

7 Tips for Facilitating Effective In-Depth Interviews

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWING (IDI) is a qualitative research technique that typically involves a series of one-on-one interviews about an idea, program, or situation. Individuals are often invited to participate because of their first-hand knowledge about, or experience with, the topic of interest. This focused, personalized approach allows participants to explore, in depth, why they think, feel, and behave the way they do. However, the quality of the interview data often depends on the skill of the interviewer. Read on for how to get the most out of your interview experience.

Do your homework. Take the time you need to get comfortable with the interview objectives, guide, and protocol. Interviewers who are practiced and prepared are typically better able to: navigate the interview landscape while staying on task, ensure that all of the specific interview objectives are met, and 'think on their feet' when challenging situations arise.

Establish a safe, non-judgmental environment. To maximize opportunities for participants to openly and honestly share their opinions, let participants know how their confidentiality will be protected. Also share with them that the purpose of the interview is to learn about their thoughts, opinions, and experiences. Throughout the interview, refrain from sharing your personal opinions through comment, expression, or body language; instead, focus on actively listening and supporting the participant through the interview process. This can be as simple as not reacting with shock or surprise, not expressing disapproval or disdain, and remaining open and encouraging regardless of the participant's responses.

Question carefully. Strong, in-depth interviews are dependent on well-crafted questions. In addition to being objective-driven, effective interview items avoid question bias and are open-ended in nature. Don't forget to ask follow-up or extension questions to help the respondent go into further detail. Finally, allowing for brief silences after a question can provide valuable "wait time" for participants as they think through their responses. Be comfortable with silence – don't try to fill it. If you don't fill the silence, the interviewee will. And you may get useful information when s/he does.

Ask, don't tell. The purpose of an interview is to ASK clear, purposeful questions to explore participants' thoughts, feelings and behaviors; however, during this process, it is not uncommon for participants to ask questions themselves about specific topics or services with which they are not entirely familiar. In such a case, you

can gently reframe the question back to the participant and/or remind participants that the purpose of the interview is to learn more about them. Depending on the specific interview protocol, there may be time after the formal interview concludes to answer content-based questions and/or clarify misinformation.

Be mindful of time. The interviewer has a tricky job when it comes to time management. As a way of respecting the respondent's time, make every effort to begin and end on time. During the interview, keep the discussion on track, gently moving the participant along to make sure all key items in the facilitator's guide are covered. Make sure to have a plan for how to handle abbreviated interviews; for instance, highlight in advance the key questions that are essential to every interview.

Adopt a system for data collection. The note taker (who at times may be the interviewer, too!) is responsible for capturing what is said, word-for-word when possible. If protocol allows and the participant provides consent, a recording device can be used. If needed, the interviewer can ask participants to clarify and/or verify any responses. However, it is not the role of the interviewer or note taker to analyze responses in the moment; the interview is a time to simply document as many details of the discussion as possible.

Don't forget to reflect. As soon as possible following the interview (and ideally within 24 hours), take time to review and organize your notes. If you worked with a note taker, be sure to discuss the interview findings together, ensuring that you captured key themes and quotes. Reflecting on the interview process also allows you to consider opportunities to improve future interviews, if the protocol allows, such as revising the order of items or strengthening key questions.