Interviewing Workshop

This three-part activity is meant to provide students with an introduction to the interviewing process which includes preparation, interviewing, and transcription/analysis. Please note that a research study featuring interviewing would be much more in-depth and the three phases would be interconnected.

Activity One- Preparation: Framing and Creating Basic Structural Questions for an Open-Ended Interview

Materials:	Time (minimum):
pens	20 minutes for writing questions
paper	15 minutes for group critique
white board or other large writing surface	

1. As a group, select a general topic to explore that could apply to all students in the class. Such topics could include: "life as a graduate student," "being a new researcher," "daily interactions at my workplace," "my first year of work" and others. Then, select a theoretical framework to further refine the topic, such as feminism, critical theory, disability studies, queer theory, etc.

2. Once a topic and framework has been selected, break into three subgroups. The first group will be responsible for creating five guiding questions based on participant background and history. For example, if everyone in the class is an educator, your group would be responsible for writing questions related to the teaching profession in terms of daily workplace scenarios, what led people to become a teacher, etc. The second group will take on the task of writing five guiding questions that address existing conditions/situations related to the chosen topic. For example,

if your topic is the impact of standardized testing, your group's questions would address elements of testing in the classroom. The third group will oversee the construction of meta-analytical questions related to the topic. Meta-analytical questions are the ones posed by the researcher to his/her self during the interview. Examples could include, "How am I able to concentrate on the participant and what she is saying while at the same time anticipating follow up questions to ask?" or "In what ways do I find myself making judgments or interpretations about the participant's responses ahead of time?"

3. Pay particular attention to the selection of participants and the types of questions best suited for an open-ended interview, along with your theoretical frame. The key is not to make your questions a point-by-point oral questionnaire but a frame for the direction of the interview, with the understanding that new directions will emerge in any open-ended interview.

4. Post each group's questions on a large sheet of paper, white board, or project electronically for everyone in the class to view at once. The format should be easily viewed to facilitate editing by the group as a whole.

5. As a class, critique each question:

   *How does the question align with the overall topic and purpose of the interview? If not, how better may the question(s) be framed?

   *How are the questions informative? Will they yield rich data? Give some examples.

   *Is the question a yes/no question? If so, how could it be revised?

   *Does it work with the other questions as a group? If it is very different, justify its inclusion with examples.

*Is the language easy to understand, not just for the researcher, but for the participant? Could it be reworded for clarity?

*Is it an open-ended question? If not, how could it be re-written to be more open-ended?

*Is it too threatening or leading?

Is it redundant?

*Considering the context of the interview and who will be participating, is it bias-free? Would there be any examples of it not being bias-free if the background of the participants changed?

6. Based on the class critique, rewrite any questions. The idea is to foster a spirit of reflection and careful analysis, as well as clearly stated questions that align with the theoretical framework. As with all critiques of work, avoid personal criticism or attack.

7. All of the groups should gather together to decide as a whole which questions from the separate groups should be included. Criteria for inclusion should include relevance of the questions regarding the theoretical framework, clarity, and the potential for questions to yield rich participant responses. The resulting list of questions generated from this activity session will be used in the following activity.

Activity Two- Interviewing: Conduct an Interview with a Classmate

Materials:	Time (minimum):
questions from Activity One	15 minutes per interview

digital recorder 30 minutes total for the pair

paper

pens

1. Get into pairs (if there is an odd number, the instructor can serve as the substitute). Pairs should be randomly selected- it is recommended that people from the same workplace, district, or program not pair up, if at all possible.

2. Do a quick equipment check with the digital recorder. Watch for volume settings and test out different speaking distances from the recorder.

3. Refer to the interviewing section of this chapter to go over basic protocol before proceeding.

    * Are both participants physically comfortable and in a quiet spot?

    *Begin with broader questions first.

    *Make sure the interview flows- do not just hit one question at a time as if completing a shopping list.

    *Develop the art of interviewing by creating good lead-ins and segues between questions.

    *Ask follow up questions where appropriate in order to obtain clarification.

    *If the participant still hesitates to fully answer a question, move on.

    *Interviews, like conversations, often loop- this means you can often return to a question later on.

*Avoid closed-ended questions unless you need them for simple clarification (age, number of years, etc.).

*Make written notes of any observations you want to record that will possibly enhance your understanding of the transcript later on.

