

# 9 In-depth, Intercept and Expert Interviews

## Learning Objectives

- 1 Explain the advantages and disadvantages of using interview research
- 2 Examine the unique features of in-depth, expert and intercept interviews
- 3 Identify the different types of interview questions
- 4 Describe the different methods of screening potential interview participants
- 5 Explain the guidelines to be used for well-written interview questions

### WHY AREN'T BRITISH ARTS AND HUMANITIES STUDENTS FINDING JOBS WHEN THE JOBS ARE THERE?

Studying a field in the arts and humanities and assuming you won't be able to find a job? You're not alone. A survey of 17,170 British students found that only 27 per cent of students studying in arts and humanities expected to find a job after graduation. In contrast, 58 per cent of engineering students and 57 per cent of business students expected to be gainfully employed on completion of their studies. Pity the poor arts and humanities students! Yet further research found that companies stated that 80 per cent of all positions would be open to applicants who studied any subject.

*Question:* If you worked in career placement, what additional research would you conduct to gather more information to help your arts and humanities graduates?

*Source:* Boone, 2007

## 9.1 The Rationale for Conducting Interview Research

Interviewing is a qualitative research technique using personal communication between researchers and research subjects. The purpose of conducting interviews includes gaining insights into

consumer behavior, obtaining factual information and developing hypotheses for quantitative research. Besides in-depth one-to-one interviewing between researchers and research subjects to gain insights on consumer preferences, researchers may also conduct intercept and expert interviews. Intercept interviews only use three to four quick questions and are given by researchers at locations where specific subjects can be found. The purpose of expert interviews is to gather information on product, industry or consumer segments.

The purpose of research interviews is to explore ideas, gain knowledge or develop hypotheses that can then be tested using quantitative research. Research interviews use a partially structured approach to questioning. Some of the questions will be asked verbatim of each research subject. A researcher will determine other questions to ask as the interview progresses. The fact that some of the questions are the same for each research participant allows comparability. At the same time, a researcher can also add additional questions, which allows flexibility. The fact that interview methodology may be only partially structured does not mean that the interview process can be treated casually, as an interview is not simply a conversation. A researcher must spend time in carefully preparing research questions if an interview is to be successful.

### 9.1.1 Interview stages

In-depth interviews go through four stages. However, expert interviews only have three stages and intercept interviews two. All start with an opening phase where introductions are made and the purpose of the research is explained. In-depth interviews move on to a short questioning phase that includes easily answered, predetermined questions about a participant's consumer behavior or opinions. The probing phase asks follow-up questions based on the responses received during the questioning phase. During the closing stage, a researcher will thank a participant and answer any questions they may have about what will happen to the information he or she has provided.

#### *Research interviewing stages*

- *Opening*: communicates the purpose of the interview and establishes trust regarding confidentiality and ethics
- *Questioning*: uses predetermined questions
- *Probing*: uses follow-up questions based on earlier responses
- *Closing*: A researcher gives their thanks and answers the participant's questions

### 9.1.2 Advantages of using interviews

Interview methodology has the advantage of allowing research participants to express ideas in their own words. The length of an interview allows a participant time to develop their ideas fully. If a researcher is still unclear as to a participant's meaning, he or she can ask probing follow-up questions. Interviews are also used for gathering information that can be developed into an hypothesis that can be tested in turn by using quantitative research. Finally, the expert interview is useful for gathering factual knowledge.

#### *Respond in own words*

The purpose of an interview is to uncover consumer motivation by allowing participants to respond to a question in their own words. The advantage of this approach over survey research is that the answer is not based on the researcher's preconceived ideas. In survey research, even

if the question is general in nature, a researcher will have predetermined possible responses. For this reason, it is difficult for new insights to emerge from survey research. For example, a survey question on why consumers do not buy a brand of breakfast cereal might provide possible answers concerning its price, taste and availability. However, in an in-depth interview it might be found that these three factors had nothing to do with consumers not purchasing the product. Instead, consumers might mention that this cereal is for kids, and not for adults such as themselves. Interviews can lead to deeper insights that might be missed in other forms of research (Anderson, 2007).

