suggested working a hundred hours a week, but rather how to make the most out of a 40-to-50-hour week, so my emphasis is on efficiency—getting more desired output from a fixed input—as distinguished from creativity. The point is not that others should do as much (or as little) as I or anyone else does, for that is purely idiosyncratic, but that we should all make good whatever promise is in us. Indeed my message has been that in order to fulfill the promises we make to ourselves and to others, we ought both to make fewer promises and more effective use of ourselves.

Notes

1. A colleague writes that his sense of priorities differs because the local conditions under which he works are different. He serves on department committees because in his institution they matter. He does not serve on campus-wide committees because they do not matter. So be it. I give readers my constants in order to provide a steady source of advice. *Ifs* and *buts* do not belong here. But my constants may also be your variables. Start here, I suggest, without necessarily ending where I do because (*a*) we differ and (*b*) so do the conditions under which we work.
2. Letter from Howard Becker to author, August 3, 1987.
3. There is an exception to this. Most years I work only three- or four-weekend days. Last year (the 1986–87 academic year), I worked about 20-weekend days in order to finish books that had bunched together and (so I tell myself) to make life easier thereafter. We shall see.
4. Conversation with Dan Kahneman before a committee meeting.

5

The Open-Ended, Semistructured Interview: An (Almost) Operational Guide

Dean Hammer
Aaron Wildavsky

When a reporter or historian interviews a source who was a participant in the events being studied, or a social scientist seeks to understand a process by talking to the people involved, the chances are they are using the open-ended, semistructured interview. This type of interview, like most things we wish to define, can be characterized by what it is not as well as (approximately) what it is. Closed interviews have questions that are fixed, if not for all time, then at least for the duration of the project in which these interviews figure. The questions are structured as well in that they are asked and the responses recorded in a given order or a given cycle and in a given way. Neither the content nor the manner of asking the questions is supposed to vary. Ideally allowing for the failure (or the inability of interviewers) to follow their instructions, each interviewer is an interchangeable part, for the purpose is to achieve as high a level of standardization as human ingenuity and malleability will allow.

By contrast in the open-ended interview everything is provisional. Having soaked himself in the subject matter, our intrepid interviewer is free to try out numerous questions to see which will secure the most revealing results. Questions may be abandoned, altered, and tried again. Especially important are follow-up queries, with such creative locutions as why and what else. These questions are semistructured in that there is supposed to be some "method in the madness," some patterns to the questions, some holding on to ones that show promise. The interview is only semistructured (as in semitough) in that the questions and the mode

of asking or following them up are intended to vary according to the discretion of the interviewer.

Semi means that one of the aims of this bundle of interviewing techniques is to come up with an approach (questions plus style) that is well suited to the research project at hand. The outcomes are also semigood in that they can be only imperfectly achieved. Understanding this much—that you can do better but must always fall short—is part of both the armory and the armor of the would-be open-ended, semistructured interviewer. It helps to understand why the interviewer's performance necessarily falls short of his promise.

Given the nature of the beast, the open-ended, semistructured interview cannot be done perfectly. The best that can be expected is not too bad or better still, not so bad as before. Good advice can be given, but it cannot be followed exactly as given. The reason is that the usual prescriptions, including our own, tend to be proverbial (that is, mutually contradictory—many hands are better than one but too many cooks spoil the broth). Circumstances, as lawyers say, do alter cases. And these circumstances are so numerous and varied, including the personalities of the interviewer and the respondent, the conditions of the time and the organizations involved, the sensitivity of the subject, and much more, some of which involves subtle matters of social interactions, that no one can claim to understand but a small proportion of them. The first requirement for those who wish to accept this daunting task without self-destructing is *courage*. The second is *resilience*, the capacity to bound back, to learn from error how to do a bit better, to be buffered from adversity—rejections, hostility, missed opportunities—and go at it again. The third and final requirement is *self-management*, the use of personal experience to develop a personal style of interviewing that will withstand the blows and bridge the gaps and inconsistencies in the prescriptions that follow. There is fun, too. Even pleasure and an aesthetic sense of hitting the right chord are possible. But first you must have courage, resilience, and self-management.

The kind of interviewing we are discussing is a product of social interaction taking place under severe time constraints, unequal status, and decidedly mixed motives. Looking good to the relevant other is a human preoccupation that does not distinguish between interviewer and interviewee. However the person being interviewed has much more practice in managing the impressions he gives than you do in digging beneath the surface. It is an unequal contest. The best you can do is to even up the contest a bit. But even when you have succeeded in knowing more about certain aspects of his office than he does (after all he does not have the time or the right to ask everyone else what they are up to nor the hope of getting honest answers), you cannot let him know that you know, otherwise you risk becoming one of those mythical victims of 1930 gangster movies, who, as he disappeared into a watery grave in cement shoes, was dispatched with the words no scholar could ever mutter: "He knew too much." Actually it is advantageous to let on you know some things because trading inside news may be good for the interview. Then again revealing confidences is not done (1) because it is dishonorable and (2) because it is counterproductive—word will get out that you are untrustworthy and no one will speak to you again.

All respondents appear to be busier than any interviewer. All the interviewer has to do, or so it seems, is interview, while the person being interviewed is doing his job, a job full of interruptions (at crucial moments). If you cut short the interview (to gain good will or simply to show human kindness), you may never get back in again due to illness, transfers, lawsuits, and other unfortunate happenings. If you push your luck, annoyance may leave you, the bedraggled interviewer, not only without vital answers but without hope of ever getting them. What to do?

Nothing, really, except perseverence. You place your bets and take your chances. There are often things to try, but rarely superior alternatives (until afterward when it is too late). And that is exactly the point we have been trying to make.

Because it involves the vagaries of human nature, multiplied by social interaction—i.e., diverse natures, with semi-opposing interests and incentives, hurriedly done amidst mounting time pressures, with neither party quite certain of what they want to give and get—interviewing without much structure or closure is an extremely uncertain business. Ambivalence is its middle name. That is its joy and its disappointment. That is why creativity that cannot be pre-programmed is called for.

That is also why specific advice is called for—to cut through the ambiguity—and is bound to be faulty—because no specific move can cover over the inherent uncertainties of brief, asymmetrical, mixed-motive encounters.

The prescriptions that follow for devising, conducting, and writing up open-ended, semi-structured interviews were compiled from two uneven sources: the written literature (as compiled by Dean Hammer) and Aaron Wildavsky's efforts to pass on his semi-satisfactory experiences to his students. Footnotes or initials identify the guilty parties. When in doubt, stick with it and make error your friend.

Open-ended interviewing requires the cultivation of a relationship. As in any human relationship, rules are limited in application so that getting the most out of the interview relies largely on judgment that can be developed only through experience. Of course, acquiring this experience means you must survive your first interviews. The rules that follow can be

thought of as a survival kit, something to hold onto until you can be guided by your own experience.

Preparing for the Interview

A successful interview begins with thorough advanced preparation. Fundamentally *you need to become (and remain) familiar with the objectives of the interview.* This seems almost too basic to mention, but it is easy to become sidetracked and lose sight of the general goals of the project.[1] The interviewer who wants to find out about the different strategies used by the respondent under various conditions, for instance, should not be diverted by family history or why civil servants receive no respect. Since interviews are interactive and mutual, however, respondents may use them for their personal purposes. The trick here is gently but firmly to bring the respondent back to the desired pattern of questions. The best general advice is to use something, anything, in the response ("Do you attribute your later success in——to this early childhood fixation?") to get back on track. Whose interview is this, anyway.

Sometimes, Lewis Dexter reminds us, sharing a peripheral interest with a respondent leads to a fuller picture of the kind of person being interviewed. Rapport may be enhanced. True. But all this takes time. Only experience (and that is not always reliable) enables the interviewer to sense when going outside the subject will enable him ultimately to enter into it more fully.

A counsel of perfection: Being able to sort out central from peripheral topics will save you and the respondent time. Focus, which is possible when you know what information you want, increases the depth and the concreteness of responses, since you will be able to spend more time and effort concentrating on a special issue. Asking, "So what can you tell me?" about everything is likely to get you nothing.[2] Then again if you already knew what you wanted to ask, you might be using a different type of interview or be near the end instead of the beginning of your project. What is central may be a product of research rather than its prerequisite.

As well as knowing or guessing what data you need, you should also *try to anticipate the responses likely to come from any particular interview.* This requires getting to know about the individual and his job within the organization. Knowing this, you will be in a much better position to steer the discussion toward areas in which the respondent has particular expertise and insight.[3] Too much preconception of course is likely to lead you astray by rendering you less sensitive to what the respondent is trying to communicate. Be familiar but only a little so the respondent can explain

the true meaning to the uninitiated. *Anticipate but not overly* is the delicat[e] balance you seek to achieve. Polonius could hardly give better advice.

Becoming familiar with the interviewee's situation (for example, his rol[e] in the organization) increases the likelihood that you will be able to explor[e] effectively the implications of particular statements. Equipped with [a] knowledge of the situation as it appears to be, the interviewer

> can readily distinguish the objective facts of the case from subjective definition[s] of the situation. He thus becomes alert to the entire field of "selective re[-]sponse." When the interviewer, through his familiarity with the objectiv[e] situation, is able to recognize symbolic or functional silences, "distortions," avoidances, or blocking, he is the more prepared to explore the implications.[4]

While we are certain that Robert Merton and Patricia Kendall hear through silences and see through distortions, ordinary mortals can only hope t[o] educate their perceptions to recognize invariably selective responses.

Knowledge can also be helpful in stirring the respondent's memory. The better versed you are about the history of the organization and the individual you are interviewing, the greater chance you have of being able to mention some detail or event that will spark the memory of your informant.[5]

Always remember that you, the researcher, are the theorist, not the person you are interviewing. Aside from the fact that action-oriented people are unlikely to be introspective, they are experts on what they did or do and what they perceive. From their responses your task is to build a description and then interpretation of the phenomena you are investigating. *Asking respondents who has the power is wrong; asking them what they did or observed is more like it.*[6]

To aid you in this task, *you should understand the function of the organization.* Do not give the interviewee the impression that you are coming in out of the cold. Ignorance of the association's most rudimentary function is likely to result in wasted time. Beginning the interview with "What does your organization do?" indicates to the respondent that you are not prepared for an informed or technical discussion. The interviewee will likely feel that he must carefully go over the basics with you, taking time away from exploring important issues.[7] Contrarily, as Lewis A. Dexter advises in his seminal study, the respondent is likely to appreciate and be more comfortable with the interviewer who has taken the time to understand, at a basic level, what the organization does.[8] The contrary danger is wrongly believing you have to know too much, which can lead to paralysis. A little knowledge helps.

