How to conduct interviews

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The interview technique

The interview technique is used in a wide range of settings, including the following:

1 Job interviews

“Besides getting several paper cuts in the same day or receiving the news that someone in your family has betrayed you to your enemies, one of the most unpleasant experiences in life is a job interview.”

Lemony Snicket, The Carnivorous Carnival

2 Police interrogations

“No! Please! I'll tell you whatever you want to know!" the man yelled.

"Really?" said Vimes.

"What's the orbital velocity of the moon?”

"What?”

"Oh, you'd like something simpler?”

Terry Pratchett, Night Watch

3 Media Interviews

"I cannot sing, dance or act; what else would I be but a talk show host."

David Letterman

4 Key informant interviews

"The journalistic style tries to verbally pin the respondent down by appearing to know everything already. The questions are direct and
directed toward a particular outcome. The
ethnographic style of interviewing instead tries
to enter into the world of the respondent by
appearing to know very little.."

Beth L. Leech, Asking Questions: Techniques for Semistructured Interviews,

Interview Types

There are three common types of interview used in impact measurement; *Structured, Semi-structured* and *unstructured*. Can you match the descriptions on the left to the definitions on the right? Answers follow on the next page.

1. Structured

2. Semi-structured

3. Unstructured

A. Contains components of both, structured and unstructured interviews. In semi-structured interviews the interviewer prepares a set of the same questions to be answered by all respondents, however, additional questions (probes/prompts) are used to clarify and further expand on certain issues.

B. No questions are prepared prior to the interview and the interview is conducted in an informal manner.

C. A list of pre-determined questions that all interviewees ask in the same order. These can often be closed questions. Data analysis can be more straightforward.

