

What is an “interview”?

- “A conversation, in which facts or statements are elicited from another”
- “A meeting at which information is obtained”



Quote about learning interview techniques

- “One thing I know I have learned is that interviewing is much more difficult than I ever imagined it would be. Interviewing appears to be asking someone questions... Who has never done that? It is only when you try to do it that you realize there is much more to it than meets the eye.”
- Different styles: Michael Moore; Jeremy Paxman



Types of Interviews

Structured Interviews



Semi-Structured Interviews



Unstructured Interviews

Structured Interviews

- Never give lengthy explanations of study
- Never deviate from sequence of questions or question wording
- Never let person interrupt an interview
- Never suggest an answer or agree or disagree with an answer
- Never interpret the meaning of the question
- Never improvise, such as adding answer categories half way through



Interviewing in the Social Sciences

- Interviewing in the Social Sciences used to be entirely structured, objective interviewing techniques.
- Now unstructured, free-flowing interviews are considered a very important tool
- Best research may involve a combination?



Semi-Structured Interviews

- When you go into an interview situation with a clear list of questions you want answered
- You have to be aware the interview will probably go off on a tangent
- It takes skill to keep the interview focused on the subjects you want answered



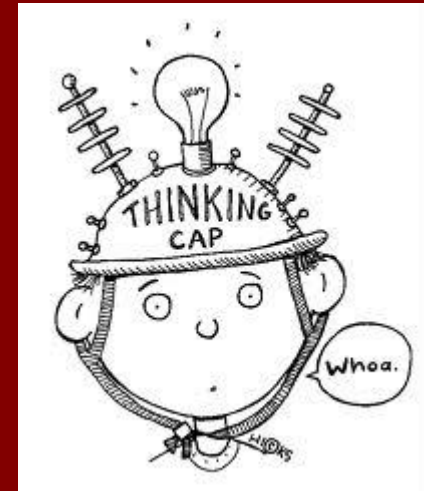
How many people? How often?

- As usual with qualitative research, there are no hard and fast rules
- You might stop people outside Debenhams for 10 minutes of semi-structured interviewing or you might re-interview the same person 5 times for an hour
- You have to decide who you have access to, for how long, and how will these different types of interviews affect your research



Getting the information you want

- Remember – you can't aim to get certain *answers*, but you can aim to get the *information* you want.
- You might think your questions are great, but the respondent just might not 'get it'.
- You need to be able to think on your feet, to prompt the respondent to think again about your question.



Writing questions for semi-structured

- Very tempting to write questions as you would for 'structured interviews'.
- Can the respondent answer your question with a 'yes' or 'no' answer?
- How can you get your respondents to elaborate?
- How can you get them to talk about the information you want without giving them clues about why you are asking them?
- Start with simple questions then dig...
- How to finish/close the interview?



Unstructured Interviews

- You need a lot of confidence to do this kind of interview, but it can lead to some of the richest data
- You will normally need to either have an established rapport with your respondent or be able to build that rapport quickly
- In these situations, the line between conversation and interview becomes blurred



Recording your interviews



- You have three choices:
 1. Record the proceedings
 2. Take notes as you do the interview
 3. Someone else takes notes as you do the interview

Recording

■ Pros

- You don't have to worry about anything apart from doing the interview
- Everything is there word for word
- You can capture the voice inflections, pauses, emphases

■ Cons

- Finding one to use
- Getting consent from the respondent
- Making sure the interview is audible
- Making sure the batteries don't run out half way through
- You have to listen to yourself when you transcribe the tapes



Taking Notes yourself



- Pros

- People are less concerned about you taking notes than recording
- Don't have to worry about interview being audible etc

- Cons

- It is very difficult to concentrate on the interview, when you're taking notes at the same time
- You will inevitably miss things they say
- It's hard to capture the subtlety and nuance of an interview when you are busy scribbling in bad shorthand

Having someone else take notes

■ Pros

- You don't get sidetracked by having to keep notes
- There's two of you observing the interview so you can discuss your interpretations of the interview afterwards

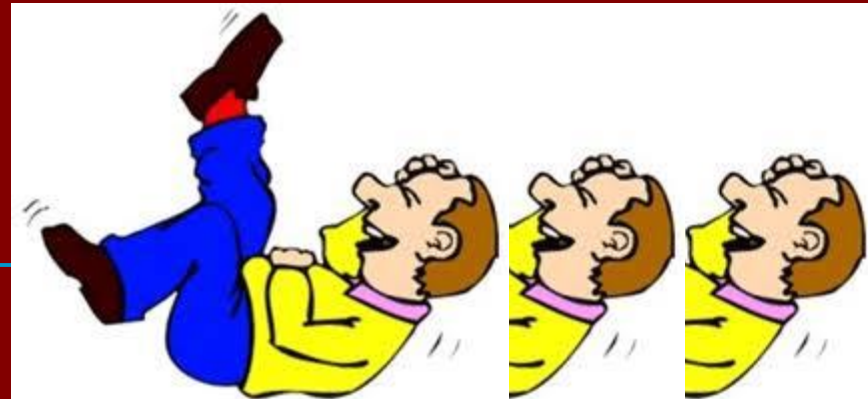
■ Cons

- The respondent might feel strange
- You have to trust your note-keeper
- Harder to build a rapport with two of you there



