Organizing an Interview

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1. Create a Respondent Fact Sheet
    a. Interviewee's name (or code number, if the topic is a sensitive one and names keyed to code numbers are kept in a separate place), and interview number if multiple interviews.
    b. Place and date of the interview.
    c. Demographics: Gender, Age, Education, Ethnicity, Place of residence, Place of birth; Occupation or other position.
    d. Attitudes: Religion, politics, ideology as needed.
2. Schedule the Interview
    a. Chose a quiet place that has internet access. Active interviewing often means having prompts and artifacts at hand, or the ability to fact check or look at things together with the subject. It is fine if this is a semi-public setting (café or bar) but make sure you are not within earshot of other people and that the noise in the room does not interfere with recording levels.
    b. Make it a nice experience for the person helping with the research. Arrive early and clean the space up. Pay for meals or refreshments (receipts may be reimbursable, or at least tax deductible). Give them something: an example of your own writing, a news article on the topic, or something else relevant (not gratuitous).
3. Create a Loose Script
    a. Leading questions (What do you think about …? Is it getting better, or worse?).
    b. Other people's opinions to bring out contrast (Experts say …; I read in the paper that …; Some people think …)
    c. Let the respondent complete their thoughts, but use the script to keep the conversation moving if the discussion loses energy.
    d. Tell them the research question, define terms, and explain the working hypotheses. Save this for last, otherwise might bias the respondent.
4. Immediately Before the Interview
    a. Dress appropriately, so you show professionalism and cultural respect.
    b. Test your recording equipment.
5. Things to Say Before the Interview Formally Starts
    a. Explain purpose and nature of the study, telling the respondent how they came to be selected, and why they are important.
    b. Assure the respondent about the ways you are ensuring anonymity or confidentiality—especially in any written reports growing out of the study—and that the responses will be treated in the strictest confidence.
    c. Indicate that some of the questions may seem silly or difficult to answer. There are no right or wrong answers, but the respondent should do their best to answer questions. Confirm that you are mostly interested in personal opinions and experiences.
    d. Feel free to interrupt, ask clarification, or criticize a line of questioning.

   e. The interviewer should reveal something about themselves – background, training, and interest in the area of inquiry.
   f. Ask permission to record the interview, explaining why this is necessary.
6. Immediately After the Interview
   a. Within 1 hour of finishing the interview, spend half an hour going back over your notes. Fill them out, highlight things, and mentally replay the exchange. There may have been important things that you did not, or could not, write down. Now is the time to look over your meta-commentary and find cross-cutting themes. You don't need to write a long fresh memo. But do write a few additional summary sentences at the end of your document. Make a to-do list for following up with the subject if the person has offered to send you documents, introduce you to someone, or pass along some other evidence.
   b. If this has been a team interview, within one hour of the interview, go back over the notes that you and your partner took. Spend at least half an hour together. Discuss the differences in your observations, and use each other's recollections to actively spur new notes. Explain any differences in interpretation you have. At this stage your interview notes should remain your own document, but you should take advantage of having a partner in the interview to invigorate your notes.
   c. Immediately email your notes to yourself, in an encrypted format, with no identifiable subject information, so that you have a backup.
   d. Immediately write to any contacts that have come from this interview. New subjects are more likely to participate with a personal introduction, so set that up while the offer to do so is warm.
7. The Day After The Interview
   a. Send the subject an encrypted thank you.
   b. Transcribe the interview.

      OR

   c. Write up Interview and Field Notes
      i. Instead of transcribing full interviews, many interviewers do detailed note taking, actively revisit your notes immediately after the interview, and then produce a research memo.
      ii. Field notes are more or less chronological logs of what has happened to the interviewer, the subject and the setting during the period of observation. They are a running description of events, people, things heard and overheard, conversations among and with people. Each new physical setting and person encountered merits a description. You should also record changes in the physical setting or people. Since you are likely to encounter the same settings and people again and again, you need not repeat such descriptions, but only augment them as changes occur.
      iii. Summaries and notes of what the informant said generally at some point.
      iv. Verbatim transcription of responses that seem important.
      v. Field notes of relevant extra-interview encounters with the informant.
      vi. Personal emotional experiences.
      vii. Methodological difficulties or successes.
      viii. Short, tentative pieces of analysis that might ultimately help answer or rephrase your research question.
8. The Week After The Interview

a. Compose a Research Memo
    i. Within one week of the interview, compose a research memo. The rule of thumb on length is 2 single spaced pages for each hour of interview. On average, interviews should be about two hours long, so research memos should be about 4 pages long.
    ii. Do a brief Interview Summary on the interview. Include large take-away points and information on other contacts. This does not have to be highly polished writing—lots of ordered or numbered lists are fine. But use lots of thematic subheadings and write as if the audience is the other researchers on the team.
    iii. Name this file with useful information "Interview Research Memo – PSEUDONYM – DATE" and backup.
b. Suggested Headings
    i. Interview Setting – describe in rich detail the physical context of the interview.
    ii. Interviewer Self-Reflection – comment on your own positionality, feelings, personal reactions during the interview.
    iii. Specialized Findings – using as many quotable quotes as possible, with timestamp information from the interview recording, to describe the unique observations from this interview subject
    iv. Transportable Findings – using as many quotable quotes as possible, with timestamp information from the interview recording, to describe generalizable findings, transportable ideas, or fit with project themes that are emerging over time.
    v. Conclusions and Lessons – describe any important future questions, interview techniques, trends or surprises that should be brought to the attention of the whole team.

9. After 4 or 5 Interviews
    a. Compose an Aggregate Research Memo
    b. Use the following subheadings
        i. Similarities across subjects
        ii. Differences among subjects
        iii. Transportable findings
            1. Themes that come up in conversations with team members or seem to have been consistently raised by subjects.
            2. Reflections from multiple subjects on some crisis in current events.
    c. Alternatively, do an aggregated memo that is all about one cross cutting theme.
10. Backup Your Work