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## PROCESS OF CONDUCTING FOCUS GROUPS IN PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE



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### ABSTRACT

As development is advancing in the various dimensional is various tools and techniques are also advancing in data collection. Focus group discussion is one of the most significant part perhaps tool in qualitative data collection. In social sciences focus group discussion is used to collect the qualitative data on the particular issue which is not concerned with any quantifiable unit therefore, the social worker must have the skill how to conduct a focus group discussion. In social work this method is frequently used to collect the information, for four solving the problems of client therefore it is very essential to understand how to conduct focus group discussion in various situation. In this article's author has explained some of the basic processes that are involved in the conduct in the various focus group discussion in professional social work practice.

**KEYWORDS** : focus group discussion, qualitative data, information collection, professional practice, problem solving practice, data analysis

### INTRODUCTION

Focus groups are a special type of group used to gather information from members of a clearly defined target audience. Unfortunately, many people confuse focus groups with a number of other group methods used for collecting information such as meetings, public forums, nominal groups, advisory councils, hearings, and study circles. These, however, are not focus groups. Nor are committees or task forces charged with carrying out a particular assignment. Rather, a focus group is...

- composed of six to twelve people,
- who are similar in one or more ways, and
- are guided through a facilitated discussion,
- on a clearly defined topic,
- to gather information about the opinions of the group members.

The goal of a focus group is to promote self-disclosure among participants. Because a group, rather than an individual, is asked to respond to questions, dialogue tends to take on a life of its own. Participants “piggy-back” on the comments of others and add a richness to the dialogue that could not be achieved through a one-on-one interview. Focus groups arose in the early 1940’s as social science researchers were looking for alternatives to interviewer-dominated methods. One of the first uses of focus groups was to explore morale of U.S. troops during World War II. Later, focus groups were used extensively by the business community as a way to stay in touch with customers. It was not until recently that focus groups were embraced in the academic community.

A focus group is a small-group discussion guided by a trained leader. It is used to learn about opinions on a designated topic, and to guide future action. Following are the examples of focus group discussion

- A focus group of parents of preschoolers meets to discuss child care needs. Parents share their views on local child care programs, and on what could be done to improve them.
- A focus group of senior citizens meets at the new senior center. What do they think of the programs being offered? What are their own suggestions and ideas?
- An agency wants to open a group home for developmentally disabled adults in a quiet residential area. It convenes a group of prospective neighbors. What are their concerns? Can this work?

#### A FOCUS GROUP IS DIFFERENT IN THREE BASIC WAYS:

- The main difference is the group has a specific, focused discussion topic.
- The group has a trained leader, or facilitator.
- The group's composition and the group discussion are carefully planned to create a nonthreatening environment in which people are free to talk openly. Members are actively encouraged to express their opinions.

Because focus groups are structured and directed, but also expressive, they can yield a lot of information in a relatively short time.

#### NEED TO USE FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups help people learn more about group or community opinions and needs. In this respect, they are similar to needs assessment surveys. But needs assessment surveys typically have *written, closed-ended, relatively narrow* questions which are *quantitatively scored*. The person being surveyed often responds with a numerical rating, rather than with a verbal statement. Such surveys can be very useful; but they usually can't capture all that a person is thinking or feeling. Responses in a focus group, on the other hand, are typically *spoken, open-ended, relatively broad, and qualitative*. They have more depth, nuance, and variety. Nonverbal communications and group interactions can also be observed. Focus groups can therefore get closer to what people are really thinking and feeling, even though their responses may be harder -- or impossible -- to score on a scale. Which is better? *Both* of these methods are useful. And both can be used together, to complement each other. Which should you use in a specific situation? That depends upon your own needs and purposes, and the resources

available to you.

### WHEN SHOULD YOU USE A FOCUS GROUP?

- When you are considering the introduction of a new program or service.
- When you want to ask questions that can't easily be asked or answered on a written survey.
- When you want to supplement the knowledge you can gain from written surveys.
- When you know, or can find someone, who is an experienced and skilled group leader.
- When you have the time, knowledge, and resources to recruit a willing group of focus group participants.