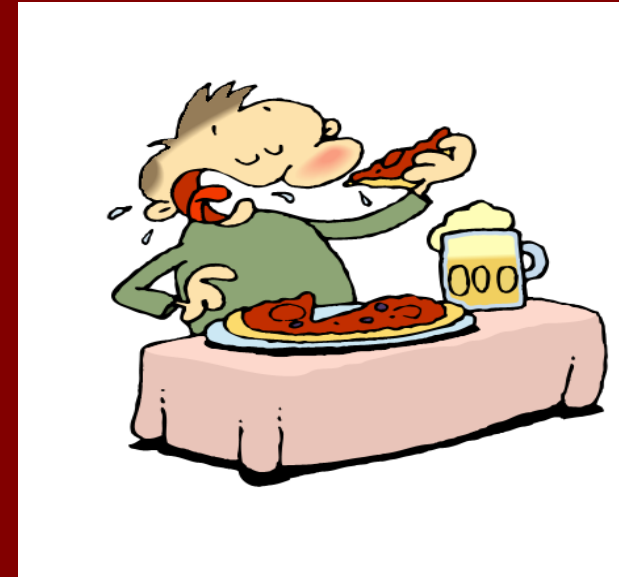
Building up a Rapport?

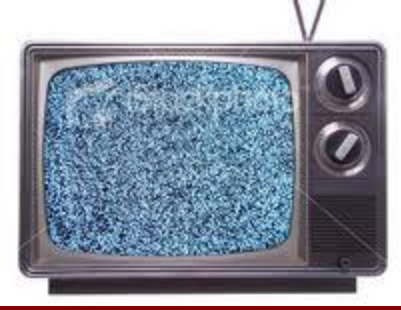
- You have to think about different issues:
 - What are you going to wear?
 - Where are you going to do the interview?
 - How do you intend to present yourself?
 - How much of the research study do you tell them about?
 - How are you going to make them feel at ease?
 - If they are not talking, how are you going to get them talking?
 - Do you have a good joke?



Unexpected Behaviour or Surroundings

- ❑ People being late
- ❑ People eating
- ❑ Interruptions (mobile phones; children running in etc)
- ❑ Having to interview in difficult surroundings (noisy, other things going on)
- ❑ Can you ask the questions you want, if ~~other people are in the room?~~





Assessments and Formulations



- Try not to respond with:
 - “That’s Great”; “yes, I totally agree”, “I did that last week”, “I love Buffy too”
 - Paraphrasing what they’ve said for your own purposes
 - Avoid closed-ended questions
 - “So you watch TV?”
 - Avoid confusing, double questions
 - “So you watch TV; what television programs do you like? Comedies, news or documentaries?”
 - Watch Parkinson.
-

Are you listening?

- The interview is about them not you.
- Should be approx 80%-90% them, and 10%-20% you
- In order to keep rapport going, are you talking too much and giving away your perspective?
- Are you concentrating on what they are saying so you can tailor the next question?
- Are you jumping in with your own questions, and missing opportunities that the respondent gives you?



Phrasing questions

- This is notoriously difficult
- When you listen to yourself, you will cringe
 - Ummmmms, aaaahhhhhs, unnecessary clarifications
- Tempting to be on the respondent's side:
 - “Could you tell me a little bit about....”
 - Is this what you really want? No, you want them to describe things in great detail and with great intelligence
- Are you asking the questions clearly, or are you rambling to try and make your question clearer?

Dealing with sensitive issues

- What do you do if people are clearly distressed?
- What if people refuse to answer?
- How do you deal with your own embarrassment and discomfort?
- How do you deal with issues of gender, age, class, race etc.



As you pack up...

- Chat while Pack.
- Anything I should know?
- Contact Details – them
- Contact Details – you
- THANKS!



Writing up your interviews

- Martin Bashir interviewing Princess Di
- If we look at this transcript as an example, think through how you would write up these results.





Conclusions



- Don't be scared off
- Interviews are great, and provide some of the richest data
- But easy to assume interviewing is easy, but it's not necessarily
- Only by doing it and listening to yourself will that become clear
- Your interviews at the end of the project will be 100% better than your early ones

Sample Interviews

- Martin Bashir interviewing Michael Jackson & Princess Diana
- Kerry Katona on This Morning
- Michael Parkinson interviewing Meg Ryan
- Michael Parkinson interviewing JLo
- Jonathan Ross interviewing Lady GaGa
- Ali G interviewing Beckhams
- Paxman interviewing Michael Howard
- Paxman interviewing Chloe Smith



Think About...

- What are their styles of interviewing?
- Are they using open or closed questions?
- Do they achieve open or closed answers?
- What is interviewer's first question? Last question?
- Would you have phrased things differently?
- Are questions adapted according to circumstance?



Sample Oral History Interviews

Google “oral histories” on youtube. Eg:

- Early African American memories
- Jazz oral history
- The Endocrine Society oral history
- Sue Johnson on oral history