Interview Types

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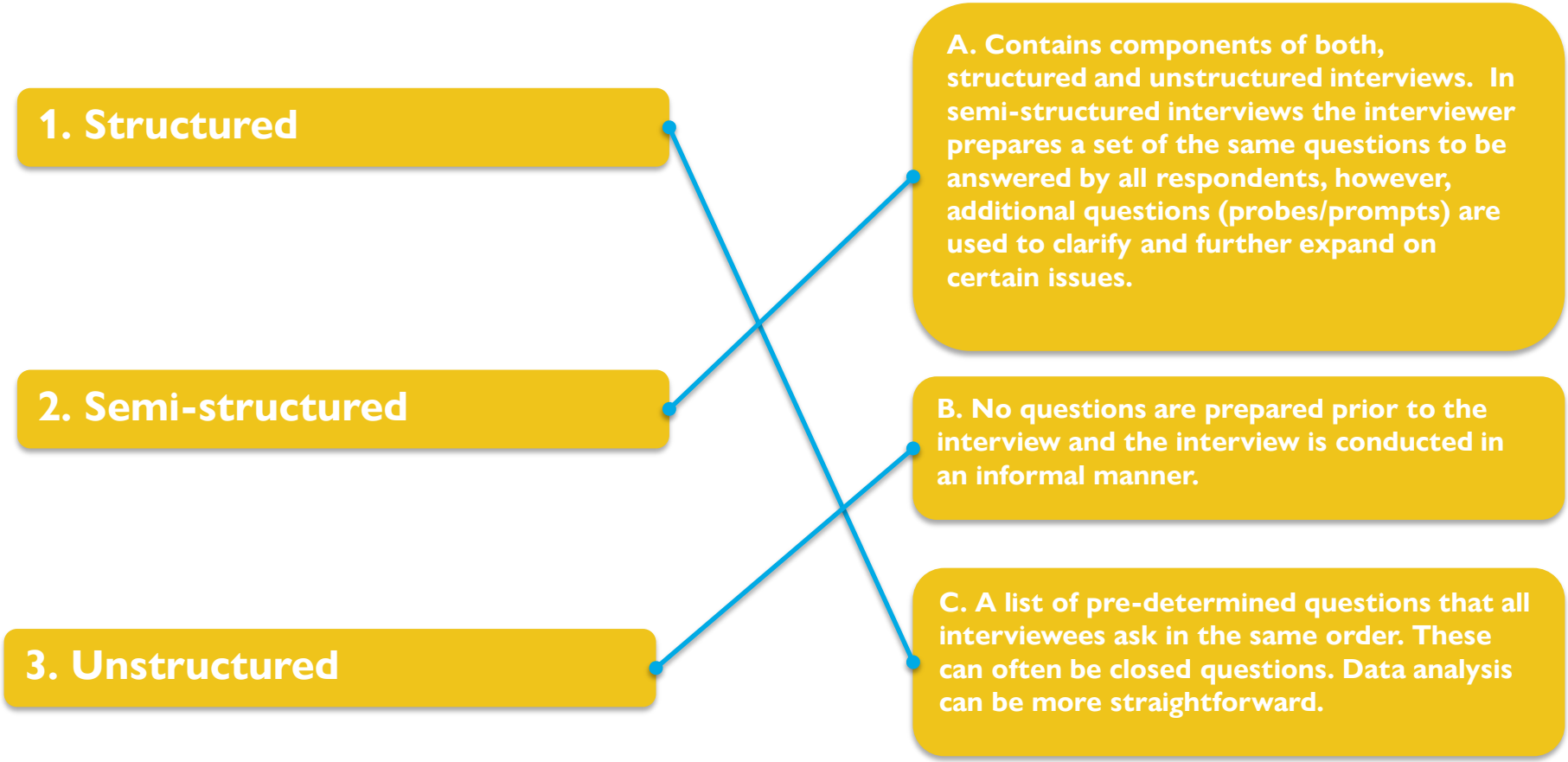
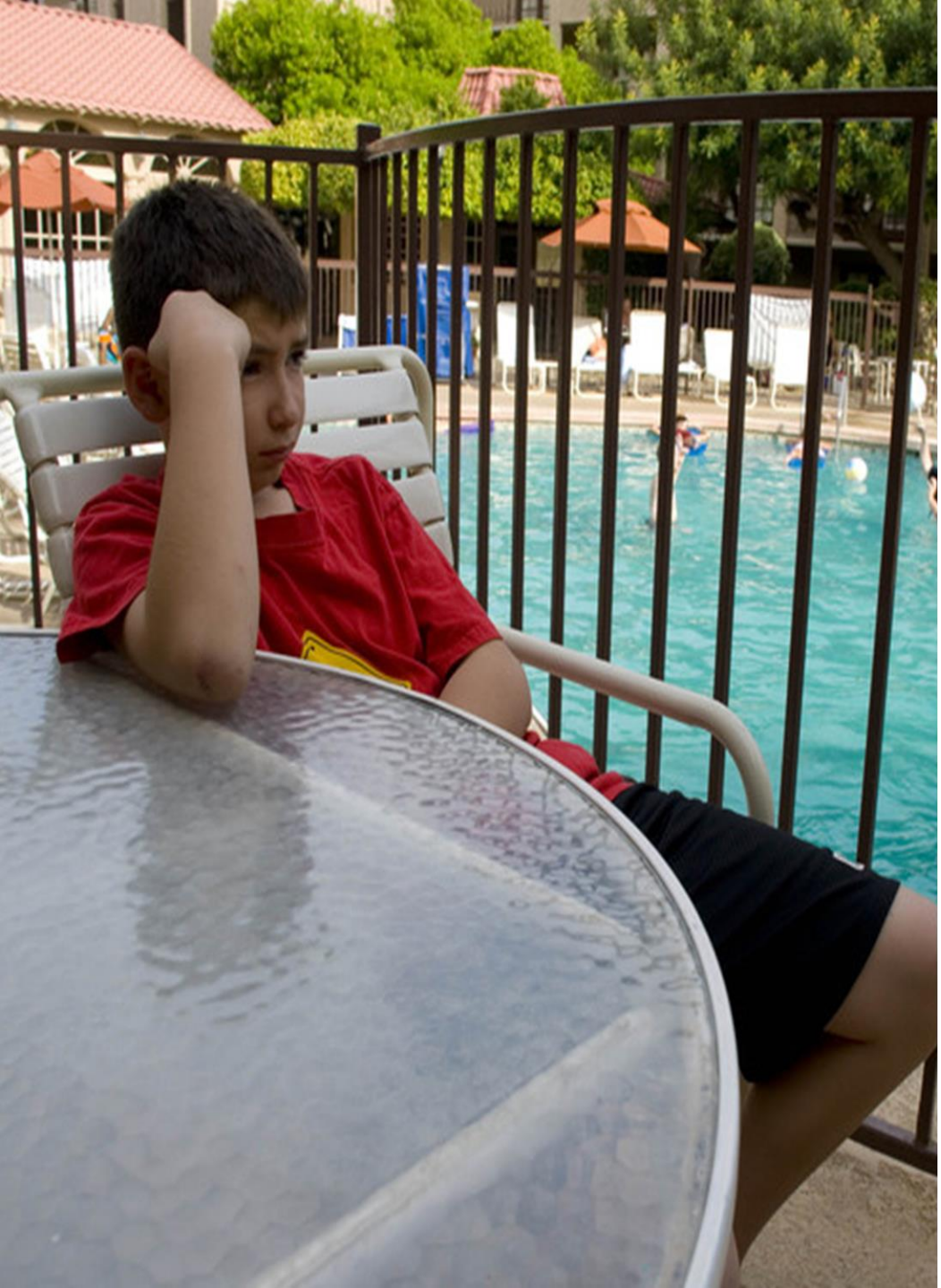