### *Allow time to develop ideas*

Interviews allow researchers to probe underlying reasons for consumer behavior, such as why a particular segment of the population is not purchasing a product. For example, the American National Football League has been trying to expand interest in the sport in Europe. While many Europeans enjoy watching sports teams compete, despite the NFL's best marketing efforts American football has had limited success expanding their fan base in Europe (Owen, 2007). If consumers who routinely purchase a competitor's product refuse to purchase a company's similar product, there may be a deep-rooted reason for such purchasing behavior. In-depth interviews with potential fans may be needed to uncover the reason why American football is having trouble attracting fans in Europe. These will allow researchers to spend enough time with research subjects to find out the cause of the purchasing behavior.

### *Develop hypotheses*

Interviews can be used to develop hypotheses that can then be tested using quantitative survey research. For example, the owner of an amusement park might wish to conduct a survey on motivations for attendance. The information obtained will then be used to develop future promotional campaigns. Attendance at the park is strong and, therefore, management does not believe there are any serious problems that need to be explored with a focus group or in-depth interview methodology. On the other hand, they do not want to construct a survey form without some input from current customers. They might decide to use intercept interviews of guests leaving the park to quickly gather information. If the majority of respondents list 'quality time with my family' as the motivation for attendance, a survey can then be developed to confirm or deny this hypothesis.

### *Probe for underlying reasons*

Interviews also allow researchers to probe beyond the initial answers given by participants. Sometimes this is necessary because the original answer is unclear. Often participants will use negative terms, such as 'boring', 'ugly' or 'useless', or positive terms such as 'great', 'best' or 'exciting'. The problem with this type of terminology is that it is too general to be of use to the company commissioning the research. In an interview, a researcher can ask for clarification on what a participant means by a word such as 'ugly'. Is it the packaging or the product design? Is it the product's color, size or shape that the consumer finds so unappealing? Once this negative information is obtained, a researcher can then obtain information on how the product can be improved by asking what color or shape the participant prefers.

### *Ask follow-up questions*

Another advantage of conducting interviews is that researchers can probe unexpected insights. For example, if during a interview a participant mentions that they enjoy cereal as an evening snack a researcher can probe for more information on how often that participant consumes

cereal of an evening. The researcher may then decide to ask other participants about their consumption habits. From this first insight, that researcher might find that a number of participants consume the same product in the evening. Communicating these unexpected data to the company may provide them with a new promotion idea.

### *Gain factual knowledge*

Expert interviews are used to gain factual knowledge on subjects that are of interest to researchers. This knowledge may be about benefits that consumers prefer in a product or information regarding a target market segment's behavior. For example, a company that produces medical equipment for hospitals may be developing a new design for wheelchairs for obese patients. To ensure that the chair will be developed with the right benefits they may arrange expert interviews with nursing supervisors. From these interviews, researchers might learn that an important criterion in chair design is the height of the seat as nurses have difficulty helping obese patients transfer from a bed to a chair.

### 9.1.3 Disadvantages of using interviews

A disadvantage of the interview methodology is that researchers must be highly skilled if an interview is to provide useful information. Because each participant is allowed to develop their own ideas every interview will be unique, making the information between interviews difficult to compare. A final disadvantage is that because of the time and expense of conducting interviews, only a small sample of participants can be used.

#### *A skilled interviewer*

One disadvantage of interviewing is that it will require a moderator who is skilled in interviewing techniques. An interviewer must have experience of working in the social sciences or have past marketing research experience in interviewing. Interviewees do not always cooperate with the interview process, and may in fact try to disrupt the flow of an interview and take control. A skilled interviewer needs to know how to handle these situations and regain control by returning to the topic under discussion (Sands and Krumer-Nevo, 2006).

A skilled interviewer will understand that an interview is a type of controlled conversation and not a monologue where only the participant speaks. An interviewer must not only listen for unclear or insightful answers but also must keep the interview focused on the research question without leading the participant. Unlike focus groups where group interaction can prompt responses, interviews rely on an interviewer's skill to ensure that the participant provides the needed information. This can be difficult with shy, quiet or resistant participants.

In addition, researchers must encourage participation while letting participants do almost all of the talking. A researcher must elicit from a participant information of which they may only partially aware or which they (wrongly) deem unimportant. Because of the difficulty in conducting interviews, skilled interviewers are expensive to hire. However, without a skilled interviewer interviews will waste time and money and may lead a company to accept faulty information upon which to make decisions.