Here are several situations when you might want to know more about community opinions before taking action. How useful would a focus group be in each case?

- A new strain of flu is going around. Half the town seems to be catching it. What should be done about it?
- A wave of break-ins has hit a nearby neighborhood. How can this be stopped?
- A new playground is being planned. What features should go into it?

### OUR VIEWPOINTS:

- Controlling the flu is not a matter of citizen opinion, but rather of medical facts, and of public health prevention and treatment. A focus group is probably not helpful here.
- Increased police presence may help; but a structured discussion among neighbors might hit upon other useful solutions. A focus group could be quite worthwhile.
- Citizen input is definitely called for here. A focus group could be an ideal way for finding it out.

A focus group is not for every social situation. But it can be useful in many situations where action should be guided by public opinion.

### THE PROS AND CONS OF GROUPS

Should you collect your opinions from groups, or from individuals? The focus groups are, of course, groups. Most surveys, though, cover one person at a time. One advantage of focus groups is depth and complexity of response, as mentioned before. And group members can often stimulate new thoughts for each other, which might not have otherwise occurred.

How to conduct focus group?

### BEFORE YOU BEGIN

A focus group is a small-group discussion guided by a trained leader. It is used to learn more about opinions on a designated topic, and then to guide future action. The group's composition and the group discussion should be carefully planned to create a nonthreatening environment, so that participants feel free to talk openly and give honest opinions. Since participants are actively encouraged to not only express their own opinions, but also respond to other members and questions posed by the leader, focus groups offer a depth, nuance, and variety to the discussion that would not be available through surveys. Additionally, because focus groups are structured and directed, but also expressive, they can yield a lot of information in a relatively short time. In short, focus groups are a good way to gather in-depth information about a community's thoughts and opinions on a topic.

### RECHECK YOUR GOALS.ASK:

- "Why do I want to conduct a focus group?"
- "Why am I doing this?"
- "What do I hope to learn?"

### CONSIDER OTHER METHODS.

Are you planning to use *other* methods for learning about opinions as well?

In other words, so far: Think before you start, look before you leap.

- If yes, which ones, and why?
- If no, is this the single best method to use to find out what you want?

### FIND A GOOD LEADER.

This is not a casual matter: Your leader will determine the success of your group. What kind of leader do you want? Probably someone who:

Take a careful look around. Perhaps you can find the right leader within your own organization. It's possible you can do the job yourself (but don't overestimate [or underestimate] your own abilities.) Depending on the situation, you might consider looking for someone outside your organization, someone that specializes in facilitating these kinds of groups.

- Has experience facilitating groups
- Knows something about the topic
- Will relate well to the focus group participants
- Will work together with you to give you the outcomes you want

### FIND A RECORDER.

A small but important point, often neglected. You want to make sure people's ideas don't get lost. Someone should be writing down what is said, in the same way as taking minutes at a meeting. Arrange for this in advance. (Alternatively, you can tape-record, with the group's permission. This will take more time -- to transcribe the tape, and interpret the transcription-- but you will have a more complete, accurate, and permanent record.)

### DECIDE WHO SHOULD BE INVITED.

Ideally, those invited should be a *representative sample* of those whose opinions you are concerned about. Suppose you're concerned about the opinions of public housing tenants. You would then want to spread your invitations across the different public housing facilities in your community -- not just the best, or the worst, or the most vocal. Or suppose you are concerned about the opinions of Main Street shopkeepers. Get a complete list. Select a representative group, for example by size, type, or whether they have local or outside ownership. You probably want to hear from all kinds of businesses; so make sure you do. You could even pull the names out of a hat. (This approaches a "random sample.") Or, better yet, if you had time, you could run several different groups, to include more people, and more different kinds of people.

