

Tips for Interviews

What is it used for?

Guiding interviews is a kind of empathic, deep listening. It helps to “step into the shoes” of other persons, to conduct an intensive way of emphasizing. Interviews are also valuable as starting points for iterations.

Important principles:

- Create a comfortable atmosphere (also regarding aspects like undisturbed surrounding, light, temperature, furniture ...)
- Recap information, given beforehand: Information about the interviewer! What is the aim of the interview? How long will it last? Will the interview be recorded? What will happen to the outcome?
- Breaking the ice: Get to know each other, talk about daily routines, the weather, common interests ...
- Use open ended questions by integrating verbs like how, when, why, tell me about ...
- Let interviewees tell their story. Encourage narration.
- Avoid a question/response situation. It's not a survey!
- Fokus on interviewees not on the questionnaire!
- Be flexible in using your questionnaire, adopt spontaneously.
- Assume the role of an apprentice, not an expert. Ask again when you didn't get it.
- Ask for show and tell.
- Avoid abstract questions (technical terminology, special language, opinions, definitions)
- Avoid leading questions (presuppositions).
- Active listening: Rephrase / summarize in own words (parts of) sentences someone said
- Ask people to show things / features / hacks / services they interact with

Different kind of questions

- General questions: What does ... mean for you? How would you define ...? What do you associate with ...?
- Ask about incidents, stories, or (surprising) experiences
- Specific: When did you ... the last time? What was it like? Which obstacles did you experience?
- Outlook: What do you wish regarding ...? If a good fairy comes to you, your three wishes (regarding to our topic) would be?
- Circular questions like: Who would notice a change / difference at first?
- Biographical approaches: The first time you encountered the topic /issue in your life? Pains and gains in your life?

Building a question guide

1. Build a collection of questions (brainstorming): How do people feel about ... What do they like/dislike?
2. Assess collection of questions: Which questions are most relevant? Which are peripheral? Which are beyond our task?
3. Sort questions: Group questions that relate to each other (4-5 groups) and sort these groups (funnel from general to more specific topics)
4. Define a start question for each group of questions which encourages storytelling and narration.
5. All other questions (then the start question) are subsumed as a checklist and only asked when necessary (i.e. not addressed by the interviewee).
6. Begin the interview with a question (the starting question you formulated) that induces narration: "Tell me about... (everyday practices)"
7. Standardized demographics in advance or after interview