



Conducting face-to-face interviews

These guidelines outline some of the things you should consider to ensure you conduct a good face-to-face interview.

Types of interviews to choose from

There are three different formats your interviews can take. These are:

- structured interviews;
- semi-structured interviews; and
- unstructured interviews.

You will need to consider which approach is most suitable for finding out the information you want to know.

Structured interviews

In structured interviews the interviewer asks the respondent the same questions in the same way. This is similar to conducting a face-to-face survey. This interview may include open and closed questions.

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews mainly consist of open-ended questions based on topics you want to cover in the interview. While the interview focuses around key topics there is also the opportunity to discuss in more detail some areas of interest. You have the opportunity to explore answers more widely or other areas of discussion introduced by the interviewee. You may also have a set of prompts to help the interviewee if they struggle to answer any of the questions.

Unstructured interviews

In unstructured interviews the interviewer has a limited number of topics to discuss. This can be as small as just one or two. The interviewer then asks questions around these topics and bases later questions on the interviewee's response. You will usually cover these topics in great detail.

Drafting your questions

Depending on the structure of your interview, you need to ensure:

- ❑ you have suitable questions and topics prepared;
- ❑ your questions and topics will gather the information or data you need;
- ❑ phrase your questions in a way the interviewee will understand;
- ❑ you have prompts prepared just in case the interviewee doesn't understand what you mean – but try not to make these too leading; and
- ❑ you try to use alternatives to 'why' when phrasing questions such as 'what', 'what reason's and 'what made you'.

Before the interview

Before you go to conduct your interview there are some things you should consider.

Well beforehand

Brief your interviewee.

- ❑ Make sure they understand why you want to interview them and what you will use their information/views for.
- ❑ Let them know how long the interview should take.
- ❑ Agree a time and place for the interview – consider a location that is comfortable or familiar to the interviewee.
- ❑ Ensure the interviewee has confidence in you.

Just beforehand

- ❑ Ensure you have all the equipment you need.
- ❑ Check again that your questions cover all the information you need.
- ❑ Check the environment is suitable for the interview for example quiet, no interruptions.
- ❑ Make sure you know where you're going and allow time for getting lost if it's new to you.

At your interview

Break the ice with a little friendly chat if you don't know them already, to help make them comfortable and establish a rapport.

Then recap with the interviewee:

- ❑ why you are interviewing them;
- ❑ the purpose of the interview and how you will use their information/views;
- ❑ how long it will take;
- ❑ explain the confidentiality of the interview; and
- ❑ smile – make your interviewee feel comfortable with the situation.

Body language

Be aware of your body language.

- ❑ Typically we communicate 60-80% of our message through our body language.
- ❑ Just 7-10% of a conversational message is attributable to the words we speak.
- ❑ Make sure you are attentive and comfortable and they will respond better.

Be observant of the interviewee's body language.

- ❑ In general, when words and body language conflict, we believe the latter.
- ❑ Your interviewee may display darting eyes, ear tugging, and other nervous body signals.

If they are looking uncomfortable look at them in a friendly understanding way, so they remember you're just a person they're having a conversation with, then:

- ❑ ask how they feel about the topic;
- ❑ reassure them that their answers are valid and confidential; and
- ❑ consider if there's a more comfortable way you can word your approach or redirect your questions if need be.

Language

Speak clearly

Let the interviewee know you're listening – reactive listening. Use words and sounds to show this:

- ❑ Uh huh
- ❑ OK
- ❑ Oh right
- ❑ Really?

Avoid approving phrases that could lead their future answers, like:

- Yes
- That's right
- Absolutely
- You're not wrong

Avoid asking 'why?' For example use these instead:

- What reasons...
- What made you...

Responding

The response assures the interviewee:

- you heard them;
- you understood them; and
- you have interpreted the message to your mutual satisfaction.

Be aware that if you have misunderstood what they meant, you'll need to change it when you get the understanding right.

This is key to building rapport and ease of communication. In short...

- At least: recap or rephrase what the interviewee has said.
- At best: use what the interviewee has said to ask increasingly accurate and relevant questions. However, be aware of when it's time to stop and move on to the next subject.

Drawing out techniques

If you want to find out more about an issue or explore an answer, use phrases and techniques that ask for more information. Such as:

- 'Tell me more about that'
- 'I'm listening, please go on'
- 'Can you explain that to me?'
- 'You mentioned xxx, what's that about?'
- Counting to four (pausing to the count of four to give interviewee chance to add to more)

Evaluating

Establishing what is real and what is a smokescreen.

- ❑ Use open questions to sift.
- ❑ Use closed questions to zone in on important issues.

At the end of the interview and afterwards

- ❑ Re-assure the interviewee – recap what the information will be used for.
- ❑ Give your contact details to the interviewee so if they have any worries or questions they can contact you.
- ❑ Thank them for their time.
- ❑ Write up interview notes (if necessary) as soon after the interview as possible, to ensure you remember all the detail.