### DECIDE ABOUT INCENTIVES.

That is, should you offer an incentive for people to participate? Maybe not. In that case, why should people come? What's in it for them?

Possibly people will come just because they want to help. Or because they think they will meet other interesting people, or learn something, or just have fun. Maybe the novelty of the experience itself will be a motivator. And maybe all these reasons are true. (Or at least people believe them.). But maybe those reasons aren't enough, and some other incentive is called for. Money is one; sometimes focus group members get paid, even a small amount. (Focus group leaders may get paid, too.) If you can afford this, consider it. If you can't, then think about other possible incentives: food and drink (more than chips and soda?); public recognition; something to take home; a later training opportunity. What will do the job?

### DECIDE ON THE MEETING PARTICULARS.

#### SPECIFICALLY:

Pin these down before you start signing people up.

- What day?
- What place?
- What time?
- How long?
- How many groups?

### PREPARE YOUR QUESTIONS.

Go in prepared. Write out in advance a list of topics and questions you want to ask. This will serve as your guide. Below are some examples of general questions. These apply largely to groups discussing a current program or service, but they can be adjusted for planned programs, as well as for groups dealing with other concerns. The precise language and order of presentation will depend on your topic and group, but some of these questions may be adapted to your own needs.

- "What are some of your thoughts about what's going on now?"
- "Would you say you are satisfied with the current situation, with the way things are going on?"
- (If so) "What are you satisfied about? Why is that?" (Or, "What's going well...?")
- "Are there things you are dissatisfied with, that you would like to see changed?" (Or, "What's not going well...?")
- (If so) "What are they? Why is that? How should they change? What kinds of things would you like to see happen?"
- "How about this particular aspect (of the topic). What do you think about that?"
- Repeat for different aspects of the topic, with variations in style. For example, if the main focus group topic was "community policing," some key aspects to cover might be visibility, sensitivity, interaction, respect, etc.
- "Some people have said that one way to improve X is to do Y.
- Do you agree with this?" (Or, "How do you feel about that?")
- "Are there other recommendations that you have, or suggestions you would like to make?"
- "Are there other things you would like to say before we wind up?"
- Some "probes" or follow-ups" designed to get more information on a given question:
  - o"Can you say more about that?"
  - o"Can you give an example?"
  - o"Jane says X. How about others of you. What do you think?"
  - o"How about you, Joe. [Or, "you folks in the corner over there...."] Do you have some thoughts on this?"



o "Does anyone else have some thoughts on that?"

#### recruit your members.

Call them up. Email them. Or find them.

*Remember:*

- Other things equal, personal contact works best.
- Stress your benefits. Why should people come?

#### DOUBLE-CHECK.

Review the arrangements. Is everything ready to go?

#### WHEN THE GROUP MEETS

##### Conduct the group

A common sequence of events for many focus groups goes something like this: (The leader usually takes responsibility for carrying them out.)

- Thank people for coming.
- Review the purpose of the group, and the goals of the meeting. Set the stage.
- Go over the flow of the meeting -- how it will proceed, and how the members can contribute. Lay out the ground rules. Encourage open participation.
- Set the tone. This is important, because probably few of your members will have been in a focus group before.
- Ask an opening question. This could be a very general question ("What are your general thoughts about X?"), or something more specific. Both choices are justifiable; and both types of questions might be asked before the group ends.
- Make sure that all opinions on that question get a chance to be heard. How do you do this?

Some common techniques

- Summarize what you think you have heard, and ask if the group agrees
- Phrase the same question in a different way
- Ask if anyone else has any comments on that question
- Ask a follow-up question
- Look around the room, and make brief eye contact, especially with those who may not have spoken

**Reminder #1:** Be sure to record. If the group is not being tape-recorded, someone should be writing the key points down.

