

Interviews

Have a look at my notes but please remember that these are only my notes and are not a substitute for your own reading.

Interviews

1. Most widely used
2. They enable researchers to obtain more in-depth information

What is an interview

1. Similar to a conversation between a researcher and an informant (whom you interview on a number of occasions, a respondent you only interview once)
2. Some are conducted on the phone

Informal interviews

1. Few controls in these
2. They take place and are not organised or focused
3. They are used to introduce researchers to those being studied
4. They are conversations that help the researcher gain the confidence of the researched
5. Informant – person who conveys information to the researcher

Structured interviews

1. The researcher uses an interview schedule
2. This is a specific set of instructions which guides those who ask the respondents for answers

Semi-Structured

1. You have an interview schedule but it is not rigidly tied to this, and you can follow themes that emerge in a way that structured interviews tend not to do.

Why use interviews

1. The ways that exist to get information about people include

Observing what people do Asking them about what they do Analysing texts and artefacts produced by people – done when using textual analysis

2. Interviews allow us to find out about people's ideas, their thoughts, opinions, attitudes, and what motivates them
3. Observations – are often used alongside interviews
4. They are recorded – either written or using video or tape recorder

How to interview people

Anonymity

Need to tell them that no one else will connect their name to what they have said

Accuracy

1. They could be tape recorded or notes jotted down during the interview, or immediately after the interview. I suggest recording of the interview is best.

2. Try to record the date of the interview, where it took place, and who you interviewed, who was present etc. and any other observations that might have links to popular culture.
3. Also, ensure that you do have batteries, tapes and that the tape recorder or your phone works properly.

I remember conducting one interview, and the batteries were running out – it was impossible to make out what they were saying and it had been the waste of an hour.

Avoid leading questions

When you ask questions do not offer leading questions which push your respondents towards a particular answer. Even if you know your interviewee well, don't assume you know what they are going to say.

Have the informants define terms

Ask them what they mean by things that you are not familiar with - give their definition rather than yours. Don't suggest a definition but you can ask, did you mean... or can you explain...

More advice for interviewing people

1. Stay focused - if the informant gets off the track try and draw it back to the topic
2. Focus on getting more details

One way I try and get the topic back to what I want them to talk about is to say, that is interesting and then change tone slightly and ask a more relevant question or e.g. getting back to what you said earlier about XXX

3. Make sure your questions are clear - otherwise you will have ambiguous answers. Avoid jargon.

If they do not understand your questions, or the questions are fuzzy then they will not be able to supply the information you require

3. Ask for examples or amplification - try and get more details such as

Could you expand on that a little?
 Could you explain that to me – (I'm not sure I understand what you are saying)
 Could you give me some examples of what you mean – you might get more than one example, whereas if you ask for one example, you are likely only to get one!
 What was the result of XX
 Why – this is always useful to get people talking if they are being a bit quiet! (I have used why do you think that)
 Where did something happen, or who was involved etc

Questions before the interview

1. The semi-structured interview needs an interview schedule with a list of questions but you can be flexible on how these are asked
2. You will need to have thought about the questions to ask beforehand
3. Need to have title or heading for the interview, any instructions, list of key questions to be asked, follow up questions, comments and notes by the interviewer
4. The list of questions that you draw up in the interview schedule need to be logically thought out.

Non-judgemental

1. You should not suggest by the questions you ask, the tone of your voice, your facial expression or body language how you feel about the information that you are given by the informant
2. The respondent might stop giving information if you appear judgemental, or change what they are saying.
3. Sometimes using the phrase Uh-huh, nodding your head or saying I see is sufficient to continue. – It is recognised as keep talking!

Taking notes

Take notes – about matters that strike your attention e.g. whether the informant appeared nervous or relaxed, were there interruptions, distracting noises and music etc.

Be careful about this if it is distracting for the interviewee

Listen

1. Be a good listener – don't interrupt the informants or complete their sentences for them – you might think you know what they are going to say, but they might say something completely different to what you thought
2. Do not let your mind wander when you are listening?
3. Focus on their face and look attentive
4. Look at them when they are talking
5. Sometimes putting your head slightly to one side is suggestive of listening

Contradictions

1. People sometimes contradict themselves

People are contradictory – you cannot suggest to them that they said X before and now they are saying - you have to listen to what they are saying and work out later what changed their mind – or made them contradict themselves

Transcribing interviews

1. This takes a long time.
2. For every 1 hour of interview material it takes 2-3 hours to write this up.
3. You must put the transcribed (or written up) interview into an appendix
4. You need to make sure that the recording is destroyed once this is written up.

Making sense of the information

1. Need to have the interviews checked for accuracy
2. Need to look for information that will be useful
3. What information about people, practices, ideas, beliefs did you get
4. Need to classify and categorise the material in the transcripts and to see if there are any themes that you can use in relation to popular culture and identity or identities.

Need to get a sense of how the informant's mind works – how they make sense of their world in relation to popular culture. If you are unsure about this, do come and ask for guidance.

5. The process of finding categories and classification systems is done by coding

Coding

1. You have to make sense of the material you have
2. Look for patterns, classifications, themes and categories in the material
3. Come and ask if you need some guidance.

One way of understanding the interview material

Read the material and get an overview of it

Examine it carefully and look for the topics covered

Make abbreviations for each topic (I used different coloured marker pens for topics) and put down the appropriate abbreviation beside the corresponding material in the transcripts.

Then you need to go back to your initial definitions/theory and see how popular culture relates to identities or identity based on your abbreviations.

Problems

1. People may distort things; perhaps convincing themselves of a distortion to be true
2. People do not remember things accurately – memory might let them down; may fabricate the truth
3. People do not always have useful information – may have little of interest to say
4. People may tell you what they think you want to hear – want to give material that will be helpful, or they are bored and want the interview to finish
5. People use language in different ways – intended meaning may not be the communicated or articulated meaning

The meaning received or gained by the interviewer may be different from that intended by the interviewee

Use feedback – ask them if that is what they meant.

Statement which must be included

You must complete the relevant ethics forms – including seeking ethical approval and also the consent form. You need 2 copies of the consent form so that you keep one and the interviewee keeps one.

You can find these forms on my website <http://www.mediaandculturalstudies.co.uk/ethics/>

Writing the essay

1. Once you have transcribed your interview, you can then begin writing the essay. This is because you don't want to assume the themes that will emerge from the interview (even if you know the person well and may have an idea regarding what they will talk about).
2. Once you have identified the themes relating to identity/popular culture, you can begin the essay by highlighting those particular themes in relation to identity.
3. See the assignment examples and details.