Lacking knowledge about a subject creates a dilemma for the inter-

viewer: Either you can interrupt the respondent because you do not understand, thereby disrupting the flow of the interview and leaving the impression that you are not prepared to discuss the subject in depth, or you can continue the interview without being sure about what is being said, hoping that everything will become clear later on. In the event that you do come across an area that you do not understand, it is better to clear up the confusing statements before moving on.[9]

Become acquainted, if you can, with the structure of the organization. This means not only understanding its formal hierarchy (thereby enabling you to determine who the subordinates are and who reports to whom) but also its informal social relationships. You should also try to familiarize yourself with the personnel the respondent comes in contact with as well as people whom they do not see.[10] This sort of information on what relationships exist between members of the association will help you determine whom to interview first and what sorts of questions to ask each interviewee. Our permissive "if you can" indicates that such information is useful but not indispensible. If you want to know everything before you start, you will have trouble getting started.

Finally *you should try to investigate the outlook of individuals in the organization.* Different people, depending on their attitudes toward the organization, their feelings toward other workers, or their ego needs, will supply vastly different types and amounts of data. There are several kinds of respondents who are likely to divulge a great deal.

1. The naïve respondent who speaks without thinking about the implications of his statements.
2. The frustrated individual who harbors resentment against the organization because of blocked ambitions.
3. The secure veteran who has little to lose from any statements he might make.
4. The individual in need of ego stroking; this person will try as hard as possible to please the interviewer as long as the interviewer continues to make him feel needed.
5. The subordinate who must always cow-tow to his superiors; this individual may be waiting to tell it all.[11]

Then again resentment does not necessarily lead to clear vision. Quite the contrary. Respondents who will do in their fellows may well be the most unreliable. After all if they will undermine people they know well, why should they hesitate to mislead you? *Attend to the overeager,* our motto is, *but triple check the spiteful and loose tongued.*[12]

The worst sources of all are the people who have talked themselves

(and, alas, possibly the researcher as well) into thinking that what others just like them believe is true because the right people believe it. Our next adage, as you might have guessed, is to *double and triple check the reliable as well.*[13]

There are also respondents who are likely to have unique insights into any given area. These would include:

1. The outsider, who sheds the light of a different culture, class, set of experiences, and so forth, on the organization; this might be a recent immigrant who has become involved in politics or the first woman to occupy a position previously dominated by men.
2. The novice whose experiences in the new job are still salient; the novice may be able to reveal practices and attitudes that other more veteran members have taken for granted.[14]

It is even possible, we might add, that people with long experience may have something to say. In fact one of our best tips is to *start interviewing with retired personnel, the older the better.* Time weighs heavily on their hands. They know they once were important, but nobody else does . . . except you. They will give you hours, even days. And they will pave your way to their successors. By the time you reach those who occupy similar positions in the present, you will know a lot that your respondent would like to know. Interviewing is a transaction, a bargain between consenting adults. *Trade what you have learned for what you would like to know.*[15]

Once you have an idea of what information you hope to obtain from the interview, and after you have researched the organization and its members, *prepare a tentative order of topics and subtopics to be covered.* Thinking ahead of time about the topics to be discussed helps to ensure adequate coverage during the interview. You do not want to leave the interview kicking yourself for not having thought to ask several questions. You might not get a second chance to speak to that person.[16]

You may wish to *order the topics to best stimulate an individual's memory.* For topics that require recall of past events, you may wish to ask the questions chronologically, or you may begin with questions that are most easily remembered. Once memory has been stimulated, you can then more easily pursue the difficult questions.[17]

You can also *order questions to stimulate the respondent's interest.* You may for example start with questions of particular concern to the respondent and then move to those of less interest. Or you may want to alternate between exciting and dull subjects. If the respondent is interested in your topic, he is likely to enjoy thinking about the subject and in probing his own memory.[18] After all no one wants to answer boring questions.

In any case you will want to pace the interview by alternating between questions requiring reflective responses and questions that are much easier to answer. You do not want the interview to sound too mechanical, nor do you want to wear out the respondent.[19]

While you should have an idea of what topics you would like to cover (and in what order), this preparation should be only tentative. We will discuss later the many different unexpected occasions that can arise and how you can deal with them. Suffice it to say for now that the good interviewer remains flexible: The ability to adjust to resistant informants or the fortuitous discovery of a wealth of unanticipated data will pay healthy dividends. Staying flexible but firm is another indication of melding opposites, which is the lot of the bemused interviewer.[20]

In conjunction with ordering topics and subtopics, you should *prepare guide questions*. These are simply questions that the interviewer formulates beforehand. Unlike a preplanned questionnaire, though, guide questions should be kept to a minimum.[21] Hence we reformulate in the spirit of this enterprise: *Use guide questions, but only sparingly*.[22]

Use guide questions for potentially touchy subjects. By thinking ahead about possible awkward situations and by working out wording in the calm before the interview, you may be able to avoid the embarrassment of having to search for appropriate phrasing.[23] Well-formulated guide questions can provide a much easier way of introducing delicate subjects than simply "winging it." Which of these situations would you rather be in? "Are you saying you illegally . . . I mean, were illicitly involved in this activity" or "What did you do when?" There will be enough awkward situations so that you will later greatly appreciate any advanced planning.

You may also *use guide questions for important points to ask when lulls occur in the interview*. There will be occasions when a subtopic will be exhausted and a sudden pause arises. Instead of looking at each other uncomfortably, and rather than having the interviewer scramble for any question (even one that is pointless and thus a waste of precious time), guide questions can be a quick reference for smoothly broaching a new topic.[24]

Guide questions reduce interviewer anxiety but also lead to overstructuring the situation. To realize the benefits of the open-ended format, there has to be room for follow-ups. You know yourself better than we do. Use guide questions, we say with conviction, but not too many.

Beginning the Interview with the Right Person

Whom should you see first? Opinions differ. Dexter suggests that your first interviews will most likely be relatively unproductive and that in fact

this may be for the good.[25] These initial contacts are warm-ups for the interviewer; they can be useful for getting back in practice, becoming acquainted with information you are likely to encounter in subsequent interviews, and perhaps highlighting some potentially touchy subjects among other participants.

There is the contrary argument that the interviewer should first question higher status individuals and then move down the hierarchy to those working more in the field. Top officials, it is argued, often possess a broad perspective on the happenings of the organization. Thus they are presumably in a better position than people lower down in the organization to understand what the goals of your project are. Consequently these higher status officials may be able to point you in lucrative directions that field workers would not have had sufficient perspective to suggest. Furthermore once the upper echelon has cooperated, those farther down in the hierarchy will feel they have permission to go along with the research.[26]

The disadvantage of starting at the top is that you do not then know enough to make effective use of the interview. The respondent may consequently send word down that you are not worth the time the interview takes. When you do become better informed, if you are allowed to get that far, the top people may refuse to give you more time. A reasonable compromise is to try to gain access to someone at or near the top, reveal your ignorance, explain your project, ask a few questions, cut it short, and ask if you can come back when you know more.[27]

There is more general agreement that you should *start with individuals more favorably disposed to being interviewed*.[28] These informants will likely be more responsive, providing you with a substantial base of knowledge to proceed and not to be underestimated, starting off your interviews on a good foot. The confidence from these initial interviews may well carry you over when respondents turn nasty or the information momentarily dries up.

There are as usual exceptions to this rule. Those who are more favorable to you are likely to share your preconceptions. Consequently "starting out with them may in fact lead the interviewer to rely too much and too long on unchallenged assumptions which would be more quickly questioned through interviews with others." A second concern is that concentrating your attention on a certain type of person may result in the interviewer being labeled as on his side. This demarcation is especially likely in an organization riddled with factions.[29] Here again the retired (as well as those who have jobs elsewhere) provide a good send off. Your interest in them will often be returned by forbearance for your ignorance.

preferably office

Finding the Perfect Place

The place to meet will set the context for your interaction with the interviewee. Generally speaking *conduct the interview in a professional, private place*. This place is usually the individual's office. That will provide enough privacy so that the person can speak without fear of being overheard and will also set a professional tone for the interview.[30]

If the respondent may be constantly distracted in his work environment, you should consider interviewing in a more private place. Constant interruptions will destroy the flow of the interview and hamper the concentration of the respondent. Additionally when continually reminded of the needs others have of him, the interviewee may feel some compulsion to get back to work rather than speak to you. Human interruptions need not be the sole culprit here; an individual can be distracted simply by the environment. Think for example about interviewing a teacher in his classroom, surrounded by unread papers to be graded and lesson plans still to be prepared. You will want to avoid those situations where competing time demands on the respondent arise.[31]

You do not want all interruptions to be halted. Letting phone calls come in allows you to see how the individual deals with others (as well as giving you a chance to catch up on your notes).[32] Interviewing on the job also provides you with an opportunity to observe the working environment, including scanning the respondent's desk for memos or documents that may be lying there,[33] observing how the whole office is set up (for example, are doors to offices opened or closed; are desks piled high), and seeing how employees interact with each other (including how the interviewee treats others).[34] The interviewee may also feel more comfortable in his own setting and become tense in unfamiliar or (what is perceived to be) less neutral environments. For example a principal's office would not be the place to interview teenagers about drugs in school.[35]

Where do you go if the private office is unsuitable? Going out for lunch or dinner is not advisable because there is the chance you will be interrupted by friends or associates of the respondent. Additionally writing notes and keeping track of what has been said is difficult while eating.[36] A final drawback to taking out a respondent for a meal is the cost. Your project will have finite funding; there are probably better ways to spend your finances than on a situation that may not yield very good results. Contrariwise accepting a free lunch may create a sense of obligation or partiality you wish to avoid. Paying your own way is good for the soul.[37]

Meeting at the respondent's home is a mixed blessing. The advantage of the home is that the respondent will feel fairly comfortable and secure there.[38] The drawback is that the interviewee may allow his family to enter and leave the room, thus inhibiting the flow of the discussion.[39]

There are some alternative interview sites to choose from. Usually the interviewee's workplace will have conference rooms available. This will provide the privacy that might not be available in a busy office. Or you can go for a walk. Often the time outside the office will prove to be a nice break for the respondent. Then again it is not easy to write while walking.[40]

You need to consider what time to meet for the interview. The best rule of thumb is to *ask the respondent when he can best meet*. There may be times when the respondent is less relaxed or more likely to be continuously interrupted by others. Or the respondent may want to choose a time (and place) so that he will not be seen being interviewed, either because he fears repercussions in the office or just feels more comfortable remaining anonymous.[41]

It is not so much that we disagree with this received wisdom, though we do in part, but that it amazingly omits the most important rule of all: *Get the interview anywhere, anytime you can, provided only that the setting is moral and safe*. You are unlikely to be able to set the terms—where, when, how—on which the interview will take place. Take it as it comes, some time being better than none. The respondent can usually be counted on to recognize an impossible situation. If not, a little suffering goes with the territory.[42]

One more thing. Gentlemen (and gentlewomen) do not read other people's mail—or their memos. It is wrong to play the sneak. Besides a reputation for sneaky behavior will certainly ruin your interview and possibly your project.[43]

Making Contact

Most people are quite willing to give interviews.[44] Interviewing may fulfill ego needs of the respondent (the need for recognition, for feeling needed or important);[45] the interview may be cathartic, allowing the informant to get something off his mind;[46] or interviewing may be satisfying because of the psychic need for interaction.[47] The interviewee may wish to contribute to your education or feel a duty to scholarship. Or he may just be polite.[48] You should try to discern the motivations of the respondent (although this will often be difficult). Is the respondent trying to get back at someone, trying to clear his name, or is he just attempting to be helpful to you? Understanding why the interviewee is speaking the way he is can aid you in deciphering his responses.