**Reminder #2:** Of course, the leader's job is to elicit opinion, and not judge it. All opinions should be respected.

- Ask your next question -- and proceed with other questions in the same general manner. The phrasing of the questions, the follow-ups, the ordering of the questions, and how much time to spend on each one are points that the leader will have to decide -- sometimes on the spot. An experienced leader will be able to do this. This is why you have spent time looking for one!
- When all your questions have been asked, and before the group ends, ask if anyone has any other comments to make. This can be an effective way of gathering other opinions that have not yet been voiced.
- Tell the members about any next steps that will occur, and what they can expect to happen now.



- Don't forget to thank the group for coming!

## AFTER THE MEETING

### Look at the data

If you have tape-recorded, make a transcript. If not, make a written summary from the group notes. But in any case, look closely at the information you have collected.

In some cases, you can devise and use a coding system to "score" the data and count the number of times a particular theme is expressed. Experience helps here. But whether you do this or not, try to have more than one person review the results independently. (Because even the best of us have our biases.) Then come together to compare your interpretations and conclusions.

- What patterns emerge?
- What are the common themes?
- What new questions arise?
- What conclusions seem true?

## SHARE RESULTS WITH THE GROUP.

They gave you their time. The least you can do is to give them some feedback -- it's an obligation that you have. This can be done by mail, phone, or email if you'd like. Sometimes it's even possible to bring the group back for a second session, to review results, verify their accuracy, and/or explore other themes. And note: Perhaps members have now become more interested in the issue, and would like to get more involved. Consider offering them an opportunity to do so. A focus group, indirectly, can be a recruiting tool.

## USE THE RESULTS.

Collecting useful information was the reason you wanted to do a focus group in the first place. Now you have the *opportunity*, and perhaps also the *responsibility*, to put it to use. You can improve the situation that originally motivated you, and made you think about a focus group at the very beginning.

## IN SUMMARY

A focus group is a small-group discussion guided by a trained leader. It is used to learn more about opinions on a designated topic, and then to guide future action. The group's composition and the group discussion should be carefully planned to create a nonthreatening environment, so that participants feel free to talk openly and give honest opinions. Since participants are actively encouraged to not only express their own opinions, but also respond to other members and questions posed by the leader, focus groups offer a depth, nuance, and variety to the discussion that would not be available through surveys. Additionally, because focus groups are structured and directed, but also expressive, they can yield a lot of information in a relatively short time. In short, focus groups are a good way to gather in-depth information about a community's thoughts and opinions on a topic.

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## SECTION 12. CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

- What is an interview?
- Why should you conduct interviews?
- Whom should you interview?
- How should you conduct interviews?

### WHAT IS AN INTERVIEW?

When you're watching the news at night or reading the paper in the morning, you'll notice that all the stories have a point in common: They all contain interviews. No matter what subject is being tackled, there'll always be people willing to be interviewed about it. And that's great, because that way we can get a sample of what people think and feel about different issues.

Interviews are usually defined as a conversation with a purpose. They can be very helpful to your organization when you need information about assumptions and perceptions of activities in your community. They're also great if you're looking for in-depth information on a particular topic from an expert. (If what you really need is numerical data--how much and how many--a written questionnaire may better serve your purposes.)

Interviewing has been described as an art, rather than a skill or science. In other cases, it has been described as game in which the interviewee gets some sort of reward, or simply as a technical skill you can learn. But, no matter how you look at it, interviewing is a process that can be mastered by practice. This chapter will show you how.

### WHY SHOULD YOU CONDUCT INTERVIEWS?

Using an interview is the best way to have an accurate and thorough communication of ideas between you and the person from whom you're gathering information. You have control of the question order, and you can make sure that all the questions will be answered.

In addition, you may benefit from the spontaneity of the interview process. Interviewees don't always have the luxury of going away and thinking about their responses or, even to some degree, censoring their responses. You may find that interviewees will blurt things out that they would never commit to on paper in a questionnaire

### WHEN INTERVIEWS ARE NOT THE BEST OPTION:

Interviews are not the only way of gathering information and depending on the case, they may not even be appropriate or efficient. For example, large-scale phone interviews can be time-consuming

and expensive. Mailed questionnaires may be the best option in cases where you need information from a large number of people. Interviews aren't efficient either when all you need is collecting straight numeric data. Asking your respondents to fill out a form may be more appropriate.