#### *Data not comparable*

Because researchers use probing questions without knowing exactly what answers may surface, each interview will be unique. Therefore it is difficult to compare data although, through

analysis, common themes may be found. For this reason interview methodology is often used as a prelude to further quantitative research. Because data are difficult to compare, management should be careful when basing important decisions on data obtained through interviews alone.

### *Small sample size*

A series of in-depth interviews will involve many fewer participants than a survey. Because there are few participants, interview research cannot be used to prove or disprove an hypothesis. While interviewing can provide valuable insights, the quality of such insights will depend on the quality of the research subjects. Therefore extra care must be taken to ensure that the interview subjects meet the participant profile.

## 9.2 Types of Interviews

The choice of marketing research interviewing methodologies includes in-depth interviews. With this technique a researcher spends most of the interview exploring consumer motivation and behavior. Expert interviews are used to gather information from people who are not necessarily direct consumers of a specific product, but have knowledge of either that product and industry or the needs and wants of the market segment that is being targeted. Intercept interviews are short person-on-the-street interviews that only ask a few predetermined questions. This information can be used to develop hypotheses that can then be proved or disproved by using quantitative research.

### *Types of interviews*

- *In-depth*: one-to-one on a single topic for an extended period
- *Expert*: with a person other than the research subject to obtain facts
- *Intercept or person-on-the-street*: short interviews with many participants

### 9.2.1 In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews are conducted between an interviewer and a single participant. The interview is partially structured with some of the questions being predetermined. These questions are written by researchers and based on the research question. A researcher will ask other questions based on information provided by the participants during the interviews. In-depth interviews usually last a little under an hour and go through four phases: opening, questioning, probing and closing. During the 'opening' phase an interviewer will explain to a participant the purpose of the research. Once this is concluded the research will move into the 'questioning' phase. The questions will start by being very general in nature and then will move on to more specific information.

For example, if an interviewer is discussing breakfast cereal the opening question will be if the participant eats cereal. Asking this type of question will establish the purpose of the research while at the same giving the participant an easy question to answer. The interviewer will then ask predetermined questions about brand preference and move on to more probing questions regarding why the participant chose this particular brand. The interviewer will then ask

**Table 9.1 In-depth interview structure**

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<i>Opening phase</i>	(The researcher explains the purpose of the research concerns breakfast cereal preferences.)
<i>Questioning phase</i>	Do you eat breakfast cereal? (predetermined)
<i>Probing phase</i>	What brand do you eat? (predetermined)
	Why do you prefer this brand? (predetermined)
	What do you mean by 'not so sweet'? (unstructured)
<i>Closing phase</i>	Thanks for participation.
	Do you have any questions?

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additional probing questions to ensure that the information the participant has provided has been correctly understood. Finally, a researcher will close the interview by thanking the participant and asking if they have any questions. An example of the process is shown in Table 9.1.

Sometimes research questions will touch on sensitive issues. Some industries, such as health care, assisted living for the elderly or organizations that work with the disabled, often need to conduct research that asks participants questions about difficult times in their lives. Interviewers for these types of research projects need to have special training so that the research does not leave any emotional scars. A research study conducted in Britain found, that if it were conducted with sensitivity, research participants may find the interview process therapeutic rather than harmful (Lowes and Gill, 2006).

### 9.2.2 Expert interviews

Expert interviews are usually conducted early on in the research process as a means of clarifying a research problem. They can also be used to gather data during research, but only in combination with other research methods. An expert interview is conducted to gather factual information about a problem from someone with a specific product, consumer or industry knowledge. Because this expert is usually a busy professional, the time for an interview is kept as short as possible. The expert interview consists of only two phases – opening and questioning. Because the purpose of the interview is to gain factual information, and not the underlying causes of behavior, probing is not used. This also allows for the interview to be conducted in a shorter time.

In the breakfast cereal example above, during the early stages of the research process researchers might wish to conduct expert interviews with grocery store managers. The managers can provide information on what cereals have sold well in the past and the current sales trends. In addition, researchers may wish to conduct expert interviews with nutritionists regarding current consumer eating habits.