When you make contact with the respondent, you will need to explain who you are and what your project is about. *Be general about what you*

are looking for. Do not go into a great deal of detail about the aims of your project. In all likelihood the respondent is not interested in the detail you are capable of providing. Additionally saying too much risks unintentionally stumbling on a purpose that alienates the interviewee. For example, rather than mentioning to a budgeting official, "My hypothesis is that budgeting is out of control," it is better to state, "I am examining the budgetary process." Speaking in general terms allows the respondent to interpret the scope and aims of the study as he sees fit.[49] Since you do not yet know how your project will come out or exactly what you are looking for, a general description is straightforward enough.[50]

You should provide a truthful explanation of your research. "Bluffing, pretending naiveté, representing oneself or one's sponsors as something misleading, or trying to make one's study appear *more* or *less* important than it actually is are *all* dangerous tactics. Subsequent events or other lines of communication may reveal the real situation to the field contacts and seriously damage the research worker's field relations."[51] Need we add that lying is wrong even if efficient.[52]

Do not explain your project so that is poses a threat to the respondent. If the interviewee believes that he is going to be carefully scrutinized, then he is likely to resist being interviewed (and will certainly be less forthcoming if he does decide to talk with you). Doby, for example, compares these two openings: "We want to study what makes for good and bad union leaders" and preferably, "We want to learn how a union carries on its day-to-day work."[53]

While we agree that you should not threaten the respondent, we object to this formulation on two grounds: (1) There is nothing necessarily threatening about saying that you are studying leadership (except to researchers who can never figure it out). *The interviewer need not be overly pointed,* we should say, but he should not dissemble. (2) The form of the question about leadership suggests that the respondent is being asked to theorize. If respondents were good at it, we would fear unemployment in the academy.

You should present the project in terms that will be of interest to the interviewee. The idea of the opening is to get the respondent to support your project. For example you might approach the topic you are doing in this way: "You have probably read and heard about some of the problems of youth in our city. We are interested in talking with parents about the difficulties of raising children these days."[54] Such an opening provides a clear appeal to the expertise of the parent and suggests a need by the interviewer for the parent's input.

If asked about who is sponsoring your project, emphasize those who would appeal to the interviewee.[55] A businessman will be more impressed that the chamber of commerce has provided funding for your research than that the AFL-CIO also supports your efforts. You may downplay but you must not omit those sponsors that the interviewee may dislike. For example if asked why a certain group has given you money, you can state, "As you can see from the variety of funding sources, several different groups think this project is interesting. Fortunately we are not dependent on any one group, and in fact we have indicated to each agency that a condition for our taking its money is that it cannot interfere." This is especially effective when true.[56]

You should also consider how you will present yourself to the interviewee. *Avoid the interested-citizen approach.* Few respondents will believe that a citizen off the streets would go through all this effort just because of general interest. No doubt your motives would be called into question. Suspecting the worst, that you are somehow secretly checking up on him, the respondent will be extremely reluctant to part with any information.[57] The interested-citizen approach, additionally, lacks any real direction or focus. The respondent needs to know that there is a purpose to the study so that he does not believe he is wasting his time.[58]

You should also *avoid the reporter of facts role.* Few respondents are so naïve as to believe that people collect facts without a purpose. Without a plausible explanation for your project, the interviewee will again likely become suspicious.[59] Respondents, particularly those in public service, may also feel that they have fulfilled their duties to the public by providing press releases to the media. As a reporter of the facts, so the thought goes, you would have already been taken care of.[60]

A reasonable method for gaining the good graces of the interviewee is to *use the teach-me approach.* Presenting yourself as interested in learning, which you should be, provides the respondent with the opportunity to articulate his ideas without fear of being challenged by you. If the interviewee believes he can teach you something, he is likely to reveal more about the intricacies of his activities. The respondent will often be proud to demonstrate his knowledge to a receptive audience.[61]

At times you will encounter a resistant respondent. If the interviewee claims not to have time, there are several tactics to adopt. First you should appeal to the interests of the respondent. You may wish to emphasize the special role the respondent would play in your project. This can be done by pointing to his expertise or unique perspectives. Secondly you should sympathize with the respondent and indicate that you are willing to work around his busy schedule. Coupled with this expression of understanding, you may want to add that you are interested in him precisely because he is busy and so involved in daily operations.[62]

The respondent may also claim not to know anything about your project.

In such cases it is a good idea to *point to ways in which the interviewee can help.* For example you might suggest that particular expertise is not required; rather you are interested in the perspective of the respondent. Or you can suggest that the interviewee underestimates his own role in the organization or knowledge of a situation. In response to a clerk saying that he is only a minor figure in the organization, you might suggest that "it is the clerk the often serves as the backbone of any organization."[63]

Each time you meet the respondent, reintroduce yourself. It can never be safely assumed that the interviewee recalls who you are or what your project is. You do not have to go into your whole opening again. All you want to do is refresh his memory so that he understands why you are speaking to him.[64]

Now you will never get in the door a second time if there is not a first time. It is our sad duty to inform you that not everyone is willing to be interviewed. Not even if you follow our foolproof suggestions. Perseverance pays, but not always. What then?

Work around the obstreperous individual. See people at the same level elsewhere in the organization or in a related organization. Ask people who used to do what he does. Search for documentary evidence. Learn so much he cannot afford to do without this wonderful interview. When all else fails, you can cry a little. Anyway a project so dependent on a single person probably is not worth doing. Right?[65]

To Tape or Not to Tape

You will need to decide at some point how to record the interview. There is no right or wrong answer, only advantages and disadvantages, depending on your situation. The primary advantage of the tape recorder is that you will have everything that is said verbatim. This takes the guesswork out of writing the transcript of the interview. Tape-recording is especially important if data are extremely complex.[66] There are several downsides to taping, though. First, transcription is costly. It is estimated that transcribing takes over nine hours for every one hour of the interview. Most projects would not be able to afford this; nor would the costs necessarily be justified.[67] Notes taken at the time that indicate key words and turns of phrases and then filled in immediately after the interview will usually be sufficient for your purposes.[68] There is a second drawback to taping the interviewing. Often the respondent will behave differently with the tape recorder on than if he were speaking to you. Williams quite accurately describes what can happen when you use the tape recorder: "My informant was familiar with them [tape recorders] and had no objection, and as I switched it on I could see him square his shoulders—literally—to Speak to History."[69] Ted Lascher says that low batteries, poor machine (not unknown among students), and background noise ca defeat an interview. Whether you should join him in a fail-safe technique–note taking while interviewing—we cannot say.

If you decide to use a tape recorder, Gorden suggests explaining to th interviewee why you are using a recorder rather than asking if you can us it. Asking if it is okay to tape the conversation may raise doubts in th respondent's mind ("you mean there may be something wrong with tapin the interview?"). Better to indicate that taping is a routine procedure b stating something to this effect: "I am interested in getting all the detail of your story in precisely your own words. Since I can't take shorthan the best way is to let the tape recorder do all the work."[70] This is marginall all right. We prefer to *ask: It is the polite (and the right) thing to do.*[71]

The Written Interview

Those who (like the authors of this chapter) prefer to take notes durin the interview may find certain hints helpful. Note taking is an art that ca be developed only by practice. Discipline (and not a little muscle in th fingers) is essential. *Train for note taking as you would an athletic contest jogging or aerobics are especially recommended.* The reason is that not taking, especially when doing several interviews a day, taxes the body a well as the mind. Interviewing is a physical and a mental activity. On reason we do not recommend taping is that it leads the interviewer to ba habits.[72]

One lives with the interview by immediately writing out a full account Coffee shops are ideal for this purpose, but parked cars, bathrooms window ledges, or anything handy can be used. Remember: With ever moment that passes, a nuance of the interview may be lost.[73] Good forr in interviewing also requires the interview to have been written up tha very night, for that is the only way to preserve as much detail as humanl possible. The pain involved is worthwhile because the threefold repetitio of each interview—taking it down for content and key phrases, writin more of it in longhand, and typing it—burns the content into memory. I creates the familiarity essential for making creative use of the contents.[74]

You should also comment on any ideas that arose during the interview Did the respondent refer to an issue that needs to be covered in futur interviews? Or was something said that might be covered in a differer project? The write-up should also include, as already noted, evaluations c the interviewee's comments (hunches about perceptions that may hav colored his responses) and a summary of his general disposition (angry pleasant, satisfied).[75]

Once typed (whether previously taped or not), *the interview should be photocopied,* since interviews are valuable research material that, for safety's sake, should be kept in more than one place. They should also be locked up to preserve confidentiality. This precaution is the more necessary because *interviews should be read and reread in order to sink in, thus decreasing the chance of loss or mutilation.*[76]

Since people act on the world as they perceive it, the researcher who wishes to understand behavior must try to get under the skin. There is no better way of encouraging identification with the respondent, to think as he thinks and feel as he feels, than living the interview in the manner we have described.