Interviews will not be suitable if respondents will be unwillingly to cooperate. If your interviewees have something against you or your organization, they will not give you the answers you want and may even mess up your results. When people don't want to talk, setting up an interview is a waste of time and resources. You should, then, look for a less direct way of gathering the information you need.

#### PROBLEMS WITH INTERVIEWS:

You must also be well prepared for traps that might arise from interviews. For example, your interviewee may have a personal agenda and he or she will try to push the interview in a way to benefit their own interests. The best solution is to become aware of your interviewee's inclinations before arranging the interview.

Sometimes, the interviewee exercises his or her control even after the interview is done, asking to change or edit the final copy. That should be a right of the interviewer only. If the subject you're addressing involves technical information, you may have the interviewee check the final result for you, just for accuracy.

#### WHOM SHOULD YOU INTERVIEW?

Your choice of interviewees will, obviously, be influenced by the nature of the information you need. For example, if you're trying to set up a volunteer program for your organization, you may want to interview the volunteer coordinator at one or two other successful agencies for ideas for your program.

On the other hand, if you're taking a look at the community's response to an ad campaign you've been running, you'll want to identify members of the target audience to interview. In this case, a focus group can be extremely useful.

If you're reluctant to contact a stranger for an interview, remember that most people enjoy talking about what they know and are especially eager to share their knowledge with those who are interested. Demonstrate interest and your chances of getting good interviews will improve.

#### HOW SHOULD YOU CONDUCT INTERVIEWS?

Sometimes, being a good interviewer is described as an innate ability or quality possessed by only some people and not by others. Certainly, interviewing may come more easily to some people than to others, but anybody can learn the basic strategies and procedures of interviewing. We're here to show you how.

#### INTERVIEW STRUCTURE:

First you should decide how structured you want your interview to be. Interviews can be formally structured, loosely structured, or not structured at all. The style of interviewing you will adopt will depend on the kind of result you're looking for.

In a highly structured interview, you simply ask subjects to answer a list of questions. To get a valid result, you should ask all subjects identical questions. In an interview without a rigid structure, you can create and ask questions appropriate the situations that arise and to the central purpose of the interview. There's no predetermined list of questions to ask. Finally, in a semi-structured setting, there

is a list of predetermined questions, but interviewees are allowed to digress.

### TYPES OF INTERVIEWS:

Now that you've decided how structured you want the interview to be, it's time to decide how you want to conduct it. Can you do it through the phone, or do you need to do it face-to-face? Would a focus group be most appropriate? Let's look at each of these interview types in depth.

### FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEWS

Face-to-face interviews are a great way to gather information. Whether you decide to interview face-to-face depends on the amount of time and resources you have available at your disposal. Some advantages of interviewing in person are:

- You have more flexibility. You can probe for more specific answers, repeat questions, and use discretion as to the particular questions you ask.
- You are able to watch nonverbal behavior.
- You have control over the physical environment.
- You can record spontaneous answers.
- You know exactly who is answering.
- You can make sure the interview is complete and all questions have been asked.
- You can use a more complex questionnaire.

However, if face-to-face interviews prove to be too expensive, too time-consuming, or too inconvenient to be conducted, you should consider some other way of interviewing. For example, if the information you're collecting is of a sensitive and confidential nature, your respondents may prefer the comfort of anonymity, and an anonymous questionnaire would probably be more appropriate.

### TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

Telephone interviews are also a good way of getting information.

They're particularly useful when the person you want to speak to lives far away and setting up a face-to-face interview is impractical. Many of the same advantages and disadvantages of face-to-face interviewing apply here; the exception being, of course, that you won't be able to watch nonverbal behavior.

