

Top Tips for Interviewing

- 1) **BE PREPARED.** Read up as much as you can about the place and people — including related research carried out previously by others — before you begin to structure your survey or schedule of interview questions.
- 2) Draw up your **LIST OF QUESTIONS**, ordered in a logical way. Begin with direct, easy to answer questions before tackling more abstract or potentially sensitive questions. Consider using a mix of **LEADING** (direct, factual) and **OPEN-ENDED** (“can you tell me about a time when...?”) questions. Keep the wording as simple and concise as possible.
- 3) **FIELD TEST** your schedule of questions to ensure that the respondents are likely to interpret the questions in the way you anticipate. **REVISE** accordingly.
- 3) **IDENTIFY** potential interviewees and **INVITE** them to participate in your study. **EXPLAIN** as clearly and fully as you can **who** you are, **why** you are there, why you want to ask **them** these questions (why are you interested in their opinion or experience), and what you will **do** with the information once you return to MIT.
- 4) In **CONDUCTING** an interview:
 - a) Begin with casual talk to establish a conversational tone. Be friendly and interested. Don’t immediately launch into an interrogation! IF you are offered any refreshment, accept it. By giving hospitality, they are able to elevate their position.
 - b) If need be (i.e., if the interview was scheduled in advance) **REMIND** them about the goals of your project and why you’re interested in speaking with them. **THANK THEM** for helping you.
 - c) If you wish to record the interview, ask permission to do so and explain that you’re doing it so that you can listen better without having to take notes as you converse. But audio recording is not necessary, because you can also...
 - d) **TAKE NOTES.** Don’t try to write down every word. Jot down key words, putting direct quotes in quotation marks. Immediately after the interview, write through these notes, elaborating from memory, using a notational method that distinguishes direct quotation from paraphrasing. Even if you are conducting a survey, you may learn things that are not included on your survey instrument — knowledge is not bounded!
 - e) Pay attention to **TONE** and **BODY LANGUAGE** (in so far as you’re capable of interpreting this). Do they seem certain or are they hesitant? Embarrassed or confident? Taking notes (after the interview) about such cues will help you in interpreting their words later.

e) Be an ACTIVE LISTENER. Express interest (“oh, that’s interesting”) and ignorance (oh, I didn’t know that”) — but try not to interrupt! To prompt a speaker to continue, ask them to elaborate (“can you say more about that?”)

f) Be PATIENT. Don’t be afraid of silences or pauses. Give people time to formulate their response and choose their words. If you pause before going on to the next question, they may elaborate what they have just said in illuminating ways.

f) KNOW WHEN TO STOP. If the person you’re interviewing is showing signs of growing restless or bored or tired or distracted, you may need to end the interview before you reach the end of your questions. It is important not to overextend your welcome! Remember, they’re doing you a favor!

g) Your final question should ask whether they have anything to add to the conversation; what else is important for you to know?

h) THANK THEM FOR THEIR HELP!

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