

Formulating an interview guide as a tool for qualitative data collection

There are three types of interviews which are used to gather data in qualitative research such as structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, and unstructured interviews.

The form of an interview guide should be loose and flexible which allows for dialogue during an interview, the opportunity to change the order of the questions and easy movement from question to question.

Well-formulated questions in the guide are participant-oriented and not leading, but also clearly worded, single-faceted, and open-ended. The aim of the guide is to generate answers from participants that are spontaneous, in-depth, and vivid. This means that the answers reflect the interviewees' personal feelings and stories, and the interview guide could produce data allowing new concepts to emerge. Descriptive answers could be encouraged by starting questions with words like what, who, where, when or how. In some cases, the word why could also be used. Avoid dichotomous questions that can be answered with a "yes" or "no".

A semi-structured interview guide consisted of three levels of questions:

1. Introduction
2. Main themes and
3. Follow-up questions.

Opening Questions or Introductory questions:

They could be used as a warm-up to break the ice and create a relaxed environment. These questions could be about participant's general experience related to topic of research or about issues that were familiar to the participant yet central to the study subject.

Key Questions or Main themes:

The main themes cover the main content of the research subject and within these participants should be encouraged to speak freely about their perceptions and experiences. Every participant would usually be questioned on the main themes. The order of the main themes should be progressive and logical. The questions related to the main themes should move from the lighter ones to more emotional and in-depth ones and then end on lighter themes again. Question sequence should also go from general to more specific.

Follow up questions:

Follow-up questions should be used to make the main themes easier for the participant to understand and to direct conversation towards the study subject. The aim is always to maintain the flow of the interview and gain accurate and optimal information. Follow-up questions could be pre-designed, spontaneous, or based on the participant's answer. Pre-designed follow-up questions could be beneficial in increasing the consistency of the subjects covered by interviews carried out by different interviewers. As a spontaneous

follow-up question, the interviewer could ask participants to expand on some point that came up in the interview, by asking for more information or an example of the issue.

Prompting or Probing:

Verbal and non-verbal probing techniques could be used as follow-up questions. Examples of verbal probes included repeating the participant's point, expressing interest with verbal agreement or giving the impression that the interviewer was aware of certain information. Non-verbal probing refers to remaining silent and allowing the participant to think aloud.

Ending Questions:

Ask an "all things considered question, this will give the participants a chance to reflect on the entire discussing and then offer their positions or opinions on the topics of central importance to the research. The moderator could also review the purpose of the study and ask if there is anything else the participants would like to add.

References:

Krueger, R. (2000) *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research* (London:Sage)

Kallio, H., Pietilä, A. M., Johnson, M., & Kangasniemi, M. (2016). Systematic methodological review: developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 72(12), 2954-2965.