### HERE ARE SOME TIPS TO MAKE YOUR PHONE INTERVIEW SUCCESSFUL:

- Keep phone interviews to no more than about ten minutes--exceptions to this rule may be made depending on the type of interview you're conducting and on the arrangements you've made with the interviewee.
- If you need your interviewee to refer to any materials, provide them in advance.
- Be extra motivating on the phone, because people tend to be less willing to become engaged in conversation over the phone.
- Identify yourself and offer your credentials. Some respondents may be distrustful, thinking they're being played a prank.
- If tape-recording the conversation, ask for authorization to do so.
- Write down the information as you hear it; don't trust your memory to write the information down later.
- Speak loud, clear and with pitch variation -- don't make it another boring phone call.

- Don't call too early in the morning or too late at night, unless arranged in advance.
- Finish the conversation cordially, and thank the interviewee.

With the increasing use of computers as a means of communication, interviews via e-mail have become popular. E-mail is an inexpensive option for interviewing. The advantages and drawbacks of e-mail interviews are similar to phone interviews. E-mails are far less intrusive than the phone. You are able to contact your interviewee, send your questions, and follow up the received answers with a thank-you message. You may never meet or talk to your respondent.

However, through e-mail your chances for probing are very limited, unless you keep sending messages back and forth to clarify answers. That's why you need to be very clear about what you need when you first contact your interviewee. Some people may also resent the impersonal nature of e-mail interaction, while others may feel more comfortable having time to think about their answers.

## FOCUS GROUPS

A focus group, led by a trained facilitator, is a particular type of "group interview" that may be very useful to you. Focus groups consisting of groups of people whose opinions you would like to know may be somewhat less structured; however, the input you get is very valuable. Focus groups are perhaps the most flexible tool for gathering information because you can focus in on getting the opinions of a group of people while asking open-ended questions that the whole group is free to answer and discuss. This often sparks debate and conversation, yielding lots of great information about the group's opinion.

During the focus group, the facilitator is also able to observe the nonverbal communication of the participants. Although the sample size is generally smaller than some other forms of information gathering, the free exchange of opinions brought on by the group interaction is an invaluable tool.

## PREPARE FOR THE INTERVIEW

So you've chosen your interviewees, set up the interview, and started to think about interview questions. You're ready to roll, right?

Not quite. First, you need to make sure you have as much information as possible about your interview topic. You don't need to be an expert -- after all, that's why you're interviewing people! -- but you do want to be fairly knowledgeable. Having a solid understanding of the topic at hand will make you feel more comfortable as an interviewer, enhance the quality of the questions you ask, and make your interviewee more comfortable as well.

In addition, it's important to understand your interviewee's culture and background before you conduct your interview. This understanding will be reflected on the way you phrase your questions, your choice of words, your ice-breakers, the way you'll dress, which the material you'll avoid so that the questions remain inoffensive to your interviewee.

## CONDUCT THE INTERVIEW

Now that you're prepared, it's time to conduct the interview. Whether calling or meeting someone, be sure to be on time -- your interviewee is doing you a favor, and you don't want to keep him or her waiting.

When interviewing someone, start with some small talk to build rapport. Don't just plunge into your questions -- make your interviewee as comfortable as possible.

### POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- Practice -- prepare a list of interview questions in advance. Rehearse, try lines, mock-interview friends. Memorize your questions. Plan ahead the location and ways to make the ambient more comfortable.
- Small-talk -- never begin an interview cold. Try to put your interviewee at ease and establish rapport.
- Be natural -- even if you rehearsed your interview time and time again and have all your questions memorized, make it sound and feel like you're coming up with them right there.
- Look sharp -- dress appropriately to the ambient you're in and to the kind of person you're interviewing. Generally you're safe with business attire, but adapt to your audience. Arrive on time if you are conducting the interview in person.
- Listen -- present yourself aware and interested. If your interviewee says something funny, smile. If it's something sad, look sad. React to what you hear.
- Keep your goals in mind -- remember that what you want is to obtain information. Keep the interview on track, don't digress too much. Keep the conversation focused on your questions. Be considerate of your interviewee's limited time.
- Don't take "yes/no" answers -- monosyllabic answers don't offer much information. Ask for an elaboration, probe, ask why. Silence may also yield information. Ask the interviewee to clarify anything you do not understand
- Respect -- make interviewees feel like their answers are very important to you (they are supposed to be!) and be respectful for the time they're donating to help you.

