

# Lesson 16

## Self-Report Techniques: Interviews



### Lesson Objectives

- All students **will** define key terms relating to the use of interviews in psychological research.
- All students **should** analyse and evaluate the use of interviews in psychological research.
- All students **could** design and conduct an interview on a topic of their choosing.

### Key Words

- Structured interview
- Unstructured interview
- Semi-structured interview
- Interview schedule
- Interviewer bias

### Extension activity:

- Test your knowledge of self-report techniques by completing the following multiple-choice quiz: <https://www.tutor2u.net/psychology/reference/self-report-techniques-revision-quiz>



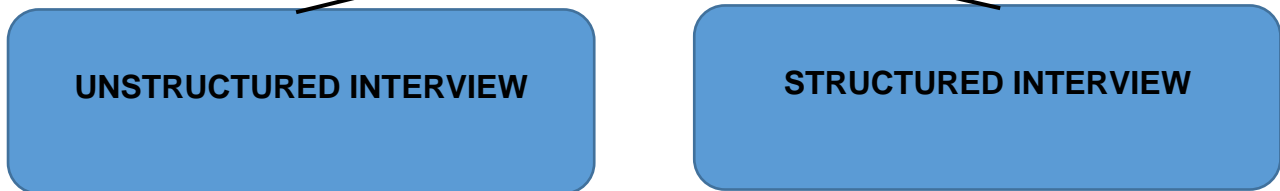
### Questions to guide your thinking...

- What is the difference between a questionnaire and an interview?
- Can you distinguish between a structured interview, an unstructured interview and a semi-structured interview?
- What are the strengths and limitations of structured and unstructured interviews?

## Interviews

An interview is a **'live'** encounter (face-to-face or on the phone) where one person (the interviewer) asks a set of questions to assess an interviewee's thoughts and/or experiences.

There are two broad types of interview:

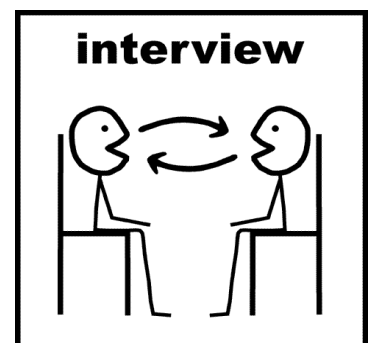


### Structured interviews

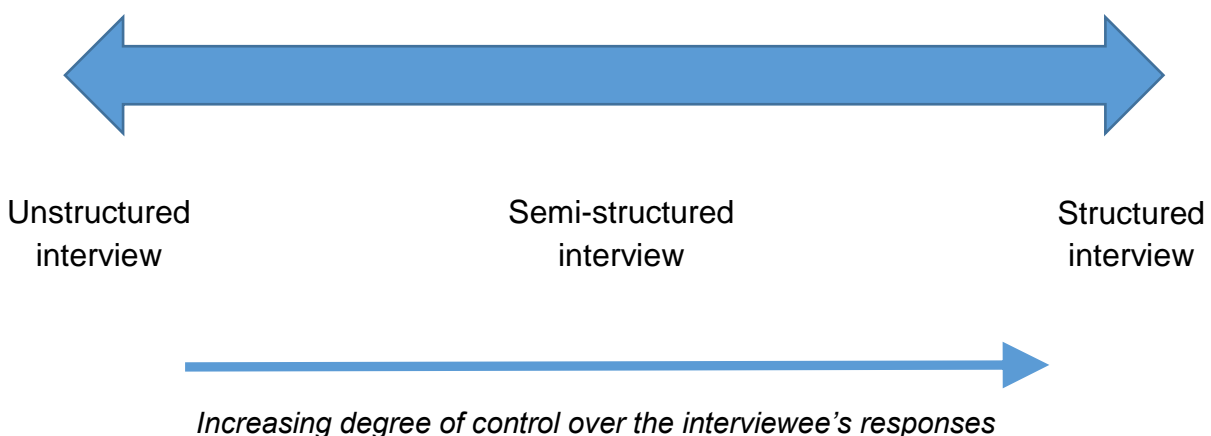
These consist of a set of **pre-determined questions** that are asked in a fixed sequence – all participants get the same questions in the same order (i.e. questions are **standardised**).

### Unstructured interviews

This works a lot like a **conversation**: The interviewer may have a general aim and topic for the interview, but there are no pre-set questions. The interaction between the interviewer and interviewee tends to be 'free-flowing' and driven by the interviewee's responses: There is **flexibility** to pick up on potentially interesting points encourage the interviewee to expand on their answers.



A **semi structured** interview is a combination of the two types described above. It has a set of **pre-determined** questions but the interviewer is **free to ask follow-up questions** to clarify points and/or follow new lines of inquiry.



➤ **Suggest which might be the best type of interview for the collection of the following data.** In each case you must: a) State which **type** you would choose. b) **Justify** your response. c) Suggest a **question** that could be asked.

1. Finding out the difference in moral attitudes between males and females.
2. Comparing the weekly average calorie intake for teenagers and over 60s.
3. Collecting eyewitness testimony following an accident in college.

## Interviews: Evaluation

➤ **Complete the following sentences, stating the strengths and limitations of interviews:**

### Structured interviews



A strength of structured interviews is that they ...



However, a limitation of structured interviews is that ...

## Unstructured interviews



A strength of unstructured interviews is that ...



A limitation of unstructured interviews is that ...

## Structured, unstructured and semi-structured interviews:



Social desirability is a problem associated with interviews, as well as questionnaires. This is because ...

