Literature Review of *Interviewing & Re-Interviewing*

Learning high-order interviewing skills requires thoughtful planning, self-controlled performance, and critical analysis of one's own interview.

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Interviewing can be defined as a "conversation between two people in which one person tries to direct the conversation to obtain information for some specific purpose" (Gorden, 1992, p. 2). The challenge for the interviewer is to extract information as directly as possible from the respondent. The interview conversation, however, can provide a potential source of bias, error, misunderstanding, or misdirection and the sure way to minimize these potential pitfalls is for the interviewer to ask questions properly in order for the respondent to provide the desired information (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Previous research has provided the interviewer with the skills set needed to ask the appropriate questions in order to solicit the desired data (Fowler & Mangione, 1990; Hyman et al., 1975); however, Holstein and Gubrium (1995) point to a significant oversight with regard to the more traditional interviewing techniques: Both parties to the interview are "necessarily and unavoidably *active*" (p. 4).

In more conventional interview approaches, respondent's can be basically seen as passive vessels of answers, repositories of facts and the related details of experience (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). The active interview, on the other hand, can be conceived as a kind of limited "improvisational" performance where the "production is spontaneous, yet structured – focused within loose parameters provided by the interviewer" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 17). A good interview can be likened to obtaining a life story from the respondent. In essence, storytelling gives a narrative account of an event, an experience, or any other happening" (Atkinson, 1998, p. 1).

> Telling our story enables us to be heard, recognized, and acknowledged by others. Story makes the implicit explicit, the hidden seen, the unformed formed, and the confusing clear (Atkinson, 1998, p. 7).

In an active interview, the respondent "constructs his or her experiential history as the interview unfolds, in collaboration with the active interviewer" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 32). If afforded the opportunity, the respondent may offer the active interviewer complex descriptions of his or her experiences drawn from his or her stock of knowledge as the narrative is constructed (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). It is the active interviewer's job to "direct and harness the respondent's constructive storytelling" as the respondent "selectively exploits" his or her narrative resources (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 39). Therefore, the active interview purports that life is as much storied as it is lived (see Ochberg, 1994; Sarbin, 1986).

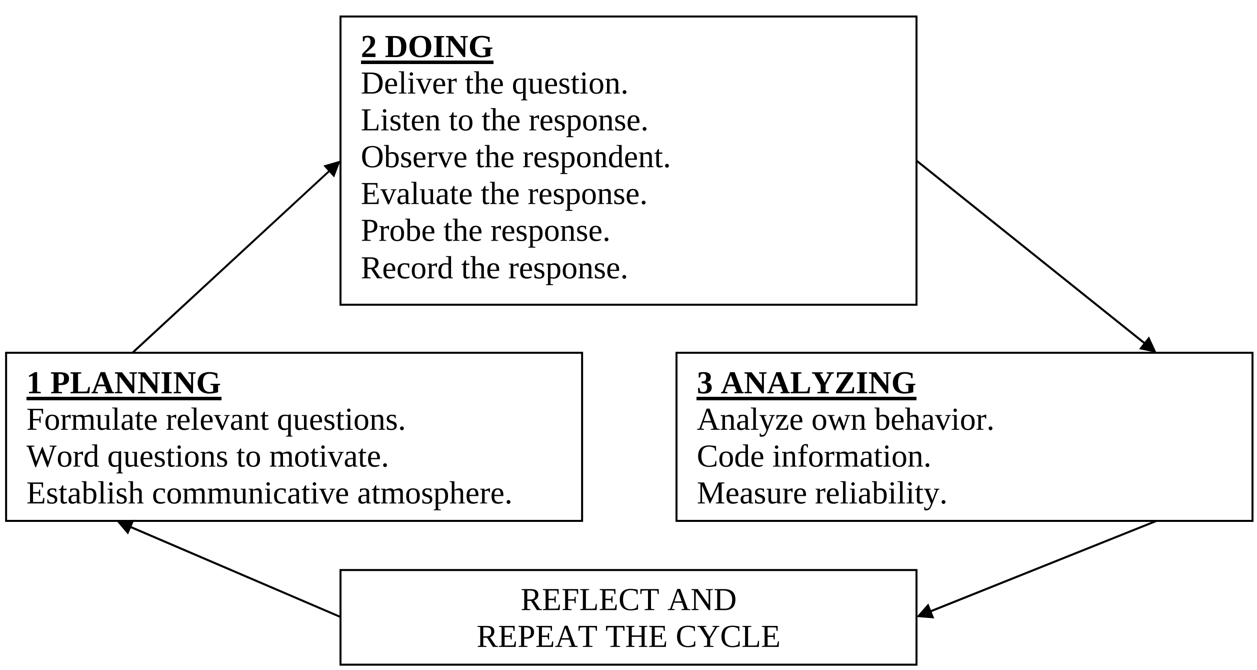
Standard interviewing is appropriate for generating straightforward behavioral or demographic information such as the respondent's age, sex, or place of birth. Interviewers are instructed to skillfully solicit answers to predetermined questions aimed at generally passive respondents (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). These types of interviews typically follow guidelines like the following:

