

## CREATING QUALITY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Each interview should have 10 - 12 questions. Use these tips for writing good interview questions that will bring you the quality results you expect:

1) Start with your topic and clearly articulate one research question that you would like to answer for your research essay. When writing questions for the interview, make sure that you write them with your research question in mind. You are attempting to find answers to that question.

2) Consider your target audience. Get permission from the person you wish to interview. This will determine the language you use and the types of questions you will ask. Your interview should be tailored for the person you are interviewing.

3) The pros and cons of online interviews:

PRO: It can be done quickly if your subject chooses to do it quickly.

CON: Your subject has time to think and they may "edit" their responses.

The pros and cons of doing a "live" interview:

PRO: You can modify the interview on the spot in the event they say something that might make you want to ask a question that wasn't originally planned.

CON: If you have a sensitive topic and/or don't know the audience well, they may skew the truth, which affects the accuracy and quality of your results.

4) Your first goal is clarity. If your question isn't clear, you will have a hard time getting good results. Follow these tips to achieve clarity:

- Use simple language. Using jargon or other technical/uncommon vocabulary may mean that some subjects don't understand the question and it could affect the accuracy of your results.
- Avoid clichés. They tend to be vague and can mean more than one thing.
- Avoid general ideas and vocabulary. For example, the words "many" or "often" can mean different things to different people. You are better off asking for a specific number. For example, consider the difference between these two questions:

i) Interviewer: How often do you exercise per week?  
Subject: I exercise very often.

ii) Interviewer: How many times per week do you exercise?  
Subject: I exercise 3 or 4 times per week.

5) Don't ask leading questions. These are questions that are written with a particular bias in the mind of the interviewer about the state of mind or behavior of the subject.

Eg. *Which day of the week is the best day for homework to be assigned?* (The bias in the interviewer is that there must be a good day. The difficulty is that

this forces the respondent to pick a day when most people would probably say there is NO GOOD DAY for homework!)

6) Consider whether or not you want to ask a closed or open question, and whether it gives you the information you need/want. Closed questions are ones that only require a "yes" or "no" answer. In some cases this may be fine if you simply want to force the subject into one position or another. Otherwise, your questions should be "open" which forces the subject to elaborate. This is often done by following up a closed question with "...and why?" or "...and how?"

7) Consider the order of your questions. Your survey should flow. Start with your easiest, general, or non-threatening questions, moving to more difficult-to-answer or more sensitive questions, and finishing off with an easier question(s). At the same time, you should pay attention to the logical order of ideas in each question. It will be easier for the subject to give full and accurate answers.

8) Pre-test your questions on someone. Give your interview questions out to two or three other people and ask them for feedback. Did they feel they understood the question the first time they read it? Did they interpret your question in a different way than you intended? Did they not give you a full enough response? If there was any difficulty, fix your interview questions and then you're ready to start your research!

9) Be prepared to record the responses right away. Don't think that you will remember with clarity even a few minutes after the interview is over. The transcript should be a verbatim record of the interview. This means that it should be exactly what was said by both you and your subject, word for word. This can be done in a few ways:

- You may record the interview either as an audio recording or audio-visual recording. However, you MUST ask the permission of the subject when you initially ask the subject if you can interview them in the first place. The upside is that you can listen/watch it several times to make sure that you are recording their answers correctly, but the downside is that the person may find that they feel nervous and this may affect the quality of their answers.
- You may type out their answers as they give them. This eliminates the negative aspects of recording but it may interrupt the flow of the interview as the subject must wait for you to record responses before moving on to the next question.

10) Schedule a time and place for the interview.

- Negotiate a time when both of you will not feel rushed or distracted.
- If you are giving the interview online, give several days for the subject to respond. Be clear about when you will send the questions and when you need the subject to answer them.
- If you are doing a live interview, make sure you choose a location that prevents interruptions and you can easily hear each other.