

Individual Interviews (semi-structured): A Quick Guide

A tool for gathering individual perspectives in educational research

IMPERIAL

Centre for Higher Education
Research and Scholarship

What is a semi-structured interview?

"In a semi-structured interview, the researcher not only follows some preset questions but also includes additional questions in response to participant comments and reactions..."

A strength of this approach is that it allows the researcher to decide how best to use the limited time available and keeps the interaction focused."

(Savin-Baden & Major, 2023: 359)

 There are also other interview formats, e.g. structured interviews where questions are fully scripted, and unstructured interviews where the discussion is fairly open. The researcher should choose the format most relevant for their research question and aim.

What is its structure and purpose?

 It's a qualitative research method - used to explore experiences, perspectives, and meanings in context and in depth.

 It follows pre-determined questions - but also allows flexibility for additional prompts and questions during the conversation.

 It captures insights from individuals - provides rich, detailed data from personal viewpoints that can reveal patterns and themes across participants.

1 START

Good Practice

Introduce yourself & your role



Explain purpose, topic & semi-structured nature



State expected duration & confirm consent for audio/ video recording



Provide reminders of key information: right to withdraw, data confidentiality & there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers



2 DURING

Maintain professionalism using appropriate tone & body language



Demonstrate active listening & gently prompt for deeper insights



Ask clear, neutral, non-leading questions



Be mindful of power dynamics & avoid coercion



3 CLOSE

Summarise key points, where appropriate



Invite any final thoughts



Explain next steps



Thank participant & remind them of their withdrawal rights & timeline