1. Read the questions exactly as worded.
2. If the respondent's answer to the initial question is not a complete and adequate answer, probe for clarification and elaboration in a way that does not influence the content of the answers that result.
3. Answers should be recorded without interviewer discretion ; the answers recorded should reflect what the respondent says, and they should only reflect what the respondent says.
4. The interviewer communicated a neutral, nonjudgmental stance with respect to the substance of the answers. The interviewer should not provide any personal information that might imply ant particular values or preference with respect to topics covered in the interview, nor should the interviewer provide any feedback to respondents, positive or negative, with respect to the specific content of the answers they provide. (Fowler & Mangione, 1990, p. 33)

But, Holstein and Gubrium (1995) posit, that even the most standardized of interview can be active. Active interviewing "brings meaning and its construction to the foreground" (p. 73). The active interviewer "may interject him- or herself into the interview in various ways, all of which incite or encourage respondents' narratives" (p. 77). Finally, the active interviewer encourages the respondent to "shift narrative positions" by taking different roles throughout the interview in order to activate the respondent's "stock of knowledge" (p. 77).

The Skill Learning Cycle

Gorden (1992) posits that interviewing is a persuasive activity that involves a set of twelve skills. Three are used in planning the interview, six in doing the interview, and three in analyzing the interview. He refers to these three phases as the Skill Learning Cycle.



Planning

Formulating useful questions is important to meeting the objectives of the interview. The process of formulating relevant questions can be thought of as having three phases:

1. Clarifying the objectives of the interview
2. Specifying the information needed to achieve those objectives
3. Formulating concrete questions designed to obtain the information

Second, relevant questions have to be formulated, to motivate the respondent to give complete and accurate answers. Motivating means "to make the respondent more willing and more able to give the information sought" (p. 23). The following principles are proffered in order to motivate the respondent to offer valid responses:

1. Try to minimize ego threat and forgetting.
2. Try to maximize recognition and empathy.
3. Provide verbal contexts where needed.
4. Select appropriate vocabulary.
5. Know when to use narrow and broad questions.
6. Know when to use open-ended and closed-answer questions.
7. Know when to use direct and indirect questions.
8. Know when to use intentionally loaded questions and unloaded questions.

Third, it is important to establish a communicative atmosphere in order for purposeful conversation to occur. The stage is set in two ways: 1) a suitable physical setting and propos are selected to make the respondent more willing to talk; and 2) an appropriate social-psychological atmosphere is established by the introductory remarks and questions of the interviewer. The following physical dimensions should be considered when conducting an interview:

- Chair placement
- Lighting
- Quiet
- Privacy
- Amenities
- Visual props
- Note taking
- Tape recording
- Dress and grooming

In establishing the social psychological atmosphere of the interview, there are nine questions the interviewer needs to answer in planning the interview. The first seven are questions that arise in the respondent's mind; the last two in the interviewer's mind.