### QUESTIONS:

Questions are such a fundamental part of an interview that's worth taking a minute to look at the subject in depth. Questions can relate to the central focus of your interview, with to-the-point, specific answers; they can be used to check the reliability of other answers; they can be used just to create a comfortable relationship between you and the interviewee; and they can probe for more complete answers.

It's very important that you ask your questions in a way to motivate the interviewee to answer as completely and honestly as possible. Avoid inflammatory questions ("Do you always discriminate against women and minorities, or just some of the time?"), and try to stay polite. And remember to express clearly what you want to know. Just because interviewer and interviewee speak the same language, it doesn't mean they'll necessarily understand each other.

There are some problems that can arise from the way you ask a question. Here are several of the most common pitfalls:

- Questions that put the interviewee in the defensive -- These questions bring up emotional responses, usually negative. To ask, "Why did you do such a bad thing?" will feel like you are confronting your interviewee, and he or she will get defensive. Try to ask things in a more relaxed manner.
- The two-in-one question -- These are questions that ask for two answers in one question. For instance, "Does your company have special recruitment policy for women and racial minorities?" may cause hesitation and indecision in the interviewee. A "yes" would mean both, and a "no" would be for neither. Separate the issues into two separate questions.
- The complex question -- Questions that are too long, too involved, or too intricate will intimidate or confuse your interviewee. The subject may not even understand the questions in its entirety. The



solution is to break down the question and make brief and concise.

- In addition, pay attention to the order in which you ask your questions. The arrangement or ordering of your question may significantly affect the results of your interview. Try to start the interview with mild and easy questions to develop a rapport with the interviewee. As the interview proceeds, move to more sensitive and complex questions.

### FINAL THOUGHTS

Remember to take good notes, if you're taking notes. Put quotation marks around the person's actual words, and don't embellish their quotes. You may tape-record the conversation, but make sure your tape recorder is working well, or hours of work can go down the drain. If you're going to tape-record your interview, make sure you obtain the interviewee's permission beforehand and on tape. Finally, it's important to time your interview so that it won't last for hours. Some people may refuse to (or may be too busy to) engage on an interview they know will last for two or more hours. Others may lose interest during a long interview. So, try to be concise. A good rule of thumb is to make your interview long enough that you get useful information from it and short enough that you don't tire your interviewee. If you know you'll need to spend a lot of time interviewing somebody, consider dividing your interviews in two or more sessions.

### INTERVIEWING IN A NUTSHELL -- SUMMARY:

- Determine what you want to know.
- Discuss the kinds of questions you want to ask (open ended: How do you feel about...) or (close ended: Which do you like better: A or B?).
- Draft your interview questions.
- Determine who you'd like to interview (samples) Train your interviewers so they will all ask the same questions the same way.
- Contact the people you want to interview.
- Make appointments and follow up on them unless you are soliciting people on the street or in a mall, for instance.
- Collect and analyze the data.

### IN SUMMARY

So, your interview is done and it you've got the information you needed. It's time to thank you interviewee for his or her kind cooperation. Send them a thank you note soon after the interview. Be cordial and appreciative. You never know when you may need or want to interview this person again!

### PRINT RESOURCES

- 1) Bailey, K. (1994). *Methods of social research*. New York, NY: The Free Press.
- 2) Berg, B. (1998). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.



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