

QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW: BASICS



WHAT is a qualitative interview?

A qualitative interview or in-depth interview is the most widely used method in qualitative research and evaluation. It is a method used to enable us to enter into the perspective of the person being interviewed. In program evaluation, it allows us to capture the perspective of program participant, staff, and other stakeholders involved in the program or service. Through interview we can find out the things we cannot directly observe such as:

- A person's feelings, thoughts and intentions;
- Behaviours that took place at a different time;
- How people organise and attach meaning to what goes on in the world.

A qualitative interview is different to a survey (or structured interview) because it is:

1. Based on themes or topics;
2. In-depth (not surface level);
3. Open-ended;
4. Conversational and interactive;
(An exchange of dialogue);
5. Flexible;
6. Recognises the interviewer as part of the process.



A GOOD INTERVIEWER is

- A good "active" listener
- Open minded and non-judgemental
- Flexible and responsive
- Patient and comfortable with silence and non-verbal prompts
- Observant

WHY use qualitative interviews for evaluation?

Qualitative interviews are **important** in evaluation because they:

1. Provide the participant, staff and stakeholder perspectives, experiences and points of view about the program or service and enable exploration of differences between participants' experiences.
2. Participants' quotations reveal respondents' emotions, the way they organise the world, their thoughts about what is happening, their experiences and their basic perceptions.
3. Provide rich information about context and program processes in which program activities result in participant outcomes.

Qualitative interviews can be used in many different ways in evaluation:

1. As a unit of data to be combined systematically with other interviews **for outcome (difference made) evidence for monitoring, evaluation, learning and planning (MELP).**
2. As a major way of constructing a participant story or narrative.
3. To illustrate and augment quantitative data findings.
4. To offer insights for reflective practice, including answering the question, "How can we do it better?"
5. For developing a structured (quantitative) survey.

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HOW to plan, conduct, write-up and analyse an in-depth interview for evaluation

The credibility of an in-depth interview depends on:

1. The way it was conducted;
2. Documentation of the interview method (including why this person was chosen).

A step by step process for in-depth interviews for evaluation is outlined below

1 Decide on the topic and evaluation question(s): Key questions are:

- a. "What difference is the organisation/program/project making?"
- b. "How can the organisation/program/project be improved to make more of a difference?"

4 In advance, through consultation with the participant:

- a. Decide on a convenient day and time for the interview;
- b. Negotiate an appropriate location;
- c. Go through what is required (using Participant Information) and gain consent.

2 Develop an interview schedule or guide and note:

- a. Often the same interview schedule or guide will be used for many interviews;
- b. Information sheets, consent forms and an ethics process are required;
- c. The anticipated length of the interview (minimum of 15 minutes);
- d. How you intend to record the interview (audio, video).

5 At the time of the interview:

- a. Go through consent and get permission to record the interview;
- b. Start filling in interview template (including demographic information)
- c. Develop rapport to put the participant at ease;
- d. Proceed with the interview, checking off topics as they are covered;
- e. Take brief notes as well as record the interview;
- f. Thank the participant for their time.

3 Choose a participant to interview and note:

- a. Why this person was chosen;
- b. How representative their experience is of other participants;
- c. Where they fit into the sampling frame (see Sampling INFORMATION SHEET);
- d. Their demographic characteristics (e.g. gender, age, cultural background).

6 After the interview

- a. Check that the recording worked;
- b. Complete the interview template;
- c. Transcribe the interview;
- d. Store all relevant information securely and respect interviewee privacy.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- "Qualitative Interviewing" by Michael Patton 1990. In Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods M.Q., Sage Publications, Newbury Park, California.
- "Conducting Semi-Structured Interviews by William Adams 2010. In Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation, Third Edition, Josseybass, San Francisco.
- A small MP3 Voice Recorder and spare batteries.
- Transcribing software such as Transcribe Wreally (<https://transcribe.wreally.com>).