

Tips & Tricks for Conducting Successful Interviews • June 2021

# Open and Exploratory:

How to conduct effective interviews to discover something new!

# Conducting effective interviews is more difficult than it looks

An interview is a **kind of conversation** that is **specifically used to discover critical and psychological information**.

This also applies to most of our daily conversations. Whether it's ...

- ▶ ... at the university, when the teacher wants a feedback from his students
- ▶ ... in a job interview, when the employee or the employer wants to know more about the interviewee
- ▶ ... at the family dinner table asking your child about their day
- ▶ ... in all situations in our life where a dialogue takes place

At Séissmo, as market research specialists, we constantly strive to find out how people behave.  
Learn from our **interviewing techniques!**

Our know-how will make you an interview specialist - See how to get **great information** and **real emotions** out of your interviewer in any situation!

# The 3 basic principles for conducting effective interviews

**Go into detail and adapt to the other person's frame of reference**

Wide scope for bringing in the interviewee's point of view

Highest level of self-revealing comments

**Be open minded to go where the conversation takes you**

Accept to discuss all relevant aspects, be flexible

**Be neutral and don't "lead the witness"**

Ask open-ended and unstructured questions

Structuring is only carried out as the conversation progresses

# How to break the ice with your conversation partner

## Establish a trusting relationship

Approaching interviewees **positively, friendly, patiently and respectfully** is important to build trust

- It can start right from the beginning by offering **drinks and snacks ...**

### Online interviews:

- Try to be in a quiet room and make sure you have a good connection and technical equipment
- Switch on your camera
- Pay attention to the signs of the person you are talking to (e.g., what does their background reveal?)

## Start the conversation

**The first question** should be **as open as possible** and about the context of the problem

- Give the respondent the opportunity to talk about their **personal experiences**
- Give him/her **time** and **freedom** to become comfortable with the interview situation, you (the interviewer) and the topic
- The personal reference system** thus becomes conscious

**AVOID THE FRAMING EFFECT!** Don't lead or bias the thinking process in a particular direction through how you ask the opening question

# Maintaining the pace of the conversation

- ▶ The interviewer should get the conversation going both **non-verbally** and **verbally**



**Non-verbally:** Nodding and attentive active listening

**Verbally:** Matching sounds and words (« yes », « clear », « hmmm »,...)

## Do's and Don'ts:

- ▶ **Accept pauses in the conversation:** the speaker deepens and gathers their thoughts
- ▶ **During pauses,** summarize the interview. Use language like “If I understand you correctly”; “I hear you saying...” to allow them to expand or clarify their answers
- ▶ **Do not** give your own opinion, make value judgements, relate your own experience, give advice, highlight status or other symbols that may reveal your own opinions

# Why you should never ask "why"

The respondent may feel confronted with a **direct** and **insistent** question.

- ▶ Would lead to **unrealistic coherence** - *As humans we want to appear 'logical' and 'thoughtful'*
- ▶ **Contradictions** in **rational** and **emotional behaviour** may occur - *Again, this is human! If there are contradictions in your interview, you are more likely to get authentic answers! Be happy about it!*
- ▶ **No correct answer** because of the **social desirability bias**  
*Wrong* example : *Why do you eat sweets?*  
*Good* example: *Tell me about the last situation in which you ate sweets.*

## Tips & tricks:

- ▶ Ask open-ended questions, not suggestive ones
- ▶ Allow sufficient time for your interviewer to express his/her **own impressions**
- ▶ Form chains of associations until reaching a deep understanding
- ▶ Deepen the comments
- ▶ Do not give your **own opinion** (even if requested)

# A few best practices

Don'ts	Do's Open-ended question invite to discuss a topic further!
Are you all right?	How are you?
Can I help you?	What can I do for you?
Do you see yourself still working for our company in 5 years?	Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
Do you know of other ways to improve the department?	What other measures could the company take to improve the service?
Can other companies do better?	What do you mean by better? Who are the others?
Is the price too high for you?	What do you compare the price to? What is too high for you in the price?
Did you solve the problem?	How did you approach the problem?

# Experts' tips for conducting effective interviews (1/2)



## Show empathy

- ▶ Be supportive, friendly, and attentive
- ▶ Provide a pleasant atmosphere
- ▶ Help establish a sense of security in your partner, especially if the environment is unfamiliar
- ▶ As the interview progresses, pay attention to the process & the interviewee – pick up the signals!



## Adapt to your conversation partner

- ▶ Re-use their language
- Don't correct words, don't interpret during the interview
- ▶ Adopt the flow and rhythm of your partner's speech



## No confrontation

- ▶ Would lead to unrealistic consistency
- ▶ Contradictions between rational and emotional attitudes may occur
- Sensitive topics: Minimise wrong answers due to social acceptability by smartly handling the conversation



## Focus on the topic and keep the speech flowing

- ▶ Cover all aspects
- ▶ With talkative ones: Refocus on the purpose of the interview
- ▶ With shy ones: Make small talk so they can relax
- ▶ Nod to increase fluency of speech
- ▶ Show that you are paying attention



# Experts' tips for conducting effective interviews (2/2)



## Be persistent

- ▶ Go deeper: don't be satisfied with superficial answers
- ▶ Probe, and probe again ('what else?')
- ▶ Accept pauses and moments of thought
- ▶ Repeat questions in another context if necessary
- ▶ Use different attitudes to stimulate exploration (role play)



## Ask open-ended questions

- ▶ Open-ended questions create space for the answer and may uncover ways of looking at the subject that you hadn't considered
- ▶ With closed questions, the interviewee may feel guided or forced in one direction
- ▶ Tell only what is necessary - no influence/neutrality rule



## Be focused and rephrase

- ▶ Remember what has already been said. Feel free to take notes (but be consistent if you do)
- ▶ Rephrase some answers here and there to ensure you're truly absorbing what the person is saying



## Use genuine situations as references

- ▶ Too abstract or general questions don't provide valuable information
- ▶ Instead, ask for **specific contextual references** e.g.:  
'How was the last time you were confronted with this situation?'

**Thank you very much.  
We look forward to seeing you  
on the 20th of July!**

