

IOWA

Division of Student Life

GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

An interview is a structured or semi-structured conversation used to collect qualitative data about individual experiences, perceptions, or opinions. Interviews are especially useful for gathering in-depth feedback that cannot be obtained through quantitative tools (such as surveys) alone.

ARTICULATE THE PURPOSE OF THE INTERVIEW

Interviews allow us to "listen and learn" by engaging individuals in a structured or semi-structured conversation. They are ideal for exploring individual experiences, understanding sensitive topics, or expanding on quantitative data such as survey results.

Guidelines:

- Define your objectives
 - e.g., needs assessment, program planning, evaluation
- State how findings will be used
 - e.g., to inform leadership development programs, improve student engagement services

Example:

Purpose statement: "To explore students' experiences in leadership positions and gather insights for improving leadership development initiatives."

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Formal Interviews

- Pre-determined, scripted questions
- Standardized structure for consistency across participants
- Often audio recorded or transcribed
- Typically used for research or program evaluation where comparability of responses is important

Semi-Formal Interviews

- Guided by a topic outline, called an interview guide
- Flexibility to follow up on participant responses
- Conversational tone fosters rapport and depth of responses
- Typically used in student affairs for needs assessments or pilot projects

DEVELOPING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND SEQUENCE

Design your questions to flow naturally, starting broadly and moving into specifics.

Question Types:

- Opening Questions: Build rapport and ease into conversation
- Introductory Questions: Explore general experiences or opinions
- Transition Questions: Shift toward more specific themes
- Key Questions: Focus on the main research objectives
- Ending Questions: Summarize and offer space for any final thoughts

Guidelines:

- Content: Identify what you want participants to share
- Data Relevance: Ensure questions will elicit needed information
- Clarity: Avoid vague or leading questions
- Flexibility: Be ready to probe or rephrase if necessary

Example:

- Opening: "What motivated you to pursue a leadership position?"
- Introductory: "How would you describe your leadership experience so far?"
- Transition: "Can you share a specific challenge you've faced in your role?"
- Key: "What resources or support would help you succeed as a leader?"
- Ending: "Is there anything else you'd like to share about your leadership journey?"

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL & PARTICIPANT INTRODUCTION

A structured protocol ensures consistency across interviews. Prepare an introduction that clearly explains the purpose, expectations, and confidentiality practices.

Guidelines:

- Introduce yourself and your role
- State the University of Iowa Division of Student Life as the conducting body
- Explain the purpose, approximate duration, and confidentiality practices
- Obtain verbal or written informed consent before proceeding
 - Clearly state if the interview is being recorded or transcribed

Example:

"Thank you for meeting with me today! My name is [Name] and I am conducting this interview on behalf of the Division of Student Life. We are gathering feedback from student leaders about their leadership experiences. The interview will take about 30 minutes. Your responses are confidential and will be reported in aggregate."

LIMITING THE PROTOCOL LENGTH

It is important to keep interviews focused and manageable to respect participants' time and ensure the conversation stays productive.

Guidelines:

- Limit the number of open-ended key questions (typically 5-7)
- Prioritize quality over quantity
- Allow time for in-depth responses and follow-ups

Example:

For a 30-minute leadership interview, prepare 5 main questions plus optional follow-up prompts.

SELECTING & SOLICITING PARTICIPANTS

Selecting the right individuals ensures rich insights and a more relevant dataset.

Guidelines:

- Target students or stakeholders relevant to the topic

- Use personal invitations through trusted contacts
 - e.g., advisors, mentors
- Screen participants if specific experience is required

Example:

Invite students who have held formal leadership positions within campus organizations during the past academic year.

CONSIDER UTILIZING INCENTIVES

Offering small incentives can show appreciation and boost participation rates.

Guidelines:

- Choose appropriate, non-coercive incentives (e.g., coffee vouchers, swag items)
- Be mindful of any potential impact on financial aid
- Clearly explain the incentive when inviting participants

Example:

Offer a small thank-you gift, like a free t-shirt or a campus bookstore coupon, to students who complete leadership interviews.

MODERATING THE INTERVIEW

While formal moderation techniques used in focus groups are less necessary, interviewers should still maintain a professional and ethical approach.

Guidelines:

- Neutrality: Avoid influencing participant responses
- Listening Skills: Allow pauses and fully hear responses before prompting
- Probing: Use follow-up questions to gain depth
 - e.g., "can you tell me more about that?"
- Managing Time: Keep the conversation moving while allowing space for detail
- Respect Boundaries: Participants may decline to answer any question

Example:

If a student hesitates when asked a question, you might say, "take your time," or "feel free to skip any questions you're uncomfortable with."

CONCLUSIONS & NEXT STEPS

Conclude each interview by summarizing the conversation and explaining what happens next.

Guidelines:

- Thank the participant sincerely
- Summarize key themes mentioned
- Explain how the findings will be used
- Provide follow-up information if appropriate

Example:

"Thank you so much for sharing your experiences. Your feedback will help shape leadership programs for future student leaders. We'll be compiling all feedback into a summary report later this semester."

ANALYZING & REPORTING INTERVIEW RESULTS

A systematic approach to analysis ensures meaningful use of the information gathered.

Guidelines:

- Use detailed notes, recordings, or transcripts
- Code responses by major themes
- Summarize common themes and highlight illustrative quotes
- Tailor reports to your audience

Example:

Summarize leadership interviews by categorizing responses into "Skills," "Challenges," and "Suggestions". Include impactful, direct participant quotes in the final report.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS & CONFIDENTIALITY

Maintaining ethical standards builds trust and protects participants.

Guidelines:

- Obtain informed consent before beginning the interview
- Keep responses confidential or anonymous whenever possible
- Avoid including identifiable information in reports
- Respect participants' rights to skip questions or end the interview at any time

Example:

"Your participation is completely voluntary. Your responses will be kept confidential and reported only in summary form."

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL EXAMPLE

Student Leadership Experience Interview

Welcome to the leadership interview! My name is [Name] and I am conducting this interview on behalf of the Division of Student Life. Thank you for taking the time to speak with us. The purpose of this interview is to better understand your experiences as a student leader at the University of Iowa. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes. Your responses are being audio recorded for future data analysis. To reiterate the informed consent form you signed prior to this interview, your participation is completely voluntary. You can skip any questions or leave the interview at any time. Your responses will be kept confidential and reported only in summary form.

1. What motivated you to take on a leadership position at the University of Iowa?
2. How would you describe your overall experience in your leadership role?
3. Can you share a memorable moment or accomplishment from your leadership experience?
4. What challenges have you encountered while serving as a student leader?
5. What resources, training, or support would have enhanced your leadership experience?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share about your leadership journey?

Thank you so much for sharing your experiences. Your feedback will help shape leadership programs for future student leaders. We'll be compiling all feedback into a summary report later this semester. As a token of our appreciation, we will be giving each of you a free University of Iowa t-shirt!