Rapport and Neutrality

It is important to develop rapport with the respondent. The interviewer must be able to "imaginatively place himself in another's role and situation in order to understand the other's feelings, point of view, attitudes, and tendencies to act in a given situation.[77] Rapport cultivates mutual regard. If you recognize the peculiar problems and concerns of the respondent, he is apt to feel like he is being treated with respect rather than as an instrument for your ends. Your concern may well be reciprocated: The interviewee may try harder to remember and may disclose more intimate, previously unanticipated information. Contrarily to act unconcerned about the interviewee's feelings is to court disaster: At best the interview will be strained and the respondent indifferent to your interests; at the worst the interviewee can become unfriendly and antagonistic. Rapport is not something that you can instantly achieve; there are no simple steps to memorize; instead the literature indicates some measures you can take or avoid that may improve the possibility of establishing empathetic contact with the respondent.

When you enter an interview, the respondent will have certain expectations about your role. A blue-collar worker may pejoratively refer to you as a "know-nothing intellectual." A conservative may view all college professors as liberal. Interviewers may well be antipathetic to the attitudes of a bigot. While there is the call to remain neutral in interviewing,[78] to declare yourself neutral to, say, the Ku Klux Klansman would be the kiss of death. You will immediately be brandished as a foe, and the interview will end before it ever gets under way. The problem the interviewer frequently faces is, in the words of Dexter, "On whose side shall I be neutral?" The answer is, according to Dexter, "Where possible [. . .] accept the informant's definition of neutrality, for there is great respect, in American culture at least, for neutrality, and to be neutral in the informant's terms.[79] Much as we respect Dexter, from whom we have learned a great deal, *we prefer to be neutral, period.* For the interviewer is also a social actor. Encouraging evil may not be the idea, but it can still be the consequence.[80]

Neutrality requires you to *withhold judgment on the views of the respondent.* This means you need to restrain your anger toward the bigo and keep your views on trade policy quiet. You do not want to leave the impression that you are against the respondent, and you certainly do no want to turn the interview into a debate.[81] You are not teaching but tryin to learn from the respondent. It requires discipline to keep from reactin to opinions hostile to your own. More difficult than keeping your opinion to yourself, though, is guarding against subconscious prejudice on you part.

> We may hear only what we expect to hear, basing our expectations on all sort of cues—the speaker's voice or diction or mannerisms or dress, or somethin he said at another time, or what other people he seems to resemble have said We may listen only for what fits into our purposes, leaving off as soon as w have classified the speaker . . . or satisfied our wandering curiosity, or decide what we ourselves are going to say.[82]

The best advice we have for both keeping your opinions to yourself an for mitigating prejudice is not a negative injunction (grit your teeth an bear it), but to *think about the interview as a genuine opportunity fo intellectual discovery.*[83] To aid you in this endeavor, you might als speculate beforehand about such a wide range of possible responses tha almost nothing could surprise you (although you will no doubt be sur prised).[84]

Neutrality does not preclude understanding. You should attempt to *plac yourself in the same frame of mind as the informant.* By carefully observ ing the actions, language, and intonation of the interviewee, you should b able to detect his demeanor. For example an executive may convey a businesslike air or an auto worker may act indignant toward people wh buy foreign cars. You will want to become "a kind of verbal mirro reflecting the subject's expression back to him.[85] Simply nodding you head and being a good listener is not enough. You need to be responsiv to the informant by indicating that you follow his concerns and understan why he feels that way. "Comments or questions that indicate that he [th interviewer] understands the significant features of the situation *as the appear to the respondent,* usually encourage the respondent to amplif and reveal the deeper nooks and crannies that he might at first hesitate t tell a relative stranger.[86] Kahn does a nice job of explaining that under standing does not require being like the respondent.

> The interviewer must be persuaded as "within range"—that is, he must be seen as a person to whom the respondent's statement and experience will not be foreign or offensive. This does not mean that the respondent needs to see the interviewer as similar to himself, but he must view the interviewer as capable of understanding his point of view, and of doing so without rejecting him.[87]

In fact Becker even goes so far as to suggest that "the interviewer should appear to agree, or at least to empathize, with most of what the respondent tells him—no matter how outrageous or offensive it is to the interviewer."[88] Though we are loathe to disagree with such a great ethnographer as Becker, we think empathy-as-passive-approval is out but empathy-as-understanding is in.[89]

Be careful though. Lurking behind assuming a role is the danger that the respondent will begin playing to your reactions. To avoid this situation, *keep in mind that the role you assume is intended to display neutrality, not partisanship*. Play roles with moderation. In other words when confronting the businesslike executive, he may well be more responsive if you similarly conduct yourself efficiently and somewhat formally. Contrarily a jovial individual may feel uncomfortable with such formal pretensions.[90]

Part of establishing rapport with the interviewee is to *use the vernacular of the respondent*. By employing the local jargon, the respondent may feel free to speak spontaneously without having to translate for you. If the interviewee believes that you do not have a good understanding of the environment, he is likely to spend more time rephrasing his statements and going over basic terminology. More than likely the respondent will feel that it is a waste of time to go into great detail with someone who does not appear to have a good grasp of the issues.[91] Using the respondent's language can also promote good feelings. An interviewee will feel more comfortable with someone who speaks his language, since the interviewer will appear more familiar.[92]

Unless you can use the jargon to good effect, however, it is better to forego the playacting and be yourself. By using the vocabulary incorrectly, you risk confusing the respondent and further widening the gap between what the interviewee means and what you believe he means.[93] The risk of being thought a phony has to be weighed against the lesser likelihood of being thought a local type. Kahn notes this when he writes, "Teaching new language to the respondent is difficult and risky, and attempts to assume the respondent's vocabulary are more often ridiculous than effective." It is more important to be genuinely understanding than filled with colloquialisms.[94]

The foundations for the development of rapport start early in the interviewing process. *You should become aware of the respondent's situation and experiences before the interview*. Knowledge can be obtained from reading (for example newspapers may mention tense times in an administration), from speaking with other researchers and colleagues of the interviewee, and by communicating directly with him. The more knowledge you have, the greater the likelihood that you will become aware of potential obstacles to conducting a successful interview.[95]

Obstacles can crop up anywhere in the interviewing process. You should *be aware of potentially touchy subjects*. Explosive topics abound; for example the respondent may be guarded about his past job performance and become suspicious of questions about what he could have done differently. The respondent may feel guilty about his conduct; or you might uncover a particularly bitter or upsetting experience in his past.[96]

What should you do about these touchy areas? *It is best to avoid the subject if it is only marginally relevant or important to your concerns*. There is no sense upsetting the respondent and potentially ruining the interview to obtain only limited gains.[97]

If the area is important to your research, postpone those questions until the end of the interview. You want the interviewee to feel relaxed during the interview. To begin the interview with emotionally challenging questions could cause the respondent to see the encounter as hard work and consequently lose his desire to cooperate.[98] By the end of the interview hopefully, the respondent will feel comfortable and be more willing to discuss these difficult areas.

If the interviewee appears reluctant to discuss a particular subject, do not approach the area too quickly. It is best to "talk with the respondent around the edges of the area" until the respondent leaves an opening. During the course of the interview, opportunities may arise to advance a mild question that will not upset him. Once the respondent has mentioned the high turnout in the last election, you may inquire, "How were you able to turn out such a large vote?" Compare for example that approach to asking, out of the blue, "Were there illegal actions undertaken to increase voting for your candidate."[99]

For touchy questions (as well as throughout the interview), *you should show appreciation for the respondent's efforts*. As an interviewer you are asking the respondent to spend his time, to search his memory, to work through chronologies, to answer difficult questions, and to relive memories that may be unpleasant. You can show appreciation in a number of ways. You may preface difficult questions with, "I realize how hard this question is, but I am sure you can give me some good ideas." Throughout the interview there will be occasions to praise the respondent for his effort and to comment on the good job he is doing. For example, "I know how hard it was for you to talk about these painful experiences and I appreciate

it"; "you have given me an unusual amount of detail on your experiences. This is very valuable information."[100]

At the beginning of the interview as well as during it, you should *preface some questions, particularly more difficult ones, with a reminder of the respondent's qualifications.* Beginning a question with, "You have such unique insight into this problem because of your position" will support the respondent's need for recognition and provide him with confidence to answer more difficult questions.[101]

It may seem easy to overdo flattery, but experience teaches that is not so. The reasons for not being a flatterer are two: It is unbecoming and unproductive. Though the respondent will undoubtedly enjoy being flattered, his desire to retain your high opinion will lead to only his telling you more lies. *Do not flatter,* we say; it will get you somewhere, all right, but not where you want to go.[102]

Despite the many virtues of establishing rapport with the respondent, *you should not develop overrapport.* At all times you want to remain detached enough so that you can observe the respondent's behavior and statements. You do not want to become so friendly and chatty with the interviewee that you begin spontaneously responding to him without being conscious of your reactions or of the cause of those reactions.[103]

Encouragements, while useful for showing interest in what the respondent is saying, can also produce irrelevant or distorted responses. An interviewee who has little to say may feel compelled to speak because of your support.[104] Related to this, the respondent may perceive your rapport as support for a particular response and consequently be reluctant to answer contrary to these perceptions. *To avoid influencing responses, do not regularly use such encouragements as "excellent idea" or "good"; instead respond with less obvious interjections like "yes."*[105]

Do not feed the respondent your own line; there is no sense in listening to echoes of your own voice, but lots of interviewers do it. A good reason for writing down questions in advance is to spot inadvertent bias. Another good reason for rereading interviews is to make sure you are not leading the interview to a predetermined conclusion.[106]

Interviewing as Conversation or Guided Monologue?