1. Who is the interviewer?
2. What can you do for me?
3. Why do you want to interview me?
4. What are the objectives of the interview session?
5. Why are certain types of personal information needed?
6. Why are you taking notes and/or tape-recording?
7. Will what I say be kept confidential?
8. Should the interviewer engage in any self-disclosure?
9. Can the interviewer reduce time pressures?

Doing

A verbally well-formed question asked in a communicative atmosphere may not be received well by the respondent if the nonverbal accompaniment to the question is not appropriate. Verbal and nonverbal aspects of the message must be delivered and reinforce one another for the maximum effect. The following skills are the interviewer's nonverbal tools for delivering questions with maximum meaning and motivation:

1. Assume the optimum conversational distance.
2. Maintain a body position that conveys interest in the respondent by facing squarely and leaning forward some of the time.
3. Touch the respondent if it is appropriate and acceptable to do so.
4. Maintain eye contact with the respondent without staring.
5. Show appropriately responsive facial expression.
6. Employ suitable conversational tone of voice.
7. Pace conversation carefully by controlling your own rate of speech, length of silent probes, and turn taking; have no fear of honest hesitating and groping.
8. Eliminate distracting behavior mannerisms that might make the respondent feel you are not interested or sympathetic.

Second, if relevant and motivating questions have been formulated, the physical and verbal setting established to create a communicative atmosphere, and the questions delivered with appropriate nonverbal accompaniments, now it is time to truly listen to the respondents' answers. The first step in learning to listen is to appreciate the great difference between the passive, physiological process of hearing and the active, mental process of listening. The second step is to recognize and eliminate as many of the physical, semantic, and emotional obstacles to listening as possible. The following seven action statements summarize how to listen:

1. Know your objectives: Understand the objectives of the interview precisely so you can determine whether a particular response is relevant or irrelevant or complete or incomplete.
2. Know your respondent: Be familiar with the respondent's accent, vocabulary, and social context so you are able to understand what he or she means and to show interest and appreciation.

3. Pay attention from the beginning: Have all preparations made in advance and focus your attention on the respondent from the beginning of the interview.
4. Control your urge for self-expression: Do not deviate often from these three golden rules: stop talking, don't interrupt, and don't change the subject.
5. Listen actively: Strive to understand the meaning of what is being said: evaluate the information in terms of its relevance, validity, and completeness; and evaluate the respondent's motivation.
6. Listen empathetically: Be a sensitive receiver of feeling cues and a responsive sender of cues that indicate you have heard and sympathize.
7. Be patient: Expect to make errors and be prepared to correct them. Expect misunderstandings and irrelevancies from the respondent and be prepared to make repeated efforts, if necessary, to correct them. Avoid overcontrolling and judging the respondent.

Third, visible nonverbal cues such as eye movement, facial expression, and posture affect the meaning if the verbal message by reinforcing, supplementing, or contradicting. An awareness of the respondent's nonverbal behavior helps the interviewer achieve the three major objectives of any interview: 1) to *understand* the meaning of the message, 2) to *evaluate* the relevance and validity of the information received, and 3) to evaluate the *motivational* state of the respondent. The following five additional points are essential in observing a respondent's nonverbal behavior.

1. If the visible cues are *congruent* with each other and with the verbal message, then they indicate meaning by showing the relative importance of certain words, the amount of conviction, and whether the word or phrase has a positive or negative emotional charge. The interviewer thus receives clues about where to probe for additional relevant material.
2. If the visible cues are *incongruent* with each other or with the verbal message, then they warn that the verbal message may not be entirely valid. The respondent may be confused, having difficulty in remembering, trying to hide information, or fictionalizing to deceive the interviewer. In any case, this incongruency is an indication that the interviewer should probe and do crosschecks on the validity of the response and/or give more assistance to make the respondent more willing or more able to give valid information.
3. Visible nonverbal cues have a function separate from acting as an interpretive context for the verbal message. They indicate important dimensions of the motivational state of the respondent: the energy level and mood of the respondent, the respondent's attitude toward the interviewer or toward the topic of discussion, and the turn-taking desires of the respondent. These cues help the interviewer decide when to introduce certain topics, when to speed up or slow down the pace, whether the respondent needs encouragement and support, and so on.
4. To note all of the potentially relevant specific cues, the interviewer needs to be aware of the total body of the respondent. Eye behavior and facial expression are extremely important, but the behavior of the shoulders, arms, and hands, legs, and feet, and body posture where leakage is more likely to occur are also significant.