Advantages and disadvantages of the interview method

- ✗ Can be more susceptible to interviewer bias
- ✗ Information can be harder to analyse
- ✗ Potential to overlook community members that are less visible/voluble
- ✗ Can take longer to collect and analyse data (if primarily qualitative)
- ✗ Requires an experienced/ skilled evaluator

- ✓ Enables the interviewer to dig deeper into topics e.g. to understand motivation behaviour and/or perspectives of participants
- ✓ Can help with the further interpretation of quantitative data
- ✓ Can help to establish rapport/trust
- ✓ Enables interviewer to clarify responses
- ✓ Enables respondents to answer in their own words



Arranging the interview

When arranging the interview, it is important to:

- Be clear over the purpose of the interview and how the information will be used
- Explain how long the interview will take (30 minutes to 1 hour are typical time frames)
- Give the location of the interview (if in-person). Choose a location where the respondent will feel safe/comfortable/relaxed.

Selecting respondents

When selecting people to interview, we would advise to consider:

- How many respondents you have the capacity to interview
- What knowledge of/experience do they have of the topic at hand
- Think about the characteristics of your target audience and whether the interviewees will be representative of this
- Demographic balance (age, gender, ethnicity)
- How reliable will they be – what vested interest do they have?

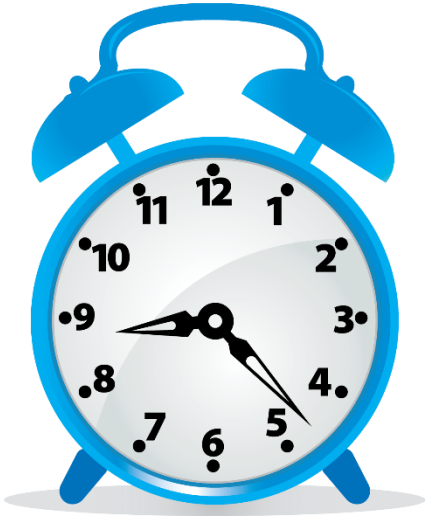
Do your research

It is important to ensure you are prepared to use the interview guide, this involves

1. Researching the topic of your guide beforehand to make sure you are familiar with the context behind the questions you are asking (e.g. to understand the concept of wellbeing if you are asking about wellbeing).

2. Getting familiar with the questions in your guide. It is common when conducting an interview to move around and change the question order depending upon what emerges during the interview.

The Importance of time-keeping



The timing of the interview is crucial:

1. Punctuality is key, turning up/running late can irritate the respondent and effect their answers

2. It's important to keep the interview moving and not dwell to long in a particular area to keep the respondent engaged

Getting Consent

From an ethical standpoint, getting consent from participants to take part in the interview is particularly important:

I. **Explain the purpose of the interview and how the information will be used**

II. **Ask if they are comfortable to record**

III. **Explain confidentiality/anonymity**

Gaining rapport and staying neutral

One of the main advantages of the interview method is that it allows you to establish a rapport with respondents. The following can help with this:

- Restate and summarise key points before moving on
- Appear interested, friendly and knowledgeable
- Do not sit in silence, give verbal or non-verbal reassurances that you are listening

It is important to maintain friendly but neutral stance when conducting the interview. We advise to:

- Avoid expressing strong opinions
- Be aware of your body language
- Maintain a neutral tone of voice

"some interviewer bias can be avoided by ensuring that the interviewer does not overreact to responses of the interviewee. Other steps that can be taken to help avoid or reduce interviewer bias include having the interviewer dress inconspicuously and appropriately for the environment, holding the interview in a private setting, and keeping the interview as informal as possible" (Connaway and Powell, 2010, p.172).

Working with Translators

It may be that you need to work through a translator to interview your respondents. We suggest:

- Taking the time to talk through the interview guide with the translator and talking through key points or areas that could be misunderstood.
- Stressing the importance of accuracy in the way questions are phrased.
- Checking in with the translator on how they are asking follow-up questions during the interview.
- Use translators that have experience of conducting interviews.

Transcribe the Interview

It can be useful to write up your interview immediately afterwards, particularly if not recording the interview. If recording, external transcription can help to save time.

At the end of each interview, it can be useful to prepare a 1-2 page interview **summary sheet** reducing information into manageable themes, issues, and recommendations.

Each summary should provide information about the key informants position, reason for inclusion in the list of informants, main points made, implications of these observations

Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Tips, USAID Center for Development Information and Evaluation

Saying thank you

At the end of the interview it is important to make sure you thank the respondents, explain that their viewpoints are important, and how their feedback will be used.

Bibliography/Reading List

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