4. It is very important that each participant takes turns asking the same set of questions from start to finish. This will provide each of you with a better sense of the interviewing process and special challenges that can arise as personalities and the roles of the interviewer/interviewee combine. Avoid the temptation to save time by taking turns per question. If you both answer each question together, the risk of following the lead of a more outgoing personality can happen, along with a lack of distinction between sets of transcripts later on.

5. Right after each participant completes his/her 15 minute interview session, immediately jot down your impressions of the experience of interviewing. Do not talk to each other or try to collectively interpret, just write down your initial thoughts as to how the session went experiencing both interviewer and interviewee roles. Highlight the difficulties of each role. Do not share these until the next activity.

6. Save your immediate impressions and audio recordings for the final phase of the activity.

7. Play back the audio recording to ensure that it is audible and complete. If not, you will need to go back and conduct the interview again. While the play back is happening, you can jot down any notes in response to what you are hearing, which may help during the transcribing process.

Activity Three- Transcribing and Analyzing

Materials: Time (minimum):

questions from Activity One	45 minutes for transcribing
digital or audio tape recordings	10 minutes for immediate impressions
immediate written impressions from Activity Two	45 minutes for group analysis
paper & pen	
different colored highlighters	
white board or other large writing surface	

1. After recording your immediate impressions, begin the task of transcribing your interview. Start by playing back the first interview and seeing how much you can remember to write down. Most researchers can process only a few words at a time, so you will find yourselves hitting rewind quite a bit. Working in pairs can make a first time experience with transcribing less harrowing- one partner can dictate while the other one writes.

2. As you listen to each sentence, resist the inclination to summarize your partner's words on paper without hearing the entire passage. Don't assume what they will say next thinking this will save time. It is very important to record each and every word, pause, speech quality, etc. as you hear it on the tape.

3. After the transcripts are complete, have a debriefing on the process by sharing everyone's immediate impressions from the second activity, along with reactions to transcribing. This will provide a chance to share questions and concerns, allowing the research instructor to provide active mentoring in a large-group setting.

4. At this point, if there isn't much time remaining, everyone should word process their handwritten notes and bring them to the next class meeting. Otherwise, using handwritten notes will work if there is ample remaining class time.

5. Each partner should do a quick silent read-through, to orient themselves to the flow of the transcript. Circle any themes/codes that are noticed, adding notes in the margin if necessary, related to the agreed-upon topic from activity one. Both partners should consult together and compare their list of codes, narrowing them down to four or five for simplicity and to avoid redundancy.

6. Using the different colored highlighters, both partners should go over each of their transcript sets, using a different color for each theme noticed. Switch transcripts and review each other's codes.

7. After all pairs have completed coding their transcripts, the instructor will have each group share their list of codes out loud, providing one example quote that expresses each code. The instructor will write down the codes on the white board as each pair shares them, paraphrasing the supporting quotes.

8. If all goes well, there should be duplicate codes emerging across the various groups. As the example quotes build up, students should be able to notice the various ways that conversation can reveal different themes, as well as support different themes, which has implications for writing up interview research reports.

9. As a group, try your hand at writing up the data using one theme and sample quotes. Brainstorm together how to introduce the quote, tie it to the identified theme, and integrate it into a paragraph. The challenge is to utilize the quote but without it appearing choppy, out of

place, or simply supported by the introduction sentence. To assist in this activity, the instructor could share some examples of how other-researchers have supported themes from interview data with quotes.

10. Conclude the activity by connecting the themes to the original theoretical frame that your group chose. Pose the questions: If we were to continue the interviewing process using the codes we created before for analyzing future transcripts, what should happen next? What would you look for in future transcripts now that you have the analysis information from these initial interviews?

Extension Activities

1. To replicate the multi-stage interview experience, after you have completed activities 1-3, consider repeating the activities by designing a follow-up interview protocol and walking through the rest of the steps. Compare your insights from the first interview round to your follow-up interview in the second round. Questions to consider may include: Did you notice any changes in the narrowing of your code/theme list or the depth of your analysis? What valuable data was revealed from the follow-up interview that did not occur in the initial interview session?

2. Reflect on all aspects of the interviewing process: deciding on a framework, developing questions, interviewing, transcribing, and reporting. What went especially well? What parts of the process were the most challenging?

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