During the research process, expert interviews might also be conducted among people involved in the distribution process and the development of promotion. If the research uncovers that package size is an issue, the researchers should discuss with distribution experts what reaction would be received if the company involved produced unique packaging that would require a modification to shelf space. If an issue involves a new promotion idea, such as marketing cereal for evening consumption, researchers may wish to interview advertising agency managers to see if they have handled such a unique product repositioning promotion for other clients. An example of the process is shown in Table 9.2.

**Table 9.2 Expert interview structure**

<b>Opening phase</b>	(The researcher explains the purpose of the research with a nutritionist regarding breakfast food consumption.)
<b>Questioning phase</b>	How important is nutritional information in food choice? (predetermined) Is portion control an issue with breakfast food consumption? (predetermined) Are there other issues that you think are important? (predetermined)
<b>Closing phase</b>	Thanks for participation

### 9.2.3 Intercept interviews

Person-on-the-street interviews also ask open-ended questions. In this case though the interview is kept very short. An intercept interview should only take a few minutes and is therefore limited to three or four questions. The participants are chosen and interviewed at the location where they can be found. This technique is often used when the subjects needed for the research are unwilling to agree to an in-depth interview. Because the interviews take a short period of time, many more can be conducted. However, the short time period for person-on-the-street interviews means that there isn't time for probing questions. Therefore interviewers used for this type of interview does not need the same level of technical skill. Instead, it is more important that the potential participants view the interviewer as someone who is friendly and approachable. Below is an example of how intercept interviews are used in researching fashions trends.

#### HOW DO YOU KNOW WHAT THE NEXT FASHION TREND WILL BE?

According to marketing researchers in the fashion industry, the first step in deciding next year's fashions is secondary research on social trends. In-house reports, government statistics and data from academic sources are studied for information on social changes that might affect what people want from fashion.

Secondly, researchers study the media to find any recent cultural changes. These media would include both cutting-edge and mainstream TV shows, magazines and movies.

Thirdly, researchers hit the streets to interview the 'fashion-forward' who are the first to be knowledgeable about the newest trends.

Finally, the researchers use observational research to see what trend-makers are wearing and also visit those retailers who are known for starting these trends.

Even with all these research efforts only 50–70 per cent of all of new fashions that make it into a retail store are successful.

*Source: Retail Week, 2004*

For breakfast cereal preferences, intercept interviews might take place wherever a target market segment congregates. If working adults are the target market segment, the interviews might take place outside an office building. If families are the target, the interviews might take place at a shopping center or grocery store. An example of the process is shown in Table 9.3.

**Table 9.3 Intercept interview structure**

Opening phase	Explain purpose of research
Questioning phase	Do you eat breakfast cereal? (predetermined)
	What brand do you eat? (predetermined)
	Why do you prefer this brand? (predetermined)

## 9.3 Writing Questions

Types of interview questions include descriptive, causal, consequence and non-directional (Ember and Ember, 2001). Descriptive questions ask for facts concerning behavior. Such questions are usually both easy to ask and easy to answer. Causal questions ask research subjects to think about why a certain behavior takes place. These questions ask for underlying motivations and take more time and thought to answer. Even more difficult are consequence questions. These types of question ask research subjects to construct a hypothetical example in their mind and to then respond on how they would act. Non-directional questions ask research participants to determine if there is a relationship between two facts.

### 9.3.1 Descriptive questions

Many of the early questions used during an interview will be descriptive. These types of questions ask participants to describe their consumer behavior. Because these are factual they are both easy for researchers to ask and easy for participants to answer. An example of a descriptive question would be 'How often do you go shoe shopping?' If an interview only consisted of these types of questions, an interview, which is both expensive and time consuming, would not be necessary. Such descriptive data could be easily obtained by using a survey form.

#### *Descriptive questions: ask for facts*

- How often do you shop for shoes?
- When do you shop for shoes?
- How much money do you spend on shoes?

### 9.3.2 Causal questions

Causal questions address how one variable acts upon another. For example, if the research question is 'What motivates women to shop frequently for shoes?', the first descriptive questions would address the facts of shoe shopping. The participants will first be asked how often they go shopping, when they go shopping, and how much they spend.