In many ways an interview is like a conversation (although we will see later why this metaphor can be dangerous).[107] Importantly *the interview should not become an interrogation.* Interviewees tend not to like a barrage of questions that make them feel they are being cross-examined. One step toward avoiding the trial atmosphere is to let the interviewee set his own pace rather than to have you pump him for information.[108] You should also be attentive to the respondent and responsive to what is being said. Dexter suggests handling the interview "as discussion—two reflective men trying to find out how things happen, but the less informed and experienced one (the interviewer) deferring to the wiser one and learning from him."[109] In this way you may be able to create an atmosphere of spontaneity on both sides.[110]

The interview also resembles a conversation, since it reflects a "balance of revelation and concealment of thoughts and intentions." In an interview just as in a conversation, neither side completely reveals his intentions or uses words that can be taken entirely at face value. The interviewer will use general phrases to see how the respondent interprets these questions. The interviewee will play with the interviewer, testing the response to particular answers (were you shocked, sympathetic?), hiding his thoughts, and gradually revealing more as he becomes comfortable.[111]

Despite the similarities between interviewing and conversation, the metaphor is limited and more importantly can be misleading. Unlike a conversation where both participants are engaged in talking for the sheer joy of discussion, *in an interview you have a purpose in speaking with the respondent.* Think about your daily conversations (not scheduled meetings or appointments): They occur spontaneously; you do not go into the conversation with a prepared agenda, and the discussion freely flows to whatever interests the two of you at the moment. Not so in an interview. While you may create the illusion of spontaneous dialogue, the truth is that the interviewer and interviewee are instruments serving their own ends. You are speaking to the respondent because he has information that you need for your project. And he may want to get his views across to the public.[112]

Another reason that an interview is not quite like a conversation, particularly one between friends, is that you and the respondent are usually strangers. And this is good. *You do not want to become friends with the respondent.* This does not mean that you should not be friendly; rather the expectation of the interviewee should be that he will not see you again. It is often easier for the interviewee to reveal more intimate secrets to someone he will never face again nor hear from than to speak to a friend. The respondent does not have to worry so much about how a relative stranger will react to his statements, whereas telling such secrets to an acquaintance may damage the friendship.[113]

It may be better to *think of the interview as a guided monologue.* The interview is *guided,* not completely free nor completely controlled by you. You try to move the discussion toward areas that appear fruitful and away from peripheral topics.[114] The bases for your decisions on what questions to ask next are a combination of preplanning (knowing what topics you

want covered) and reaction to the interviewee (when something interesting and relevant is said, pursue it).

The interview is also a *monologue,* not a conversation. Unlike a conversation, you do not reveal your views. *When asked for your opinion, it is best to appear to answer the question without really stating your own beliefs.* When asked, "What do you think of that?" it is preferable to say, "It *is* hard to form an opinion on that, isn't it? What do you think?" than to give your opinion or to say, "We aren't allowed to express our beliefs."[115] Expressing your views may bias the interviewee. Saying that you cannot give your opinion, while necessary when the respondent insists on knowing what you think, should be avoided, since it can sound unnecessarily argumentative. The following scenario is quite possible:

Respondent: What do you think?
Interviewer: I can't state what I think.
Respondent: Why not?
Interviewer: Because I should remain neutral.
Respondent: But you do have beliefs, so you aren't neutral.

Uh oh! You have lost control of the interview.

Unlike a conversation the preponderance of the interview should consist of the interviewee speaking. You want to obtain information, not tell your side of the story. The expectation of the respondent that he will have "a rare opportunity to express political opinions at length and in detail without contradiction" and without having to endure "unsatisfactory, boring, or confusing conversations" may be gratifying to him.[116] *The less said by the interviewer the better.* It is optimal to allow the interviewee to speak at length and spontaneously.[117]

Do not cut the respondent off even if he wanders. That is just the time you may learn something surprising.[118] *When desperate* however, that is, when the interview is about to conclude and you have nothing to lose, *use challenge questions.* Put the matter directly to the respondent—did he or did he not?—in an effort to shock him into a response. In the end you may be the one who is shocked, or upended, but then you were not getting anywhere anyway.[119]

Asking the Right Kinds of Questions: From Opening to Probing

In an open-ended interview, all questions are not created equal. Certain types of questions work better in different parts of the interview or with different people. While your opening questions are designed to set the respondent at ease, the purpose of questions that introduce new subjects

is to locate potential areas of significant data. Consequently you should *introduce topics and subtopics with broad questions.* These prevent the interviewer from accidentally restricting the scope of the inquiry. For example instead of starting your questioning with, "What did you do when . . . ?" you will likely obtain more information by initially inquiring, "What happened when . . . ?" You can later follow up by asking what he did. Broad questions often stimulate the respondent's memory by encouraging him to think about the topic as a whole. It is possible through the use of open questions to create an atmosphere where the respondent is encouraged to think aloud, to fill in the blank page that the unstructured question represents.[120] Contrarily when asked a very narrow question, the respondent may limit his answer, leaving other potentially relevant information untapped. Worse, a series of specific questions may cause the respondent to make up answers to please the interviewer (and to not appear ignorant).[121]

You should also *introduce topics and subtopics with unstructured questions.* Use questions that do not suggest the expected answer in the wording of the question. In other words do not feed the respondent the answer. Rather than asking, "Was it this way or that way?" try stating the question so that the respondent must choose his own alternative (for example, "Why did these people leave the organization?" instead of, "Did these people leave because they disliked the head of the organization?"). Significant data may very well turn up where you least expect it.[122]

Introduce topics and subtopics with general lead questions. By starting with questions whose key words are general, you allow the interviewee to interpret the question "in his own terms, and out of his own experience."[123] Contrarily asking specific, finely worded questions requires the respondent to think and speak in the interviewer's terms rather than in his own. Accordingly, "Encouraging the respondent to focus inward, on his own thoughts and feelings, rather than outward, on the interviewer's demands and definitions, permits him to organize and express his thoughts clearly and coherently.[124] Consider some typical lead questions: "How did you feel about the people you worked with?" or "What impressed you about how the organization was run?" The interviewee's interpretation of the general question may be quite revealing of the interviewee's perspectives and concerns.

Use short questions, the shorter, the better. Long involved questions breed uncertain answers. Neither the respondent nor the interviewer will know exactly what the response means. This is easier said than done. Self-correction is essential. When you cannot make sense of an answer on rereading, change the question.[125] One of our favorites (to officials in spending departments) was, "How do you decide how much to ask for?"

and (to congressmen) "How do you decide what to give?" The suggestion that the money was theirs to give was deliberate; Congress does exercise the power of the purse, and congressmen like to be reminded of it. Unto this day.

The exception proves the rule. British ministers responded well to the question, "Ministers are rated by how well they do in getting money for their departments from Cabinet. I understand you do (or did) especially well. How did (or do) you do it?"

A mistake that many interviewers make is launching into a lengthy explanation of the question or stating the questions in several different ways without providing the interviewee an opportunity to respond. Do not follow this sequence: "What have been the effects of this new legislation? I mean, it is anticipated that the new law will increase paper work and your office is already overburdened." Usually a question should take no more than two sentences (and preferably one sentence).[126] And be sure to ask only one question at a time. You will get only confused answers, since the respondent must grapple with organizing his statement to several questions instead of just one.[127]

Answers to general questions are helpful for uncovering how the respondent weighs the relative importance of different factors, revealing the frame of reference (does he see himself as secretly in charge, a victim, misunderstood?) and discovering vocabulary.[128]

During the course of the interview, it is important for you to understand how the respondent is using particular terms and what assumptions he has about the question. This is one of many conflicting demands placed on the interviewer. On the one hand, broad general questions are useful for soliciting unanticipated responses and stimulating the respondent's memory; on the other hand, such questions, by their very nature, leave many terms only implicitly defined. If you as the interviewer do not ferret out these underlying assumptions, you risk talking past each other or assuming the respondent's answers say one thing when they actually mean another.

There is no easy way out of this difficulty, but you can minimize the tradeoff by *actively listening*. By this we do not mean passively receiving the words and jotting them down. Rather you must concentrate on the conversation as it is going on. Sidney and Beatrice Webb accurately describe what it means to listen attentively.

> The first, indispensable factor in successful investigation or fruitful observation . . . is an efficient attention. . . . Few (for instance even in listening to lectures) seem to "take in" more than a small proportion of the statements made by the lecturer or even to absorb . . . the points he has most strenuously endeavored to drive home. To quote, "people hear some isolated point and instead of listening to the sentences that follow it, they proceed to build upon it *some notion of their own* of what the speaker is trying to say; and *this notion is what they attend to*, finding a confirmation of it in any fragments which reach their minds afterwards. In fact, they theorise, instead of trying to experience; and usually their theory is based on their own experience, not on the (presently hearable) facts so that from all speaking, *they get only what they have brought to it*, and this is not what the speaker said."[129]

By paying careful attention to the conversation, you may be able to pick up hints about the respondent's underlying assumptions or beliefs. These hints may take the form of vocabulary used (*Negroes* rather than *blacks*, *Mexicans*, not *Chicanos*, *lovers* versus *perverts*), references to groups (damn Yankees), adjectives or adverbs used (she's *only* a housewife, I'm a *proud* American), as well as direct statements of beliefs (I consider myself to be a conservative on social issues). *If unsure of particular assumptions held by the respondent or if you feel the assumptions need to be further developed, you may wish to ask questions that directly address the underlying beliefs.* You might ask, "What did you mean by 'damn Yankees'?" or, "Why do you consider yourself 'conservative on social issues'?" if the answer to these questions will shed light on the responses of the interviewee.[130] It is better to ask about specific views because the respondent may not be able to answer a developmental question that has stumped scholars for generations.[131]

Asking only broad, ambiguous questions will likely result in receiving information limited in depth. *While the interview is going on, the interviewer should probe or clarify the meaning of the answers.* Before turning to methods of probing, it is necessary to recognize that effective probing is next to impossible if you see yourself as a passive recipient of data. [132]

As an interviewer you must actively participate in the information-gathering activity. This means that you should *reflect on what is being said, be alert to what appears to be jumps in logic, and be aware of general and ambiguous comments.* By focusing your attention on the respondent, you will be better able to detect inconsistencies and ambiguities. Additionally, according to Dexter, "concentrated attention" involves the ability to

> shift gears rapidly; that is to say, when the interviewee makes what seem to him [the interviewer] to be a jump, he must not show any feeling that there is an irrelevance, but must with one corner of his mind, note that he may need to discover how the interviewee makes the transition, while with the forefront of his attention, he is listening eagerly to what seems to be the new topic.[133]

When interviewing, move from obtaining general comments to digging out specific references that elicited these general responses. A common

mistake of inexperienced interviewers is not sticking with a subject until the "good data are teased out."