5. Since the meaning of specific cues may vary with their cultural, situational, and personal contexts, it is safer to interpret the meaning of visual cues by noticing certain patterns. First, visual cues should be seen in relationship to each other; for example, note any apparent incongruencies such as the smiling mouth and mirthless eyes. Second, they should be seen in relationship to the verbal message; for example, note incongruencies such as the droopy-shouldered respondent saying, “I’m feeling fine.” Third, visual cues must be seen in a pattern over time. This is extremely important because the pattern of *change* allows the interviewer to separate the individual or cultural baseline of the respondent’s nonverbal behavior from the visual signals associated with a particular question or response.

Fourth, after the interviewer has heard what the respondent has said and observed the respondent’s nonverbal behavior, , now is the time to evaluate the information received. The interviewer in no way makes moral judgments about the respondent’s opinions, values, or actions. Instead the interviewer compares the information received with the overall objectives of the interview. Three criteria for evaluation – relevance, completeness, and validity – are expressed in the following questions which can be posed about the response to any question:

1. Is the information in the response *relevant* to the purpose of the interview? In other words, is the respondent answering the question?
2. Is the answer *complete*? A response may be relevant but still not receive a high evaluation because it is not complete. The interviewer must ask if all the important elements and details are present in the answer.
3. Is the answer *valid*? In some instances, the response may be clearly on the topic and be loaded with detail yet be invalid because it is not true. The respondent is not necessarily lying, but of course that is a possibility. The response may also be untrue because the respondent misunderstood the question, was misinformed, or did not remember.

Evaluation must be done continually while listening to the respondent in order that their responses may be probed to determine or improve their relevance, completeness, or their overall validity. The following six questions should be kept in mind by the interviewer in order to determine the degree of relevance in a response:

1. Does the response fit the definition of the basic concepts used in the question?
2. Is the response about the relevant object, person, situation, or event referred to in the question?
3. Is the information about the relevant time period?
4. Is the information about the relevant place?
5. Are the how and why aspects included when relevant?
6. Is the response at the correct level of abstraction?

Fifth, once the interview responses have been critically evaluated for relevance, completeness, and validity, then the interviewer must probe the responses. The probe allows the interviewer to rectify inadequacies in the initial responses to questions. The probe is generally improvised (although they can be scripted for use in advance) depending on how the respondent answers the original planned questions. Probes can either be verbal or nonverbal, and can come in the form of a question or a statement – as long as it solicits from the respondent an elaboration on a previous response. The basic function of the probe is twofold: 1) to point out to respondents what additional information is needed and 2) to motivate respondents to give that information.

Several probing errors are commonly made by neophyte interviewers:

1. Failing to probe because of failure to evaluate the response
2. Probing too frequently
3. Using too much topic control
4. Biasing the response by verbally or nonverbally loading the question

Generally, there are seven types of probes that are useful for the interviewer:

1. *Active silence*. By remaining silent at the end of a respondent's sentence, the interviewer in effect invites the respondent to continue talking without exercising any control over the direction of the conversation.
2. *Encouragement*. The probe of encouragement includes all words, nonverbal noises, and gestures that indicate the interviewer is listening, accepts what has been said, and wishes the respondent to continue speaking without in any way specifying *what* the respondent should talk about.
3. *Immediate elaboration*. The respondent is asked by the interviewer to share more about the topic of the immediately preceding response. This probe is accomplished by such phrases as "Then?" "Tell me more!" "Would you like to tell me more about that?" "What else could you tell me about that?" "Could you spell that out a little more?" "Would you please elaborate on that?"
4. *Immediate clarification*. This probe asks for more information on the topic under discussion by specifying the kind of information needed.
5. *Retrospective elaboration*. The respondent is asked to elaborate on something he or she has said *earlier* in the interview, not in the immediately preceding response.
6. *Retrospective clarification*. This probe asks the respondent to supply specific clarifying details about an *earlier* response, not the immediately preceding one.
7. *Mutation*. When the interviewer is satisfied that a response to a basic question is relevant, complete, and valid, he or she is free to go to a new *planned* question or to formulate a new question that has been *generated* in the interview.