The causal questions will then address the motivation for shopping. In this case the research subject has already been identified as a frequent shoe shopper. The causal question can be asked as an open-ended question, such as 'Why do you frequently shop for shoes?' or the question may be phrased using a suggested cause, such as 'Do you shop for shoes when you are depressed?' The interviewer could then move on to other suggested causes, such as stress, relationship problems or an active social life.



### *Casual questions: ask for reasons that a behavior exists*

- Why do you shop for shoes?
- Do you shop for shoes when you are depressed?
- Do you shop for shoes as the result of difficulties at work?

### 9.3.3 Consequence questions

A consequence question will address behavior by a shopper that results from the frequent shopping behavior. Once again, an open-ended question could be asked regarding how subjects feel after they have finished shopping. Or alternatively, the question can provide a suggested answer by asking ‘Do you feel relaxed after you have finished shopping?’ These questions would provide information on the intangible benefits provided by shopping that cause the behavior.

### *Consequence questions: what happens as the result of a behavior?*

- How do you feel after shopping for shoes?
- Do you feel relaxed after shopping?

### 9.3.4 Non-directional questions

A non-directional relationship question asks whether two variables are related. The question is asked without implying either a positive or negative aspect to such a relationship. An interviewer may want to know if frequent shoe-shoppers read many fashion magazines or have many family responsibilities. There is no clear direction to these questions because the researcher will still not know if reading magazines causes people to buy shoes, as people who read about shoes may not necessarily feel a need to buy them. In addition, some people who read magazines may feel the need to purchase what they see. Here all that will be known is that a relationship does exist. Further research will be needed to prove this relationship.

### *Nondirectional relationship question: are two variables related?*

- Do you frequently read fashion magazines?
- Do you have many family responsibilities?

## 9.4 Screening Participants

Because interviews are a qualitative process, it can sometimes be forgotten that as much care should be taken when selecting participants who fit the profile as when designing a sample for a quantitative survey. It is true that it is generally more difficult to have a potential participant agree to an interview than a survey because of the time involved. Therefore, researchers may be tempted to focus more on who is willing to be interviewed rather than who fits the profile. Unfortunately, if the research subjects for interviews are not carefully selected, both time and money will be wasted. A willing, but inappropriate, participant will result in not obtaining the needed information and the interview will be wasted.

A company's management along with researchers will have to meet to determine a participant profile. First of all they must decide if they want to interview current customers, potential customers or both. They must then decide on the demographic and psychographic profile of the subjects. The profile should be very specific and the researchers involved should explain to management if extra time will be needed to recruit appropriate research subjects. The example below in Table 9.4 gives some profiles that might be developed for the study of breakfast cereal consumption.

**Table 9.4 Sample participant profile**

<i>Usage status</i>	<i>Demographic</i>	<i>Psychographic</i>
Frequent cereal eaters who are currently not users of the brand being researched.	Young males; family status is single; living independently; employed.	Lifestyle is active and sports oriented; not interested in cooking; casual housekeepers.

### 9.4.1 In-depth interviews

It is important when conducting in-depth interviews that the profile must be very specific. It might focus on only one of the segmentation characteristics, or two, or all three can be used in combination to describe appropriate research subjects. To find potential participants who meet this profile a short questionnaire must be developed. The screening questionnaire can be administered in person, over the phone, or online. Only participants who have the needed characteristics that match the participant profile will be invited to participate in the research. A researcher should not provide information to potential participants on what specific characteristics are necessary to be chosen. If they do so, some potential participants might be tempted to answer so they will be chosen, even if they are not appropriate subjects. An example of a screening questionnaire is provided in Table 9.5.

### 9.4.2 Intercept interviews

For on-the-street interviews a participant profile will be provided for interviewers. By using the profile, an interviewer will need to ask a single screening question.

