

Checklist for Successful Interviews

The purpose of this handout is to give you the opportunity to improve your interviewing skills for all your research projects at ISU. If you follow these twelve steps, you can conduct interviews successfully.

1. Prepare your questions very carefully in advance, avoiding grammar and sentence structure errors, and avoiding these pitfalls (mistakes):

The Loaded Question -- a question that reflects your personal biases, assumptions, and opinions.

Example: American parents don't seem to want their children to live with them when they grow up. Why don't Americans love their children?

Solution: Form a neutral question that shows that you have an open mind and conceals your personal feelings.

Better: Why don't most adult children in the US live with their parents?

The Closed Ended Question -- a question worded in a way that "forces" a very short, one word response: yes, no, maybe.

Example: Do American parents want their adult children to live with them? (Yes. No. Maybe.)

Solution: Form an *open ended question* with wording that encourages a more developed response. Use words like "why," "how," "to what extent," "tell me more," "what are the reasons that," or "In what ways"

Better: How do American parents feel about their adult children living with them?

2. Think of possible *follow-up* questions to help you probe (explore) more deeply.

Examples: What are circumstances when an adult child would live with his/her parents? Have the feelings, attitudes or concerns about this changed over time? How? How would different American ethnic groups respond to this question?

3. Write down the questions and follow up questions that you want to ask and submit them to Sue (or a native English speaker) for feedback on your English grammar and sentence structure and also to review for inappropriate "loaded" questions.

4. **Get names of possible people to interview.** If you wish, ask Sue to send an email introducing you and asking them if you can contact them for a face-to-face interview.
5. **Find out something about the people you want to interview. What is their background, education, and interests? Learn how to pronounce their names correctly.**
6. **Call to set up interview. Introduce yourself. Clarify your purpose, ask when the expert will be available, that is, the date, place, and time. Ask for directions to your expert's office.**
7. If you want to audio-tape the interview, ASK for permission when you set up the interview. **It is illegal to audio tape or videotape a person without his/her knowledge and consent.** Many people say **NO**. If the person says no, it could be due to uncertainty about how you will use the tape or concerns about the questions. Offer to send sample questions so the person knows what to expect.
8. **Take an Interview Documentation form with you. Fill out the top, Part A, about yourself. The expert will complete Part B. This form MUST be signed by the person you are interviewing. You can download copies from the Moodle. You will need this information for signal phrases, documentation, and to identify the first and last name of the person when you alphabetize your reference list.**
9. **Arrive early but not too early (five minutes maximum).**
10. **Take a few brief notes using key words, but do not spend all your time writing; *look at the person and listen* to what is being said. Immediately after you leave, write complete notes.**
11. **Plan ways to “close out” the interview. You can say something like, “Well, I know that you are a busy person. I won’t take any more of your time. Thank you so much for your help.” *Ask for permission to contact them later, by email or telephone, if you have additional questions.***
12. **Send a “thank you” note or a “thank you” email to the person.**