> The green interviewer sometimes seems to assume that once he asks a question about something and an answer is given he should move on to the next subject. But the lead question in an area is just the first spade of dirt. If the interviewer is going to get at hidden treasures he sometimes has to unearth heaps of useless dirt before he strikes gold.[134]

If the interviewee says he is unhappy with how he is treated, ask for specific examples of his mistreatment. Charles Morrissey emphasizes that it is important to obtain examples, "One guideline I would stress, perhaps above all others, is that a good interviewer should pursue *in detail*, constantly asking for examples, constantly asking people to illustrate points they are making."[135] Asking the respondent to illustrate his points serves several purposes. It allows you to draw your own inferences. It provides some measure for verifying the accuracy of the interviewee's general statements. And, importantly, asking for concrete examples can often stimulate the respondent's memory by transporting him back to the time when these experiences occurred. Through "retrospective introspection" the respondent reexperiences the situation. By probing to encourage a network of associations, the interviewer can aid the respondent in recalling specific details as well as reporting his reactions and feelings at the time.[136]

CRITICAL

Once you discover a fruitful area, stick with it. Even if it means that you may have to sacrifice breadth of coverage, you should not pass up valuable occasions when the respondent opens up and provides you with rich data. There is a better chance that you can return to subjects you did not cover on another day, but you will probably not be able to recreate the situation that led to the revelations.[137]

Once you have adequately covered the material for your purposes, dismiss that line of inquiry and move on. You certainly do not want to bore the respondent by pursuing a subject long after he has lost interest. Furthermore putting aside the line of questioning allows you to concentrate on the next subject.[138]

Of all questions probes are the easiest to ask—Why? What other reasons are there? What else? Can you give an example? Another example would be helpful—and to miss. The inexperienced interviewer will find these opportunities passing by him faster than he can make use of them. Because experience is such a wonderful teacher, instructors and interviewers should read interviews to discuss missed opportunities. We repeat: *Reread interviews for missed opportunities in order to do better next time.*[139]

There are many different ways and reasons to probe.

1. *If the response is ambiguous or vague, you should ask for clarification.* Usually it is best and easiest to ask for clarification at the time the statement is made. If the respondent states, "A lot of people work here," a clarifying question would follow, "How many people would you say work here?"[140]

If the respondent has broached a potentially fruitful topic before you have a chance to ask for clarification, *do not interrupt the flow of the interview.* Let him finish his thought and then go back to missed points or general statements. By interrupting you risk disturbing the flow of the conversation, preempting potentially interesting statements, and leaving an impression that you are not willing to allow the respondent to finish his thought.[141] When you do come back to a question, be sure to indicate that you heard and understood what was said before so that the respondent does not think you were just not paying attention.[142]

2. *You can also use clarifying questions to reference feelings implicit in the interviewee's responses.* Toward the end of the questioning on a particular subject, you might inquire, for example, "Do you still feel anger toward the Japanese?" or, "Do you often feel unappreciated?"[143]

3. *Clarifying questions can be used to pursue seeming inconsistencies.* It is usually a safe assumption that the respondent believes he is thinking consistently. Yet responses given by the interviewee will often seem to conflict. Use probe questions to uncover reasons why apparently inconsistent beliefs can be held simultaneously.[144] It is usually best not to challenge aggressively the respondent, since such confrontations will either make him feel stupid or defensive, thereby causing him to be more inhibited in expressing himself. Instead phrase the question so that it does not sound as though you are judging the answers. Rather than, "How can you possibly explain this contradiction?" it will be more effective to state, "I am a little confused on this point. Before you said that . . . Could you clarify these two statements for me?"[145]

4. *You may elicit additional information through the echo.* An echo is created by repeating the respondent's words with a rising inflection at the end of your question. For instance an interviewee might state, "I was unhappy with my job," to which you might echo, "You were unhappy?" An echo should be used only when the prior response is relevant to the interview, since an echo encourages the respondent to continue speaking about the same subject matter. An echo is appropriate only when you believe the respondent has more to say.[146] Needless to say not all respondents enjoy this application of Rogerian therapy.[147]

5. *You can also obtain additional information through extension.* An extension refers back to information a respondent has already provided.

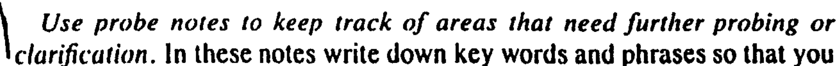
You may desire to know the respondent's feelings about an event he just described primarily in factual terms. Thus you might follow the description of the situation by inquiring, "Tell me how you felt during all this."[148] An extension may also be used to return to an earlier topic that you did not fully pursue because of resistance by the interviewee. The respondent may later be more confident or more emotionally involved in an issue and consequently willing to discuss the particular topic.[149]

6. *You may summarize what has been said to increase the coherence of a response.* If you are not sure how everything fits together, you can formulate what you believe to be an accurate summary of what has been said and explicitly or implicitly request confirmation or correction. It is usually best to preface your summary by suggesting that you are not sure if you fully understand. This will open the door for the respondent to improve on your summary, since it will be clear that you do not have any ego invested in your statements.[150]

7. *Challenge questions can be used to increase clarity or validity.* You may encounter situations when an interviewee provides two conflicting responses or when one answer contradicts information known to be true. Examples of challenge questions include, "How do you reconcile these conflicting statements?" or "According to the financial report, you actually receive more contributions from them than from anyone else." The confrontation poses an obvious danger: The respondent may feel threatened by the cross-examination and restrain his discussion. But a challenge question may also be regarded by some participants, particularly those who are confident or enjoy argument, as an indication of your interest and attention to what the respondent has said.[151]

Asking a challenge question does not mean that you must sound argumentative. Continue to think about the wording of your questions. Which question do you think will get a better response: "None of this makes any sense. How can you possibly say this when previously you state . . . ?" or "I believe you said before that . . . does that conflict with your last statement?"[152]

8. *Stay away from repetitions.* You may determine that the response to the question the first time it was asked was evasive, superficial, or unreliable. The same question can be asked later in the interview to see how the second response corresponds with the first.[153] Repetitions are dangerous though, since the interviewee may remember the question was asked and be angry that you did not believe his first answer. Besides, the purpose of repetition can be served by rephrasing the question.[154]



Use probe notes to keep track of areas that need further probing or clarification. In these notes write down key words and phrases so that you can use the respondent's own words when following up. Using the vocabulary of the respondent will indicate to him that you are paying attention and can be useful for jarring his memory. "What did you mean when you said, 'Congress is micromanaging the defense budget'?" sounds like you are attentive and will more likely trigger his memory than, "You said something about Congress and the military. What did you mean?" Even if you are using a tape recorder, these notes are important for keeping track of points to be covered or probed as well as for providing a reference to vocabulary used.[155]

Once you ask the question, keep quiet and wait for the answer. The silence that follows, while embarrassing in everyday conversation, is often quite useful in obtaining precious information. John Dean explains the virtues of the pregnant pause:

> The interviewer should have the perspicacity to *wait out the pregnant silences.* When in doubt as to what to say or what to ask, many interviewers just *pause.* If not sure what to say he may say the wrong thing—or, more likely and even worse, he may cut off some crucial data the respondent was hesitating to reveal. "Dead air" presents a powerful invitation to jump in, and will often precipitate data a respondent had not intended to reveal.[156]

How long should a silence be held before it becomes too embarrassing and inhibits the interview? If the respondent completes a sentence with a "tone of finality and then looks at the interviewer expectantly, a two-second pause assures that he has finished the comment. . . ." On the other hand, if the respondent stops in midsentence or midthought or appears to be pausing to think, a silence of ten seconds may be more appropriate.[157]

Provide definitions to difficult terms in a question. It is better to provide definitions discretely if there is doubt that the person will understand the terms. By this we mean including the definition in the context of the question. It is better to say, "As you may be aware, there has been a move to permit prisoners to be allowed more intimate visits with their spouses. What do you think of these conjugal visits?" than to ask, "What are your views on conjugal visits? If you do not know, a conjugal visit is. . . ." Placing the definition within the context of your question will not put the respondent in the uncomfortable position of having to ask what the question means or of making it appear that you think the respondent does not know the definition. By providing definitions you also avoid the danger that the interviewee will pretend to know the meaning of a term (when in fact he does not), resulting in irrelevant and uninformative answers.[158]

The interviewer must carefully balance providing too many definitions, thus defeating the goal of ambiguous questions, with providing too few definitions. A good way to avoid this dilemma is to *shun difficult terms*

when introducing topics and later use these terms as you move to more specific questions and gain an idea of the respondent's vocabulary.[159]

While you will normally ask questions that do not suggest a possible answer, there are times when leading questions can be useful. These intimate a particular answer. During the course of the interview (particularly toward its end), you may discover occasions when you think the respondent is withholding information because it goes against widely held beliefs. In this case *leading questions are helpful if they result in answers that are contrary to public ideals.*[160] What is contrary to public ideals may include anything from views on race relations to attitudes toward loyalty to political administrations. For example you may believe that the respondent is holding back his opinion that he wished the Second World War would have continued because he was economically benefiting from it. A leading question to elicit discussion of this attitude might be, "You were doing so well during the war. Do you not sometimes wish it would have continued?"

In effect leading questions encourage the respondent to express ideas or reveal information that he would otherwise be reluctant to state. Be careful. *Do not use leading questions that result in answers consonant with public ideals.* The danger is that the respondent will simply agree with the slanted questions (even though he does not really agree), since it is easier to conform than to appear deviant.[161]

In general *be alert to subtle clues that indicate the respondent is withholding or distorting his answers to please you.* This is certainly not an easy task but a talent that can improve through experience. For example watch for conflicting statements, for occasions when the interviewee begins to respond, then holds back the statement, or for seemingly minor phrases that suggest a particular outlook. A good instance of the latter example is when an auto worker who acted strongly anti-Japanese around other workers stops using the term Japs in private.[162]

Drawing Conclusions

A good interview requires you not only to ask penetrating questions, but also to draw conclusions from these responses. *Do not expect the respondent to spell out your conclusions for you.* Like a detective you must piece together the bits of information provided by different respondents. The answer you reach may be different from the conclusions of all the people you have interviewed.[163]

Part of drawing conclusions is determining how the respondent sees the situation. There are two aspects to the interviewee's perceptions that should be kept in mind. First, prior experiences and predispositions affect

how the respondent perceives his environment. *You cannot be expected t deduce the entire life of the respondent, but you should be aware of clue about past experiences that color responses.*[164] Some potential areas t examine are his ethnicity and national background.[165] Does the intervieweе see himself as overworked, the only competent person in his organization maligned by others? Does the individual enjoy his work and the people h interacts with, or does he feel his time is wasted and his peers ar unappreciative? Are there previous salient experiences that would affec the respondent's outlook, such as having been fired from the organizatio he is discussing? Is the occupation of the respondent affecting how th past is viewed? For example there is a "strong propensity of politicians t interpret the past in the light of the present," which "makes it impossibl to accept all they say at face value."[166] Researching the organization an person you will interview ahead of time will aid you in this task. It is als necessary to be alert to the respondent's statements and word choices "No one appreciates me around here" is a dead giveaway. More subtl the interviewee might mention, "Others have left because no one recog nized their importance." If important for your project, you should the follow up with, "Do you feel that no one recognizes your importance t this organization?"