#### *Sample participant profile for intercept interviews*

- Young males
- Physically fit
- Not with young children
- Dressed in a style that suggests the person has money for clothes (most likely employed)
- Dressed informally (not too fussy about appearance)

When a potential subject is identified, a researcher will then ask a single screening question, such as 'Do you eat cereal?' This method is not as scientific as the screening questionnaire used for an in-depth interview. The reason a full screening does not take place is that potential participants

**Table 9.5 Screening questions**

<i>Usage Status</i>	<i>Demographic</i>	<i>Psychographic</i>
How often do you eat cereal? Do you eat 'Healthy Berries'?	What is your gender? What is your age? What is your family status? With whom do you live? Are you employed at least 30 hours a week on a job with a wage?	How often do you engage in sports or other physical activities? How often do you cook a meal from scratch (using ingredients and following a recipe)?

will normally not be willing to provide such information to a complete stranger on the street. However, because more interviews are conducted, there can be less emphasis placed on each participant exactly meeting the participant profile. The example below shows how research was used to discover the reading preferences of young people.

**DO YOU KNOW WHAT MEDIA YOUNG PEOPLE ARE USING?  
BELIEVE IT OR NOT, THEY'RE READING MAGAZINES**

Everyone knows that 18 to 24 year old consumers exist, but marketers don't know how to reach them with traditional broadcast advertising. Research proved as true the common belief that this age group are not users of traditional media. Research found that only 8 per cent were heavy users of radio, probably because they are listening to their iPods. Only 6 per cent were readers of quality newspapers. Television was watched heavily by 17 per cent on weekdays and 15 per cent on Saturdays. A hint of what media were being used was that 24 per cent were readers of magazines. What might surprise marketers, who believe that this group of young people is unreachable, is the fact that 55 per cent of magazine readers are heavy users of commercial magazines tied to specific products and brands. According to researchers, the reason for this heavy use of commercial publications is that young people are highly brand conscious. They want to read a publication that reinforces an image of themselves as consumers.

*Source: Smith, 2006*

### 9.4.3 Expert interviews

Participants for expert interviews are usually chosen on the basis of referrals, but researchers may be tempted to rely only on people they know in order to save time. Instead, researchers should ask the management of a company commissioning research for the names of people who would have knowledge of the subject being researched. These experts might work in the industry under study, such as the cereal industry. They may also be experts on a specific consumer target market segment, such as young men, or be expert on a specific product type, such as breakfast foods.

## 9.5 Constructing Questions

One of the major responsibilities of an interviewer will be writing the questions for in-depth, expert and intercept interviews. Of course the questions should be of the correct type and provide the information needed to answer a research question and its objectives. However, there are some general rules researchers should follow so that all such questions will be well written and clearly communicated. After a researcher has written the interview questions they will need to be tested before they are used in research. The box below provides more information on writing good questions.

### WHY ASKING QUESTIONS IS NOT AS SIMPLE AS IT SEEMS

Asking questions is something anyone can do. First thing in the morning we ask 'How did you sleep last night?' At work we ask 'When would you like this report finished?' And when we get home we ask 'What's for dinner?' It would seem that asking questions would be easy, and yet asking the right question in the right way is very difficult. Author William Foddy describes the reasons why this is so.

- 1 Factual questions sometimes elicit invalid answers.
- 2 The relationship between what respondents say they do and what they actually do is not always very strong.
- 3 Respondents' attitudes, beliefs, opinions, habits and interests often seem to be extraordinarily unstable.
- 4 Small changes in wording sometimes produce major changes in the distribution of responses.
- 5 Respondents commonly misinterpret questions.
- 6 Answers to earlier questions can affect the respondents' answers to later questions.
- 7 Changing the order in which response options are presented sometimes affects respondents' answers.
- 8 Respondents' answers are sometimes affected by the question format.
- 9 Respondents often answer questions even when it appears they know very little about a topic.
- 10 The cultural context in which a question is presented often has an impact on the way respondents interpret and answer questions.

No wonder asking questions isn't as simple as it first seems!

*Source: Foddy, 1995*

### 9.5.1 General rules on writing questions

Of course the rule here is that researchers should write the questions that address a research issue. In addition to the questions being grammatically well written, there are some guidelines that will help researchers to write good interview questions. First, researchers should only ask

questions that the participants have the knowledge to answer, should write questions so that they address only one issue at a time, and should use language and style that will be understood by all participants.

### *Questions that can be answered*

Researchers should always remember one of the most important guidelines when writing questions, which is to never ask a question that a research participant does not have the knowledge to answer. This guideline may seem self-evident. However, researchers in their quest for information may write questions without considering if the research subjects have the required knowledge to answer these.

