

Online Classroom™

SOCIOLOGY SHORT CUTS 1

DOING SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Activities And Web Links



Interviews

3. Interviews**Activity 1: Semi-structured (focused) Interviews:**

The idea here is to help to illustrate the process of semi-structured interviewing from both the researcher's and the respondent's point of view.

Divide students into pairs: one takes the role of interviewer and the other the role of respondent.

The interviewer is given the schedule used by Christine in her study of educational decision making.

Interview schedule.

1. Can you tell me your parents' occupations?
2. Are you going to university when you leave school/college?

If no, why not?

If yes, which university, what subject and why did you make these choices?

If not sure, can you elaborate?

3. How did you reach this decision?

Who did you talk to about this in your immediate family?

Who did you talk to about this outside your immediate family?

Were there any other influences on your decision?

4. What do you intend doing after college or after university?

Why do you want to do this?

Did anyone influence/help you with these decisions/ If so, who?

5. Where do you see yourself in ten years time?

Interviews should last about 10 minutes.

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Researchers are then asked to organise their findings, while interviewees are asked to write down their feelings about the interview (e.g. their preference, what they revealed, didn't reveal etc.).

These reports and impressions are then written up for homework or done in class on the day.

The activity and the short reports arising from it are then used as the basis for addressing some of the following questions:

- For researchers: What are some of the main issues to be bear in mind when designing unstructured interviews (e.g. keeping participants on topic)
- For respondents: What did you like/not like about the interview? Were there things you expected to be asked about but weren't?
- Ask the interviewers to read out their impressions of the interview (what problems were involved – recording and interpreting data, keeping to the point, rapport, etc.)
- Ask the respondents to read out their impressions of the interview (how easy / difficult was it to answer or know what was required etc.).
- Comparing interview methods: what advantages / disadvantages did the students find with semi-structured interviews as compared with the structured interviews they did previously.

Put a list of research topics on the board and ask students whether they would use structured or unstructured interviews.

Activity 2: Matching Pairs

Make two set of cards on different backgrounds from the templates on the following pages.

One set identifies a type of interview or a general issue arising from interviews, the other set provides a quote from the researcher.

Most of these issues are raised in the video.

Students have to try to match the pairs (which are given in the correct order on the templates):

Cards on the left hand side of the page = Type of interview or issue.

Cards on the right hand side of the page = Researcher's quote.

A leading question	“Do you want to go to university just because your friends are going?”
An ethical issue	“I’m not telling interviewees the real purpose of my research”.
Data analysis	“I’m going over transcripts of the interviews trying to identify common themes”.
Interviewer bias	“I am always aware that my body language, expression or follow-up questions may be influencing the interviewee’s answers”.
Interview effect	“Sometimes interviewees just give you the answer they think you want to hear”.

Rapport	“To get good data you have to make the interviewee feel relaxed and comfortable”.
Semi-structured interview	“I have an interview schedule but I sometimes change it and adapt my questions to the replies of the interviewee”.
Structured interview	“I’m asking exactly the same questions in exactly the same order”.
Verstehen	“I’m trying to find out what it was like for the interviewee, I’m trying to get their point of view”.
Unstructured interview	“These interviews are more like ordinary conversations”.

Activity 3: Focus Groups

In this activity you take the role of focus group facilitator.

On a whiteboard / OHT write the question “What factors affect educational achievement” and invite the students to brainstorm their ideas. As each student suggests a factor and records it on the board / OHT.

Students should be encouraged to suggest whatever they want (and you should not ignore any suggested factor) but encourage them not to elaborate at this stage (e.g. if someone suggests “gender” as a factor do not ask them to develop the idea yet).

Once all factors have been exhausted the next stage is to focus on each suggested factor and develop it in relation to the question. For example, if gender is a possible factor ask the student group to elaborate on how it might affect educational achievement. Record the responses on the board / OHT.

In this way, students quickly build-up an impressive amount of information about educational achievement.

Optional work:

1. Relate possible explanations from the brainstorming to research. Ask students to think of appropriate research designs to test these ideas.
2. For a sample of possible explanations ask the students to suggest an appropriate research method to test the explanation.

Supplementary Material:

[Interviews.ppt](#)

3. Interviews

<http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/deliveringservices/targetedyouthsupport/disc-over/activities/hints/>

Hints and tips on conducting focused interviews (both individual and group).

<http://www.sociology.org.uk/game1.htm>

Online simulation that asks students to examine ideas about reliability, validity and representativeness in the context of interviews relating to crime and deviance.

<http://www.sociology.org.uk/methfi.pdf>

Outline and brief evaluation of focused interviews as a research method.

