

EXTRA

INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

Many books have been written and numerous papers published about how to conduct interviews. Here are just a few tips we often consider when we do interviews:

→ **Establish trust**

Consider some of the rules of safe space⁰¹ for interviews. Introduce yourself and potentially other people in the room. Make it clear that you care about the interviewees' answers, and that you are there to learn and not only to confirm your assumptions.

→ **Use clear language**

Ask questions in clear language, one question at a time. Otherwise, you might confuse interviewees. Avoid slang or technical terms. Try to speak with careful articulation.

→ **Avoid closed questions**

Avoid closed questions that could be answered with a simple “yes” or “no.” Your questions should inspire interviewees to elaborate on specific topics. Follow your interview guidelines if you conduct semi-structured interviews, but be open to following other directions your interviewee might take as well.

→ **Avoid leading questions**

Try to avoid leading questions in which you propose a specific assumption or hypothesis and, thereby, lead your interviewee to a certain answer. Leading questions are often a symptom of an underlying confirmation bias by the interviewer. A second researcher cross-checking questions for these symptoms helps to reveal such a bias.

⁰¹ See #TISDD chapter 10, *Facilitating workshops*, for tips on creating a safe space.

→ Listen

This sounds much easier than it actually is. Give interviewees time to think and do not urge them to answer right away. Sometimes a moment of silence feels uncomfortable for interviewers, but giving interviewees time to think helps them to structure their thoughts, to dig deeper, and often to open up more.

→ Paraphrase

Paraphrasing describes a technique where the interviewer repeats in his own words what the interviewee has just said. This helps interviewers to check if they correctly understood or if they only heard what they wanted to hear. Paraphrasing also gives interviewees more time to reflect on what they just said and elaborate more on it.

→ Use the Five Whys

The Five Whys is a simple but effective interview technique. An interviewer paraphrases the initial answer from an interviewee approximately five times into questions starting with “Why.” With each successive answer the participant will move from rather simple and superficial answers more toward underlying motivations and root causes.

→ Plan your interview questions

What interview questions will you pose? These might not be the same as the research question, but may instead approach the theme tangentially or indirectly. ◀