Participants can only know what they have learned or what they have experienced. However, they may still try to answer other questions simply to be helpful. Therefore, if a researcher asks questions about experiences they have not had or products that they have not used, participants can only answer hypothetically. For example, a researcher may ask participants if they would use a new product if it were available. However, the company client should carefully consider whether to base future action on the answers they receive. This is because it is difficult for people to be accurate when they try to predict the future. It would be much better to ask about the specific qualities participants desire in a product, as they can then refer back to previous real experiences. Researchers can then analyze this information and make recommendations about products that should be introduced in the future.

### *One question at a time*

Another important guideline for researchers to remember when writing questions is to only ask one question at a time. Any more than this will prove confusing for participants to answer. It may also confuse the researcher concerned who will not know if the answer was to the first or second question. A question such as 'How did you choose your last vacation destination and did you enjoy the trip?' is too complicated for an easy response. It can also make analysis of the data more difficult if a participant had had a difficult time choosing their destination (unhappy response) but enjoyed the trip (happy response).

### *Write in the words and style of participants*

Market researchers, because they have similar educational backgrounds, most often communicate with each other using the same educational level of English and a similar vocabulary. Written language is also often more formal than spoken language. Therefore the questions researchers write must be 'translated' into the everyday language of participants so they do not sound stilted when asked. This translation will not only include terminology but also grammar, the length of a sentence or question, and sentence structure. Therefore, it is important for researchers to be familiar with how participants use language. This would include any jargon that is used by younger people or by persons from minority ethnic groups. The use of their own language when writing questions will not only help in communication, it will help in establishing legitimacy and trust.

## 9.5.2 Testing questions

It is not possible to run sample interviews to test questions because it takes too much time. However, it is still important to test the questions that will be used in an interview for the use

of jargon, clarity, and appropriateness. One way to do so is to first have a potential participant listen to a researcher read through the questions. The researcher should then ask if there are any words that were not understood. Second, the researcher should ask the listener to rephrase the question in their own words. Third, they should ask the listener if they would be willing to answer the question.

This test allows researchers to replace any words that are not understood. If terminology needs to be included, researchers can provide an explanation within the question itself. Asking the listener to repeat the question is another test to see if a question communicates the topic clearly. It may also provide researchers with alternative wordings that they may want to incorporate. Finally, asking a test participant if they would be willing and able to answer a question provides information on whether a topic is too sensitive to be easily answered.

### 9.5.3 Location of interviews

The type of interview research being conducted will dictate its location. In-depth interviews should be held at a location that is free from distractions so that both the researcher and the participant can concentrate on the issue. Locations where an interview can be conducted include at a researcher's office, in a participant's home, or by telephone. Expert interviews are held at locations that will be convenient for participants so as to minimize the inconvenience. These interviews could be conducted at a participant's place of employment, over dinner or lunch, on the phone or online. Some interview methodologies have even combined interviews with an analysis of the content of emails (Clegg et al., 2006). Intercept interviews are held where the participants can be found. This might be at a location, such as a store or business. In addition, an intercept interview might be conducted in a public place where potential participants may congregate.

#### *In-depth interviews*

There are two choices of locations where in-depth interviews can be conducted – either at a researcher's office or in a participant's home. In addition, in-depth interviews can be conducted over the telephone. Choice of location is more than just a matter of convenience, and can affect the outcome of an interview. Therefore a participant should be allowed to have an input into choice of location for the interview, because when they feel comfortable they will feel more free to communicate (Herzog, 2005).

#### *Intercept interviews*

An intercept interview can be conducted at the store or business where the consumer behavior under study takes place. They can also take place in public places where likely participants tend to congregate. When conducting intercept interviews, interviewers should station themselves somewhere out of the main flow of people traffic when the questions are asked so as not to antagonize the management of a business.

#### *Expert interviews*

An expert interview will often take place in a participant's place of employment. If this is not possible such interviews can also be conducted over the telephone. In addition, online interviewing is appropriate for conducting expert interviews. The possible location choices are summarized in Table 9.6.