## Designing Interviews

### Writing questions:

Most interviews involve an **interview schedule**, that is, a list of questions that the interviewer intends to cover in the interview. This should be **standardised** for each participant to reduce the effects of **interviewer bias** (see below).

In the case of a one-to-one interview, the interview should be conducted in a quiet room in order to encourage the interviewee to open up. It is good practice to **begin with neutral questions** to help the interviewee relax and help the interviewer to establish a rapport with them.

When writing questions for interviews, researchers should follow the same guidance as when designing a questionnaire (e.g. avoid jargon, leading questions, etc.)

### Recording the data:

Usually, the interviewer will take notes throughout the interview; however, this can interfere with listening skills and could make the interviewee feel evaluated (they might feel that material that was not written down was not valuable). Alternatively, the interview may be audio or video recorded and then transcribed and analysed later.



## The effect of the interviewer:

One of the strengths of conducting an interview compared to a questionnaire is that the presence of an interviewer who is interested in the respondent's answers may increase the amount of information provided. However, an interviewer's opinions, expectations and general lack of objectivity could contaminate the data, an effect known as **interviewer bias**. Interviewers need to be aware of behaviours that demonstrate their 'interest.' This includes:

- Non-verbal communication – various behaviours such as sitting with arms crossed and frowning communicate disapproval and disinterest, whereas head nodding and leaning forward may encourage the respondent to speak.
- Listening skills – an interviewer needs to know when and how to speak e.g. they should not interrupt too often and when they do speak they should have a range of encouraging comments to show that they are listening.

## Ethical issues:

Interviewees should be briefed and assured that their responses will be treated with the strictest confidence. This is especially important if the interview covers topics that may be personal or sensitive (e.g. questions about health or close relationships).

- Design an interview schedule with a maximum of 10 questions. The aim of the interview is to obtain information about the thoughts and experiences of students at the College, although the particular choice of topic is down to you.

Keep the following points in mind before you design your questionnaire:

- ✓ Is the interview going to be structured, unstructured or semi-structured?
- ✓ Are the questions going to be closed, open or a combination of both?
- ✓ The questions should be clearly worded in order to ensure that respondents understand them (avoid jargon).
- ✓ Ensure there are NO leading questions, double barrelled questions or emotive questions.
- ✓ Do any ethical issues need to be considered?



**Topic of interview:**

**Type of interview (i.e. unstructured, structured or semi-structured):**

**Questions:**

## Questionnaires vs. Interviews

➤ Complete the following questions on questionnaires and interviews:

1. What is the difference between a questionnaire and an interview?
2. What advantage might a questionnaire have over an interview?
3. What advantage might an interview have over a questionnaire?



## Exam Practice:

Always make sure that you have written enough for research methods questions. To get top marks in the exam, you need to **expand** on your answers and **show understanding** of the key terminology – **if you use a term, define it**. Remember too, when applying your knowledge in research methods questions, link back to the scenario (context) provided at the beginning of the question.



### AQA A Unit 1 January 2010

A psychologist investigated the effect of different forms of day care on children's later social development. She selected two different types of day care: • child minders • day nurseries. The children had been in one of these types of day care full-time for at least a year before they started primary school. Each child's mother was asked to complete a questionnaire.

6 (c) Write **one** suitable question which could be used in the questionnaire to produce **quantitative** data. (2 marks)

6 (d) Write **one** suitable question which could be used in the questionnaire to produce **qualitative** data. (2 marks)

6 (e) Give **one** weakness of using questionnaires in this research. (2 marks)

### AQA A Unit 1 June 2010

A psychologist investigated the relationship between type of attachment in childhood and success in later adult relationships. He published a questionnaire in a local newspaper. The participants were people who read the newspaper, filled in the questionnaire and sent it to the psychologist. Participants' answers to the questions were used to decide whether they had been securely or insecurely attached as children. The participants who were identified as securely attached children were more likely to have successful adult relationships than those identified as insecurely attached children.

6 (d) Questionnaires and interviews are both self-report techniques. Explain **one** advantage **and one** disadvantage of using a questionnaire rather than an interview. (4 marks)

### Specification B Unit 1 June 2012

A psychologist wanted to investigate whether or not people are influenced by the opinions of others. The psychologist selected 100 pupils from a secondary school to be participants in the study. The psychologist showed participants a cake which weighed 350 grams. The task for the participants was to estimate the weight of the cake in grams. Participants were allocated randomly to one of two groups. In **Group A**, 50 participants were asked individually to estimate the weight of the cake. The psychologist gave each participant a blank piece of paper on which to write his or her estimate. In **Group B**, the other 50 participants were asked individually to estimate the weight of the cake. This time, the psychologist gave each participant a piece of paper which contained a list of five weights (493 grams, 512 grams, 502 grams, 485 grams and 601 grams). The participants were told that these were the estimates given by five people and that they should write their own estimate below these other estimates.



The psychologist expected that participants in **Group B** would be influenced by the five other estimates. She expected that they would write down a weight similar to the five estimates on the piece of paper. The median estimates for the weight of the cake are shown in **Table 1** below.

**Table 1: The median estimate for the weight of the cake (in grams) in Group A and Group B**

	Group A Estimate written on a blank piece of paper	Group B Estimate written below the list of five other estimates
The median estimate of the weight of the cake (in grams)	348	510

**3 (g) (i)** After the study, the psychologist interviewed some of the participants in **Group B**. Outline **one** type of interview that she might have conducted. (2 marks)

**3 (g) (ii)** Explain **one** limitation of the type of interview that you have outlined in your answer to **3 (g) (i)**. (2 marks)