Sixth, The amount of time and attention for recording and coding information varies tremendously depending on the nature of the interview. The following six tactics should be considered when recording to store information:

1. Precode structured answers.
2. make notes from memory after the interview.
3. Take minimal notes in the interview and amplify later.
4. Take verbatim notes during the interview.

5. Dictate only the relevant information from the tape-recorded interview.
6. Tape-record the interview and transcribe it all.

Regardless of the type of interview being coded, the following basic steps are essential to code the information reliability.

1. Define the coding categories.
2. Assign code labels to the categories.
3. Classify relevant information into the categories.
4. Test the reliability of the coding.
5. Measure the reliability of the coding.
6. Locate the sources of unreliability in the coding.

Analyzing

After each interview there must be an objective analysis of the results in terms of both the interviewer's behavior and of the information obtained. In order to ensure that the analysis is objective, another person – in addition to the interviewer – should be involved in the analysis phase.

First, it is important after an interview is conducted to analyze your interviewing behavior in order to note the skills you demonstrated and to improve those skills for future interviews. In analyzing your own behavior, the following skills will be thoroughly examined: following relevant and motivating questions, establishing a communicative atmosphere, delivering the questions, listening to the respondent, observing the respondent, evaluating the responses, and probing the responses.

Second, an additional analytic process will ask you to code your own and your coding partner's interview transcript. Remember *coding* means to classify the information in the respondent's answers into categories relevant to the intent of the interview. The first logical step in any coding process is to decide which of the content items are relevant and *only* relevant information should be coded. Do not assess the proportion of relevant to irrelevant information. The four following objectives are accomplished y coding the content of your own interview:

1. Winnowing out the irrelevant makes you aware of the need to keep the objectives of the interview clearly in mind at all times, whether interviewing or coding.
2. Awareness of the amount of irrelevant talk raises the question of whether you allowed the respondent to wander too far from the objectives or whether your tolerance of the irrelevancies contributed positively to the spontaneity and validity of the interview.
3. In trying to classify the relevant materials, you will become acutely aware of any failures to probe for needed concreteness, clarity, or completeness, because it is extremely difficult to *reliably* classify material if the meaning is fuzzy or too abstract.
4. Coding the material in both your own interview and your coding partner's provides the information needed for mathematically calculating the degree of reliability of the coding process.

Third, it becomes necessary to calculate the degree of reliability shown by your and your partner's coding of the two interviews. The reliability measure will range between 0 and 1. Zero indicates complete disagreement and 1.0 indicates perfect agreement. The precise coefficient of reliability is useful in alerting interviewers to the need for more effective interviewing and allows you to compare this performance with a similar interview in the future, thus measuring the amount of gain in the reliability of the interviewing.

Conclusion

In order for any interview to be and remain active, it is imperative that the interviewer and respondent "collaboratively construct the meaning of the interview narratives" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 59). In essence, the active interview is intended as a conversation, but not without a guiding purpose or plan (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). An interview can be conducted in a short period of time or require a considerable time investment. This review has focused primarily on an interview process that is relatively short in duration. The long interview, as described by McCracken (1998), is a "sharply focused, rapid, highly intensive interview process that seeks to diminish the indeterminacy and redundancy that attends more unstructured research processes" (p. 7). Both the short and long interview offer opportunities for personal narratives to emerge and allow the researcher to understand the way people "organize, synthesize, and present the events, circumstances, and perceptions of their lives" (Atkinson, 1998, p. 75).

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