**Table 9.6 Interview type and location**

<i>Type</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
In-depth	Researcher's office	Time saving for researcher	Possible intimidation Reluctance of participants, travel time
	Participant's home	Comfort, recall	
Intercept	Store/business	Interest level	Only current customers Security, privacy
	Public place	Lots of participants	
Expert	Place of employment	Sign of respect, convenient for participant	Lack of privacy, lack of candor No nonverbal cues, interruptions
	Phone	Cost/time savings, privacy for participants	
	Online	Time and money savings, privacy, transcript	

### Summary

- 1 Interview research can be conducted to explore ideas, to obtain factual knowledge and to gather information that can be used in developing hypotheses that will be tested using quantitative research. The advantages of using an interview research methodology include discovering the underlying reasons for consumer behavior, allowing participants to respond in their own words, and the fact that researchers can follow up unclear answers with further probing questions. The disadvantages include fewer participants being involved, the need for a skilled interviewer, and the fact that each interview is unique which makes comparisons of data difficult.
- 2 Interviews can be in-depth where topics are explored for an extended period. Intercept interviews are short but are conducted with many participants. Expert interviews are used to gather facts. All types of interviews use predetermined questions. However, only in-depth interviews use unstructured questions to probe more deeply into issues.
- 3 Interview questions can be descriptive, asking participants to describe behavior. Causal interview questions try to determine the effect of one variable by asking about the 'Why' of certain behavior. These questions will take more time and thought to answer. Consequence questions try to determine what happens as the result of behavior. Non-directional questions ask about the relationship between two variables.
- 4 When screening potential participants for in-depth interviews a profile should be very specific as to usage, demographic and psychographic characteristics. A screening questionnaire will be developed for this purpose. For intercept interviews a sample profile will be developed that will rely on visible demographic characteristics. The only important consideration for expert interviews is that participants have the required knowledge about a specific industry, consumer segment or product type.
- 5 Interview questions should only ask what participants can answer and should only allow for one question at a time. In addition, questions should be put in words and phrases that will be familiar to participants. Finally, any questions should be tested. The type of interview will partially determine the location where it should be held.

# Key Terms



**causal questions** ask participants about why a behavior takes place

**consequence questions** ask what results from a consumer pursuing a particular behavior

**descriptive questions** ask participants to describe consumer behavior

**expert inter views** an interview with someone who possesses specific knowledge of a consumer segment, industry or product type

**in-depth inter views** lengthy interviews about consumer preferences and purchases

**intercept inter views** short person-on-the-street interviews of only two or three questions

**non-directional questions** asked to determine if two variables are related

**unstructured questions** these are not planned in advance but are determined by the answer to a previous question

## Discussion Questions

- 1 Why would you argue that a research study of students' attitudes toward drinking should use interviews rather than focus groups?
- 2 What different types of questions would be asked during the questioning and probing stages of the above interviews?
- 3 Why should expert interviews be part of a study on why students drop out of college?
- 4 What three questions could be asked of students during an intercept interview regarding their music purchases?
- 5 What is the difference between causal and consequence interview questions?
- 6 Why would it be important to consider psychographic characteristics when determining a participant profile for intercept interviews on dance club attendance?
- 7 Why should interview questions be tested?
- 8 How could expert interviews be conducted online?

## Recommended Reading



Denzin, Norman K. and Lincoln, Yvonna S. (2005) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London: SAGE. While there are many interesting chapters on various aspects of qualitative research, the book also specifically addresses interviewing.



Gubrium, Jaber F. and Holstein, James A. (2002) *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*. London: SAGE. The book covers many aspects of interviewing from gender issues to cross-cultural interviewing. It also includes chapters on survey interviewing and interviewing as part of the grounded theory process.

Postoaca, Andrei (2006) *The Anonymous Elect: Market Research through Online Access Panels*. New York: Springer-Verlag. Explores the dynamic between interviewer and interviewee when the communication is online. While a marketing book, the author also brings in sociology, psychology and linguistics.

Rubin, Herbert and Rubin, Irene (2005) *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*. London: SAGE. Business students are not taught how to listen, so this book addresses the issue of listening and using probing to uncover information.

Seidman, Irving (2006) *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*. New York: Teachers College Press. While it addresses the subject of interviewing more broadly than just for marketing, this book contains excellent information on interview structure and participant selection.