

## Top Tips in Interviewing

### What are interviews?

An interview, whether one to one, or as a group discussion, is not the same as a conversation. When someone agrees to participate in an interview, there should be clear consent, and agreement around how what they say will be used, and whether it will be anonymous or attributed to them. In addition, the topic and pace of the discussion is led by the interviewer, and the interview does not happen by chance, unlike a conversation.

Interviews need careful planning in terms of logistics, such as:

- Who will do the interviewing
- who will be interviewed
- where will the interview take place
- are there any access needs to consider (translation, disability or mental health access considerations etc)
- will interviewees be compensated
- how will the discussion be recorded and analysed?

**It is important to consider whether an interview is the best approach to gather the information needed, compared to, for example, desk research or a survey. Consider the checklist below. If you are not answering yes to all the questions in the checklist, reconsider whether an interview approach meets your needs.**

### Checklist for choosing interviews

- Do I need detailed information?
- Is it reasonable to rely on the information gathered from a small number of people?
- Do I need information based on emotions, experiences or feelings?
- Do I need information about sensitive issues?
- Do I need privileged information which only a few people know?
- Will I be able to get access to the interviewees I need?
- Can I afford the time and costs required to undertake the interviews?

# Types of interviews

There are many types of interviews with different pros and cons

**Structured interviews** This is like a questionnaire administered face to face in that the questions are fixed and standardised, and interviewees are invited to respond to closed (yes / no) questions or choose from a list of responses. Structured interviews are good for gathering quantitative (numbers) data as well as some qualitative (narrative) data.

**Semi-structured interviews** These may have some features of the structured interview, such as lists to choose from, however, they will be balanced with open questions to draw out interviewees' personal views, opinions or impressions. The interviewer can be flexible with the order of topics within the interview in order to follow the natural flow of the conversation, as long as everything is covered by the end of the interview.

**Unstructured interviews** Here the interviewer's role is to introduce a topic or theme to start the conversation and encourage the interviewee to develop their thoughts.

**One-to-one interviews** One-to-one interviews are good because it is easier to arrange a meeting between just two people, and it can be easier to guide one person through the questions planned, and get significant depth of responses. In addition, the interviewee may be a specialist in the topic, for example through lived experience, or have a specific relevant role.

**Group interviews** This typically involves groups of 4 to 6 people. The key thing to remember is that the format is designed to get group views, it should not be an opportunity for the interviewer to ask the same question of each person in the group in sequence.

Group interviews allow richer responses by encouraging interviewees to challenge, confirm and explain each others' views. However, there is a risk that one or two people dominate, and it is up to the interviewer to manage this and draw out the views and opinions of quieter people.

Sometimes with sensitive subjects group interviews won't be suitable as interviewees may not be comfortable expressing their views. In these circumstances, one-to-one interviews, or smaller group interviews, for example with friends, may be more suitable.

**Focus group discussions** This is a technique originally from commercial research and advertising to explore attitudes, perceptions, feelings and ideas. The discussion usually revolves around one or more prompts such as an advert, a story, or a research finding. Over time, the term focus group discussion has come to mean a group discussion on a particular theme or topic.

## Before the interview

Before you start inviting people to interview, you need to agree that an interview is the right approach, and reflect on whether it should be structured, semi-structured or unstructured, as well as whether it should be one-to-one or in a group.

**There are some other key considerations including the choice of interviewer, the choice of interviewees, the venue, and preparing your interview guide. Importantly, you need to consider the access needs of your interviewees, such as whether they may be deaf, have a physical disability, or have a mental health condition. In Ghana, at least 21% of people have a disability or mental health condition.**

### The interviewer

With more sensitive subject matter, it can be helpful when the interviewer is as similar to their interviewees as possible in terms of gender, religion, ethnic group or disability. For example, people with a mental health condition may find it easier to talk openly to someone they know also has a mental health condition, or women may find it easier to talk to a woman about sexual health matters. In some cases, it can be useful to have an interviewer who is seen as an 'outsider' or different to the interviewees because this makes it more likely that the interviewees will spontaneously explain matters which are normally unspoken, such as cultural assumptions and shared understanding.

