

*INFO 272. Qualitative Research Methods*

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# Introduction to Interviewing

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Fall 2014

# Outline

- ❖ What is Qualitative Interviewing?
- ❖ Interview techniques
- ❖ Planning for assignment 2



[https://openclipart.org/image/800px/svg\\_to\\_png/77065/interviewer.png](https://openclipart.org/image/800px/svg_to_png/77065/interviewer.png)

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# Suchman and Jordan's Critique

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## Aspects of ordinary conversation:

- ❖ local control
- ❖ question redesign
- ❖ answer elaboration
- ❖ clarification of meaning
- ❖ detection and repair of misunderstanding

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## Critique of Suchman and Jordan's Critique

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- ❖ Are these really requirements of survey interviews? Or are those administering the survey poorly trained?
  - ❖ redundant questions
  - ❖ offering clarification
- ❖ poorly designed surveys (census and cognitive pretesting)
- ❖ opinion polls and improving their predictive power

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# Qualitative Interviewing

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“[to gain] a fine-textured understanding of beliefs, attitudes, values and motivations in relation to the behaviors of people in particular social contexts.” [pg. 39 **Bauer and Gaskell**]

“to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena.” [pg. 5-6 **Kvale**]

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# Reasons to Conduct Qual Interviews

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1. Capture what is outside our capacity for direct observation
2. Integrating multiple perspectives
3. Studying process
4. Learning how events / issues are interpreted by subject populations
5. Identifying variables and framing hypotheses for quantitative research

[Leaning from Strangers, pp 9-11]

# Mediation

- ❖ through memory
- ❖ through interviewees self-perception
- ❖ through interviewers perceptions
- ❖ the presence of the interviewer and others

**extreme cases?** teenagers, politicians

An interview is a negotiation between interviewer and interviewee (who exert reciprocal influence)

How do I know if what the interviewee is telling me is true? Is that an important question? Under what circumstances (i.e. what is your purpose for doing the interview)? Matters of self-presentation (interesting in and of themselves). Interview not as information extraction, but as interactional event.

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## Advantages / Disadvantages

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- ❖ Advantage #1: **efficiency** - generate a large amount of material on a specific topic in a short amount of time
- ❖ Advantage #2: get at the internal world of meaning and interpretation of individuals
- ❖ Disadvantage #1: **artificiality** - distance from event / experience (remember Becker on the accuracy gained from close observation)



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## Different from Ordinary Conversations

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- ❖ one-sided
- ❖ works back and forth between interpretation, belief, opinion of interviewee and details about their direct experiences
- ❖ Interviewer's guidance is light-weight and affirmative (non-argumentative, non-persuasive)
- ❖ Attentiveness to language, lots and lots of follow up questions

# Interview Techniques

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# Techniques

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- ❖ **first things first:** explain yourself and establish rapport
- ❖ but how do you establish rapport?
  - ❖ topics the interviewee enjoys talking about
  - ❖ commiserate, empathize, be human

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# Techniques

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- ❖ **what can go wrong?**
  - ❖ suspicion, evasion, stonewalling
  - ❖ Interviewees who speak very little, or are extremely talkative, or go way off-topic
  - ❖ speaking in generalities only, attempting to do the analysis for you ('let me tell you how people use the Internet here')

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# Techniques

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- ❖ **avoiding generalities**

- ❖ ask for concrete examples, personal stories
- ❖ use accessible questions with appropriate vocabulary (i.e. don't use terms like 'discourse' or 'network neutrality'  
NOTE: expert interviews are an exception)

- ❖ **quality concerns**

- ❖ avoid leading questions: "don't you think..." "isn't it true..."
- ❖ clarify and confirm

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# Techniques

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- ❖ **encouraging talk**

- ❖ avoid yes/no questions, ask questions that require descriptive or narrative answers.

- ❖ “tell me about a time when you ...”

- ❖ “can you give me an example of...”

- ❖ “how would you describe...”

- ❖ **BE QUIET!!! (and wait)**

- ❖ ask follow up questions, allow interesting tangents to develop

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# Techniques

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- ❖ **handling the over-talkative**
  - ❖ politely interrupt
  - ❖ change topic abruptly

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# Techniques

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- ❖ **'Probes'** [*lightweight guidance*]

- ❖ D: "...it got to a time where we had to come to work on Sundays and I was going bad. This is the Internet, I've **got to be careful** of myself. So, and the Lord spoke to me in several ways."
- ❖ J: "you said that **you had to be careful** with the Internet, how so, what do you mean by that?"

[NOTE: lots of probe opportunities here]



# Interviewing in Other Cultures

- ❖ issues with language
- ❖ attitudes in that particular society / subculture towards authority and the right to speak
- ❖ ideas about and experience with research practices
- ❖ private information (age, weight, income)
- ❖ rapport and suspicion (of identity, of methodology)
- ❖ time and scheduling

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## Key Ideas to Remember

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1. explain yourself and gain permission
2. ask open-ended questions in accessible language
3. follow the interviewees lead, clarify and confirm, detect and repair misunderstandings
4. be quiet!
5. **use probes**

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## Planning for Assignment 2

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