Another aspect of the interviewee's perceptions is his conception of hi audience. Thus a member of Congress may react differently to an inter viewer he believes is interested in (and would appreciate the intricacies of political strategy as opposed to someone concerned with public servic (who would be less impressed by tales of maneuvering and dissimulation) Interviewees are usually quite good at picking up your particular slant o predisposition, so be careful about your facial expressions, how you wor questions, your verbal responses, and miscellaneous comments you make As before, act as a reflection of the respondent.[167]

Drawing conclusions also requires you to pay attention to how question are answered. Insightful listening, as Doby describes it, "enables one t analyze and interpret what is being said—to piece together the little clue that reveal what is *meant* or *implied* by the respondent."[168] The inexperi enced interviewer will often be content to simply get down whatever i said, often missing what might be behind these statements.

What should you look for? *Watch for areas where the respondent show emotional involvement.* Affect is often revealed by a trembling voice changes in bodily and facial tension (increased tension when angry, a lool of resignation when sad or disappointed), stammering, watery eyes, lon silences, protestation or heavy emphasis on certain points, or defensive ness.[169] Understanding responses of central significance to the interviewe will be helpful in evaluating his beliefs.[170] You will also want to discriminat

between opinions weakly held (and verbalized only because asked) from those strongly held, because the former opinions will yield little detail (and may likely result in the respondent making up things as he goes along), whereas the latter are likely to produce a mine of information.[171]

Also watch for glib responses. A respondent will sometimes provide articulate explanations that serve as justifications or rationalizations for actions. Some phrases to watch for include, "Since everyone was doing it"; "I did as I was instructed to. I think following orders is extremely important to the efficient operation of an organization"; or, "I felt I was acting in the best interests of everyone concerned." Rarely will it be to your benefit to challenge such a response. It is far better to let the respondent complete his explanation; once he feels more secure, he may be willing to discuss his doubts and concerns.[172]

After the interview you will want to *recapture these reactions*. When writing up and analyzing the interview, provide general comments about the reactions of the respondent. For instance you might point out, "The respondent disliked academics intensely, so perhaps the statement should be evaluated accordingly," or, "He seems still to resent his ex-boss, most likely because his boss fired him."[173]

The interviewer must constantly be alert to considerations that are likely to slant a respondent's perceptions and answers. You must not only record what is told and compare it to what others have said, you must also weigh the intrinsic value of the statement.[174] Does the explanation sound plausible, or are important points left out or attenuated? Any parent has learned to weigh the intrinsic merits of statements by teens arriving home late at night. So, too, we received a lesson on the plausibility of certain responses during the Iran–Contra hearings.

There is a danger in evaluating the authenticity of an interviewee's comments. Once the interviewer engages in weighing the merits of explanations, the interviewer "has always to be on his guard against an insidious temptation in his own mind: that he may unconsciously fiddle the weights, attaching too much importance to testimony which suits his own presuppositions or prejudices, and too little to that which he finds inconvenient."[175] Easier said than done. A guard (but by no means a guarantee) against projecting your expectations into a response is to *be conscious of your own predispositions*.[176] You may believe that every comment politicians make is designed to further their chances for reelection. But do not let this belief color you evaluation of comments made in a particularly revealing or reflective moment.

The Great Deceiver

What do you do when during the course of the interview, you realize that the respondent is deceiving you? The problem arises less from deliberate lying (though that has occurred) than from honest opinions mistakenly held.[177] There are some obvious indicators of deception: conflicting statements, statements that you know to be untrue, evasiveness, and a story that does not quite add up. You should also watch for less clear-cut indicators of doubtful statements, such as a tendency to exaggerate or an inability to provide concrete examples for generalizations made. If a partisan suggests, "The previous administration destroyed the civil service" yet is unable to produce one instance of how the service has changed, then doubt may be cast on the basis for the interviewee's belief. The respondent may have made the statement to make the other administration look bad or because he had heard this from someone else. He may even be right, but to use a baseless opinion is unwise.[178]

There are several ways to guard against deception. Preparing before the interview is an important first step. Researching the organization and the individual as well as speaking to others will help you evaluate responses.[179] Letting the respondent speak freely will often help you identify inauthentic comments. If the respondent must explain his ideas in detail, there is a greater likelihood that you will uncover inconsistencies or unsupported generalities that are then ground for further investigation.[180]

When the respondent uses percentages, it is a good idea to translate them into numbers. There is a tendency to overestimate when using percentages. Thus if the respondent states that 90 percent of the people in the organization belong to a club, and you know there are a hundred people in the organization, ask if he means 90 people are members. It may well be that he really only knows of 50 or 60. You should also be alert to the human tendency to exaggerate long distances or periods of time.[181] You may also prevent falsification by suggesting to the respondent that you know the score. Letting him know that you understand what was done or that you are aware of certain information may save the interviewee from having to erect a complex facade to hide his actions and then maintain the story for fear of being considered a liar.[182] There are subtle ways of indicating your knowledge of delicate situations. Rather than stating, "I know all about corruption in your organization," which would have the effect of immediately placing the interviewee on the defensive, it would be better to indicate, "I know how difficult it is to run an organization without rewarding those who are loyal to you."

Establishing shared goals will also go a long way toward ensuring the validity of responses. If you can get the respondent to recognize that you are both interested in arriving at a complete picture of events, then the interviewee may "exert himself to the utmost to provide accurate information."[183]

In addition to asking the interviewee questions about content, you

should *ask the respondent who else you should also speak to*. The suggestions given can be helpful in uncovering potential interviewees that you had not thought to see. The respondent's suggestions can also reveal interrelationships: Those named are often his friends or frequent contacts. Do not worry if the interviewee says that he does not think a particular individual will speak to you. A supposedly reluctant person will often see you.[184] *Use the cobweb method; go from one person who recommends you to another until you have unearthed the relevant network and achieved your goal.*

Calling It Quits

When to call a halt to an interview pales in importance before when to stop interviewing. Ideally you should follow the *rule of diminishing returns: Stop interviewing about a unit, position, or person when there are no more surprises*. When you keep hearing what you have heard before, it is time to move on. In real life there are reasons extrinsic to research that limit interviewing: time, money, patience, energy. There is no prescription to offer here, since life tells you to stop because you have run out of a vital resource.

Determining how long to interview someone is influenced by several variables. You will need to judge how busy the respondent is. Does he have pressing business to attend to? Have new appointments arrived? Has the respondent made references like, "I feel really backlogged with my work" or, "As you can see by the piles of papers, I barely get any sleep as it is"? You must also evaluate the attitude of the respondent toward the interview. Is he enjoying it or does he seem impatient? You should remember though that even if the interviewee says that you can stay (and even if he appears eager), the respondent may later come to resent how much time he spent with you. Furthermore the interviewee may just be acting politely toward you, like the relationship between hosts and guests who have overstayed their welcome. Generally speaking it is risky to stretch the interview beyond 45 minutes. If you have not completed your questions and there is a chance to come back later, you can inquire if it is okay to speak to him in a few days for some more details.[185]

Be alert. At the end of an interview, the respondent may feel more at ease because the questioning is over. Often revealing comments will be made or information will come out that the respondent did not feel was important at the time.[186]

When you close your notebook or shut off your tape recorder, however, your body language suggests the formal interview is over and the rest is

off-the-record. Do not fall into deviousness. Stop your interview; like the great Yogi, act like "it's over when it's over."

End the interview with a brief conversation. This gives the interviewee an opportunity to provide rationalizations for statements he now has second thoughts about making. This may preempt retaliation later on when the respondent tells others to watch out for you because you force things out of your interviewees.[187] During the conversation you should also assuage any fears of the respondent (about confidentiality, about what you think of him because of some of his comments, and so on) and make some final statement about your appreciation for the interviewee's time and helpfulness.[188]

Provide assurances of confidentiality. You should do this at the beginning and end of the interview as well as at selected times during the interview when the respondent appears to be hesitating to speak because he fears the information will become public.[189]

Gorden says that it is not necessary to offer all respondents confidentiality; however confidentiality is a good idea if the respondent will not speak unless he remains anonymous; if you believe the interviewee's statements will be slanted by the knowledge that his name will be made public (for example, he may try to make himself look good for the public record or tone down his views because of feared repercussions); or if speaking will jeopardize his well being.[190] We think that the interviewer can go either way but that *whether or not the interview is confidential should be made absolutely clear to the respondent.*

Afterward if a quotation from the respondent is desired in your written text, there are two ways to handle this. *You may find something similar in a public document, a newspaper, court proceedings, or legislative hearing that is bolstered by your private interview*, or *you may ask the respondent for permission to quote*, giving not only the actual words but also the surrounding context. Truth in advertising applies to researchers as well as to other people trying to make their way in the world.

After your meeting *keep track of who sees the interview.* Assurances of confidentiality should be respected. Ethically it is your responsibility to fulfill your promise. Practically it is not only embarrassing but potentially damaging to your credibility for future interviews. Interviews will quickly dry up if word gets out that you cannot be trusted.[191]

Preparing Interviews for Writing

By this time you have collected 80 to 90 percent of the material. You cannot be sure whether you have collected too much or too little. Following the guidelines you have numbered each interview. On three-by-five

cards, you have written the number, full name, title, address, phone number, and biographical data about each interview and locked away these cards to maintain confidentiality. You also have a file of written sources. On four-by-six cards, you have written ideas for organization or analysis as they came to you for the article or book you are contemplating writing. What next?

Empty your mind of ideas for organizing this work by writing chapter or section headings (approximations will do). Keep it simple; you will likely change your mind. A heading alone or a few sentences at most describing content will suffice. Place these headings in order, shuffling cards as you go. Number the headings in pencil as if you expect to order them. Relax. Cards are easy to discard.

Read over each photocopied interview. Then go back and circle each separate thought or bit of data, marking it with what then appears to be its proper location within the manuscript. A single word or phrase as well as a paragraph or two can go on a card. The object here is to be exhaustive in mining the data, not to keep your cards neat nor to make their content equal. Then paste each bit on a separate card.

At this point some cards will not appear readily classifiable. What to do? Perhaps this process of coding (this is what it is) will suggest a need for new headings or subheadings. If so, write another number and classify accordingly; if not, put such cards aside until you can classify them or decide to discard them. Following this procedure will eventually produce not only a detailed outline but also an outline for writing.

Having treated all interviews in this manner, you can also write on separate cards new thoughts as they manifest themselves: Classify these or develop new classifications for them or just hold them in abeyance for a more insightful moment. And go through the as-yet unusable for clues of what you might have left out.

