

Interview guide

Introduction to the interview, written out in full, describing your project

Your pitch to them about why you want to interview them.

- Try to make it flattering: e.g., “I am interviewing senior managers in this agency” when they are all actually junior managers, etc.)
- Offer to send them anonymized versions of data you collect if that would be helpful. (For instance, if you are interviewing firms, you can send them back whatever information you collect on how they compare to other companies in their industry. If you are interviewing an official in a central government office, you can offer to discuss what you saw street-level bureaucrats in his agency actually doing. Etc.)

Interview guide should be modularized: different sets of interviewees will get different questions, but some blocks of questions will be common to all interviewees.

Questions should proceed in logical order, with rapport-building ones (like the interviewee’s background) first

Make sure you have enough items to test both your hypotheses of interest and theoretically gather evidence for contrary hypotheses.

Hints on crafting questions

- wherever possible, include numerical scales or rankings to standardize their feedback and clarify what they are telling you (when they say “a lot”, is that a 5 on a scale of 0 to 10 or a 9?)
- use branching questions with follow-ups for difficult concepts
- bring evidence with which to press them on certain points (e.g., if you are interviewing editors, bring content analyses of their coverage)
- offer them hypotheticals or third-person vignettes for potentially touchy questions
- if they don’t know the answer, ask them who would

Conclusion of interview

- Fifth-to-last question: anything else they think you should know?
- Fourth-to-last item: would they like to see your notes afterwards?
- third-to-last item: would they like to see the results of the study?
- penultimate item: other people they recommend you should contact, and their contact information
- last item: can you contact them again if necessary?

Getting feedback

- Circulate your draft interview guide to colleagues, etc.
- Pilot the interview guide on potential informants NOT in your sample.
- Pilot the interview guide.
- ...and lastly, pilot the interview guide.

MIT OpenCourseWare
<https://ocw.mit.edu>

17.801 Political Science Scope and Methods
Fall 2017

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <https://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.