There is no perfect answer, but it is key to reflect on these issues beforehand, and make an active choice of interviewer rather than assuming the project officer should do it because it is their project – they may be the best possible interviewer, but they also may not be because interviewees may feel that they need to please the interviewer or give the responses they are hoping for.

### The interviewees

While you could use random sampling, it is more likely that you are choosing interviewees because they have a unique insight or special contribution to make. For example, you may want to particularly explore the opinions of people who are blind, or you may particularly want the view of men.

Typical ways of selecting interviewees can be based on their role, especially for one-to-one interviews, for example, you may want the views of leaders in Disabled People's Organisations. Or they could be based on demographics such as age, gender, religion, ethnicity, disability, etc. They can be based on location, such as wanting a mix from urban or rural locations. You may also select people based on their views, for example, do you want to talk to people who have negative views towards mental health and compare that to people with more positive views? They can also be based on benefitting or participating in a project activity. For example, talking to people who have received psychosocial counselling from the project.

These decisions all depend on what you are trying to answer with the interviews, and it is helpful to document your decision-making process.

## Accessibility

Some of your interviewees may have disabilities or mental health conditions. You may be purposefully interviewing people with disabilities or mental health conditions. At all times, you need to consider the accessibility of the interviews. There are lots of factors to consider, and generally you may find it useful to ask your interviewees what they will find most useful and helpful.

Here is a checklist of things to consider in the first instance, however, the specific needs of your interviewees will help guide more specific planning:

- Is the location of the interview easy to find
- Have I sent clear instructions for how to get to the venue, which can be understood by people with low literacy
- Is the venue accessible by people with limited mobility
- Do I need to organise a local language or sign language interpreter
- Is there a safe space nearby where interviewees can go if they need to take a break from the interview?
- Do the start and end times meet interviewees' needs? For example, someone with a mental health condition may find it harder to get up early due to medication, while someone who is deaf may find it difficult travelling in the dark because it is harder to lipread.
- Is the interview 60 minutes or less? Longer interviews can cause difficulties for a range of disabilities, such as chronic health conditions
- Have I budgeted for interpreters, visual aides or other personal assistants or family caregivers to attend

