



## 4.2 Interviews

Much of the discussion about focus groups, particularly on designing the interview guide and recruiting participants has relevance to interviews. In addition, though, researchers need to decide which type of interview is the most appropriate for the objectives of their research (Box 2).

### Box 2: Types of interview

**Standardised, structured interviews:**

Ensures that questions are asked in the same way across a sample population by different interviewers. But risks losing important, unanticipated information.

**Guided or open ended interviews:**

Keeps interaction focused, covering the same ground with respondent sets, while allowing individual experience to emerge. But cannot divert far, or long, from the agenda without losing part of 'the story'.

**Informal, conversational interview:**

Allow the interviewer to respond quickly to individual difference and situational changes. But a great deal of time is needed to get systematic information .

Source: Herriot Watt (2000)

Note: a life history interview can include elements of all three types of interview.

### 4.2.1 Undertaking interviews<sup>1</sup>

Conducting an effective interview requires skill in four key areas:

1. Listening
  - Sit or stand still where you are
  - Look at the speaker, make a note of non-verbal communication
  - Listen for basic fact and main ideas
  - Listen for attitudes, opinions, or beliefs
  - Do not interrupt the speaker
  - Use positive, non-verbal communication to prompt the speaker

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<sup>1</sup> This section draws from Higginbotham, J.B., and Cox, K.K. (Eds.) (1979) 'Focus Group Interviews: A Reader.' Chicago: American Marketing Association.



## 2. Paraphrasing

- Repeat your understanding of their comments in your own words
- Ask the speaker if what you have said is correct and ask for any clarifications
- Make sure key points by the speaker are captured
- Ask as a check to verify understanding
- It can be useful to summarise discussions onto flip charts (etc.) and points during the discussion. This allows participants to correct any misunderstandings, and also to discuss ideas disconnected from the original speaker. This may allow them to be more honest and/ or critical.

## 3. Probing questions

- Open probe: Questions that begin with how, what, which, when, and who. Effective to encourage responsiveness and reduce defensiveness.
- Compare and contrast: Questions which ask the other person to look for and discuss similarities or differences. These types of questions help the responder to develop and express ideas while allowing the interviewer to steer the direction of the interview.
- Extension: A question that builds on information already provided.
- Clarification: Questions designed to get further explanation about something already said.
- Laundry list: Techniques where the interviewer provides a list of choice options to the interviewee. This encourages the other person to see beyond a single choice and to state a preference.
- Imagining: Any question which allows the individual to imagine or explore an alternative reality by giving themselves a different viewpoint or perspective.

## 4. Note taking