus without putting yourself in it
- Silent Probe
 - ♦ just remain quiet and wait for informant to continue
 - ♦ often happens as you are busy writing what the informant has just finished saying.
- Echo Probe
 - ♦ repeat the last thing an informant said and ask them to continue
 - ♦ “*I see. The child has loose stools, becomes tired and will not eat. Then what happens?*”
- The Uh-huh Probe
 - ♦ encourage participant to continue with a narrative by making affirmative noises:
 - ♦ “*Uh-huh,*” “*yes, I see,*” “*right, uh-huh*”
- Grand or Mini-Tour Type Question
 - ♦ see Spradley example

Letting the Informant Lead

“In unstructured interviewing, you keep the conversation focused on a topic, while giving the informant room to define the content of the discussion.”

“The rule is: Get an informant on to a topic of interest and get out of the way. Let the informant provide information that he or she thinks is important.”

(from Bernard, 1995)

Tips for Interviewing -1

- Do not begin interviewing right away
 - ♦ Friendly greeting and explanations
 - ♦ Establish ‘cultural ignorance:’ interviewer as learner
- Listen and express interest in what the informant tells you
 - ♦ More of a friendly conversation
 - ♦ Not a strict question & answer exchange
 - ♦ But remain neutral: don’t approve or disapprove
- Try to encourage informant to expand on their answers and give as many details as possible
 - ♦ informant’s tendency is to abbreviate answers
 - ♦ Use “describe,” “tell me about”
 - ♦ Do not move on to a new topic until you feel you have explored the informant’s knowledge on the question at hand
- Let informant’s answers determine the direction the interview takes (**keeping within topics of interest**)

Tips for Interviewing -2

- Use informant's own language to ask new questions
 - ◆ Do this as you learn informant's language
 - ◆ This encourages informants to speak to you in their own language
- Crude measure of success is the volume of response
 - ◆ 80% at least 'their' words
 - ◆ most problems are the fault of the interviewer
- Learn how to re-phrase/re-think questions
- Avoid using "why" questions as much as possible.
 - ◆ implies that there is a factual answer
 - ◆ informants will try to give you a 'right' answer
 - ◆ ask, *"What was happening at the time?"*

Use of Translators

Translators do the following:

- ◆ Provide literal translation
 - ◆ Do not edit, 'clean-up' or summarize statements
- ◆ Keep key terms in local language
 - ◆ Don't try to translate if too difficult
- ◆ Keep your own dictionary of key local terms

Process:

- ◆ Interviewer introduces translator to informant
- ◆ Interviewer speaks directly to informant
- ◆ Interviewer keeps eye contact with informant
- ◆ Interviewer essentially ignores the translator
- ◆ Interviewer/translator complete raws notes after interview
 - ◆ write expanded notes together, if possible