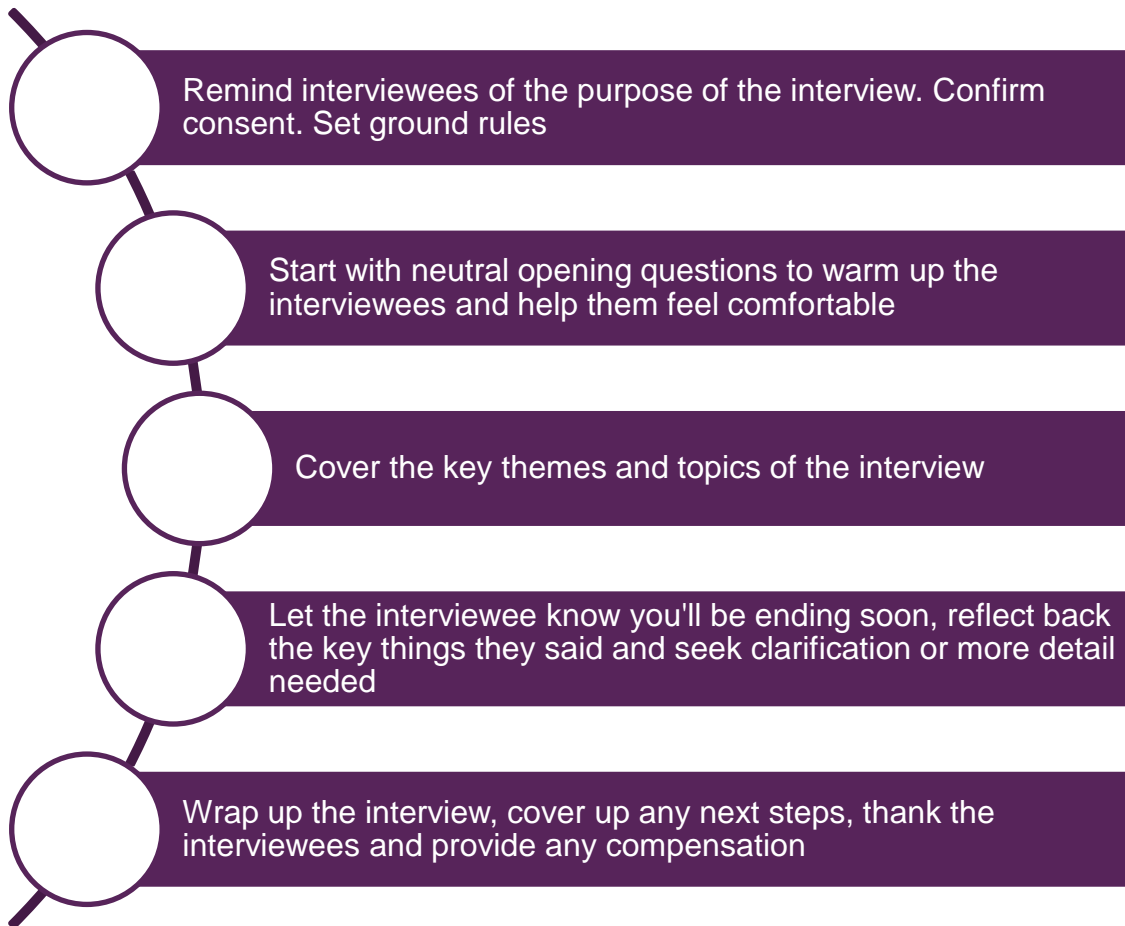
## Compensation

Deciding whether and how much to give respondents for interviews depends on a range of factors. If you are inviting interviewees to a venue, then you should certainly compensate them for their travel costs. Going in to a community and asking people to give their time to an interview, should also usually be compensated. However, if you are interviewing someone at their workplace, on a subject related to their job, probably payment would not be appropriate. Programmes like Ghana Somubi Dwumadie do not pay sitting allowances.

Depending on the length of the interview, and the time of day, you should also consider refreshments for interviewees. Remember, you should be covering travel costs and refreshments for aides and caregivers who have supported people with disabilities or mental health conditions to attend and participate. This needs to be considered in your budget, and agreed with attendees in advance.

## The interview guide

Always plan your interview in advance. If you are getting ethical clearance because you are doing a formal research project, you will need to provide an interview guide as part of your ethical application. A typical interview guide will follow the steps below:



## Conducting the interview

When interviewing people, the exact approach you take will depend on the type of interview you have chosen, and the topic you are covering. Generally, if you want to get people's views, it is good to use open-ended questions rather than closed (yes / no) questions. Sometimes you need to use yes / no questions or lists. In these cases it is usually helpful to have an open-ended question first, before narrowing down. Here are some more top tips below:

- ✓ Try to keep the content of each question to a single idea to avoid confusion.
- ✓ Try not to influence the interviewee by asking leading questions
- ✓ If you have not understood the response ask them to repeat and clarify.
- ✓ Do not assume answers
- ✓ Do not pass judgements
- ✓ When you change the tack, inform the person that you are doing so

## Safeguarding and dealing with distress

Sometimes people become upset or distressed during an interview. Perhaps they are reflecting on issues of stigma or discrimination which have affected their own lives? When setting up the interviews, especially on sensitive or difficult subjects, think about how to support people who become distressed:

- If at a venue, is there another room where they can take a break to recover
- Is there a way to get them home safely
- Can you signpost them to any support such as help groups or psychosocial support

Sometimes even more serious issues arise. Think carefully about what the person has shared, do we have any duty of care regarding the matter. For example, have they revealed abuse or maltreatment? You need to ensure you have a safeguarding policy in place which can be referred to in order to guide your response to such incidents.

## Keeping a record

Generally, it is helpful to audio record interviews, or, video record for people using sign language. Depending on the type of analysis you are planning, you may need to transcribe the interviews – this is very time consuming and needs to be properly planned for. Whatever the approach taken, remember that technology can fail. Always take a few notes by hand to help you remember the key points and any key quotes from the interview. If it is difficult for you to interview and make notes at the same time, take a note taker with you.

Remember, it is really important to store notes and recordings safely and securely. Laptops should be password protected, drawers should be locked, back-ups should exist of digital recordings. Depending on the nature of the interviews, you may also need to anonymise the responses. Look to your organisation's data protection policy or the ethical approval for more guidance.



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