The time has come to merge the cards made from the written interviews with those from the oral interviews. Combining the two sources is bound to alter the existing but fortunately alterable scheme of classification. No, this is not a hopeless jumble but an opportunity for creative ferment. New relationships are revealed. Material previously unclassified or unclassifiable finds its place, while other material, perviously well ensconced, now needs a new home. Once again go from beginning to end, filing and refiling. Once again look through the residual and attempt to place it or find a new place for it. The remainder is not rubbish but rather an as-yet-untapped source of new concepts. Leave it until its time comes.

The first two shuffles have been devoted to rough classification. Familiarity with the material has grown. The moment for fine classification has come. Each chapter should be given headings, each section subheadings,

each card placed in order of exposition. Some cards, it turns out, ha multiple uses: Either photocopy them and place them where they shou go or note on the first use its succeeding placements. Again these d cards will be moved around, some even moved out. Put these with t residual material and try once more to classify them. Enough unused ca should have accumulated to see if a body or data or a line of thou deserves separate consideration.

Until this third stage has been completed, you would be hard put to s what, if anything, has been left out. For what is to be included depends the problem you wish to solve, the argument you wish to present. Y cannot be entirely certain until you write, for only the act of writing its (not every thought will be written and not everything written is a wort thought) can fully reveal the structure of what is contemplated.

Here you face a choice: You can either conduct extra interviews a documentary research, or you can write up your account, hoping there to gain a truer perspective on what is needed. One way to choose is by t availability of sources; if they are unlikely to be available later, use th now. Another consideration is the availability of your personal resourc It may be best to postpone interviews and travel until time and money a energy are available. Whatever the choice the new material should incorporated into the old.

After you have finished each draft, review the unused cards; throw th out when they obviously do not fit. When there are no more cards le you are near completion. Keep your cards until the article or book published; they are invaluable when checking footnotes. But do r discard ideas. The card that was rejected, as the Bible says, may beco the cornerstone of a new edifice.

You may find the procedure advocated here to be exhausting. In a w that is the idea. The object is to get out of yourself every last bit of w you have to give. Later when you reread your work as a strang wondering who could have written it, or how you came on this idea, y have initiated yourself into the scholar's craft.

Defects of Open-Ended Interviews

Among the well-known defects of this art form is its unsystema character. Many important factors vary in ways difficult to control: t character of the interviewer, most of all; but also the time available, t era in which the project takes place (the openness of sites differs accordi to the time period), the effort devoted, even luck. The ability to gain en may depend on happenstance—the occurrence of certain events or t availability of a key person. You can rarely be certain (absent ot

projects covering the same ground) that other investigators would come up with the same description, let alone analysis. That is why the open-ended, semistructured interview should be thought of as a source of two types of information otherwise unavailable.

The first is the discovery of social facts, as sociologists called it long ago, namely, the location of phenomena together with an approximate description. (Immediately it should be noted that these discoveries are often contested by others who cast doubt on their size, scope, shape, and causes. A good contemporary example would be homelessness.) The second is the formulation of hypotheses about both the dependent and independent variables, what is to be explained and how it is to be explained. This understood—interviews are good for setting up, not solving, a research problem—the very subjectivity of open-ended, semistructured interviews may be considered an advantage. Their total immersion in the subject matter, we think, is an aid to creativity.

There are also lesser known but important defects of research based on this sort of interview. One of these is the subjection of interviewers to widely shared biases within the milieux they are investigating. When these biases are really significant, they are likely to be less conscious and therefore difficult to discern.

A related defect is the cooptation of researchers by the people and organizations they are studying. Other-induced cooptation takes place when a deliberate effort is made to convert a social scientist into an advocate. "Going native," however modern these natives appear, is an old story. Self-induced cooptation is a newer defect under which researchers persuade themselves they have a moral duty to act as advocates for the group they are studying. We emphatically disagree. "Doing it to yourself" is worse than being "hard done by" because you cooperate in your own corruption. Patronizing the subject population, making them into people who need you instead of you depending on them, demeans them. Patronizing your academic discipline by suggesting that its normal modes of inquiry debase worthy people demeans you. If normal science is immoral, why are you in it? Being false to your vocation in order to be true to your values is inherently corrupting. There has rightly been a reaction against those who work for intelligence agencies while pretending to be scholars. How much better is it to work against governments you do not like while pretending to be a scholar?

Using yourself as an instrument of investigation, as required by the open-ended, semistructured interview, is both a snare and an opportunity. It is a snare for those who mistakenly believe they already know what they have come to discover. It can be an opportunity for those who seek to

formulate and reformulate ideas through disciplined communion with their subject matter.

Lewis Dexter and Selma Monsky remind us that interviewees also may benefit from the process. Dexter says that

> I think it is not quite true . . . that busy men are hesitant to be interviewed. Many of them find an experienced, informed interviewer very useful or rewarding . . . because many men of affairs have nobody they can talk to honestly about their task and responsibilities. Yes, they have staff, but you say something to staff and they'll quote it against you, later on. Yes, you have colleagues but there may be some rivalry. Yes, you have professional peers but you have to maintain a facade with them. So, I think a fair number of business men we interviewed—especially important business men who couldn't relax in small business organizations or at Rotary—found interviews with us worthwhile, once they got started.[92]

Selma Monsky advises that

> . . . people have a need to think through their ideas with an interested, sympathetic, non-judgmental interviewer. . . . I'm convinced that this is the primary appeal that keeps many respondents involved and participating in interviews. I still remember one of my first respondents (almost 40 years ago) thanked me because she had learned so much; when I protested that I hadn't told her anything, that she was telling me things, she agreed, adding 'But I haven't thought through some of these things before, and I've learned a lot.'[93]

The greater the mutuality, the better the experience.

As Lew Dexter emphasizes in his seminal book, interviewing is a transactional process in which a new thing is created. Each side plays to the other. There is (but there is also more than) impression management. The distance between actor and audience is constantly being reduced and enlarged. Sometimes the positions are reversed. New perceptions emerge from each other and the events and ideas under discussion. The new reality, albeit fleeting, is real. Whether it is true (or truer) matters; whether it is powerful in leading to better questions and answers matters more.

Notes

1. This is particularly true if there are several people conducting interviews. In that case, the project coordinator needs to keep in close contact with the other participants so that the objectives remain consistently defined. See Raymond L. Gorden, *Interviewing: Strategy, Technique, and Tactics* (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1969, 1975), p. 471.
2. Ibid., p. 472; Philip M. Williams, "Interviewing Politicians: The Life of Hugh Gaitskell," the *Political Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (July–September 1980): 303–16,

305; Walter Van Dyke Bingham and Bruce Victor Moore, *How to Interview*, 4th ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), pp. 64–65.
3. Gorden, p. 472.
4. Robert K. Merton and Patricia L. Kendall, "The Focused Interview," *American Journal of Sociology* 51, no. 6 (May 1946): 541–57, 541.
5. Williams, "Interviewing Politicians," p. 303.
6. A. W. Seeking respondent's theories, Lewis Dexter states, can help the interviewer understand why the respondent acts as she does. (Letter to Aaron Wildavsky, undated, received December 1987.)
7. D. H.
8. Lewis Anthony Dexter, *Elite and Specialized Interviewing* (Evanston, Ill. Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 38.
9. John T. Doby, Edward A. Suchman, John C. McKinney, Roy G. Francis, and John P. Dean, *An Introduction to Social Research* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Stackpole, 1954), p. 244.
10. Dexter, *Elite and Specialized Interviewing*, pp. 42–43.
11. Doby et al., *Introduction to Social Research*, p. 236.
12. D. H. and A. W.
13. A. W. See Hugh Heclo and Aaron Wildavsky, "Preface" to the 2d ed. of *The Private Government of Public Money* (London: Macmillan, 1981) for chapter and verse in the British Treasury.
14. Doby, p. 235.
15. A. W.
16. Gorden, *Interviewing*, p. 402; See also Doby, *Introduction to Social Research*, pp. 241–42, and Bingham, *How to Interview*.
17. Gorden, *Interviewing*, pp. 405–6.
18. Ibid., p. 406.
19. Jean Converse and Howard Schuman, *Conversations at Random* (New York: Wiley, 1974), p. 70.
20. A. W.
21. Theodore Caplow, "The Dynamics of Information Interviewing," *American Journal of Sociology* 62 (1956): 165–71, 167.
22. D. H. and A. W.
23. John T. Doby, Edward A. Suchman, John C. McKinney, Roy G. Francis, and John P. Dean, *An Introduction to Social Research* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Stackpole, 1954), p. 241; See also Gorden, *Interviewing*, pp. 402, 477.
24. Doby, *Introduction to Social Research*, pp. 241–42.
25. Lewis Anthony Dexter, *Elite and Specialized Interviewing* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 41.
26. Doby, *Introduction to Social Research*, pp. 231–32.
27. A. W. Dexter adds that if one interviews at the top first and lower level officials know that, they may try to affirm the same story (letter to A. W.).
28. Dexter, *Elite and Specialized Interviewing*, p. 39.
29. Ibid., pp. 39–40.
30. Ibid., pp. 46–47; Bingham and Moore, *How to Interview*, p. 65.
31. Gorden, *Interviewing*, p. 249. Ted Lascher suggests interviewing congressmen in their home district offices because life is less frantic there. If economizing on time and travel does not require sticking to the place where a legislature meets, this is useful advice.
32. Dexter, *Elite and Specialized Interviewing*, p. 55. (Memorandum to Author, December 2, 1987.)

33. Theodore M. Becker and Peter R. Meyers, "Empathy and Bravado: Interviewing Reluctant Bureaucrats," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (Winter 1974–75): 605–13, 608.
34. D. H.
35. Gorden, *Interviewing*, pp. 250–51; Converse and Shuman, *Conversations*, pp. 2–3.
36. Dexter, *Elite and Specialized Interviewing*, pp. 47–48.
37. A. W.
38. Gorden, *Interviewing*, p. 251.
39. Dexter, *Elite and Specialized Interviewing*, p. 47.
40. A. W.
41. Gorden, *Interviewing*, p. 191; Becker suggests interviewing middle-management during lunchtime because supervisors tend to eat lunch at their desks and are not usually interrupted at this time. Becker and Meyers, "Empathy," p. 608.
42. D. H. and A. W.
43. A. W.
44. Williams, "Interviewing Politicians," p. 306.
45. See Gorden, *Interviewing*.
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