

IN-DEPTH, SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS: A TYPOLOGY OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

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A [semi-structured interview](#) is conducted in order to glean insight into the firsthand experience of an interviewee (to better understand their experience with respect to an extreme event, for instance). Indeed, interviewees are often selected purposefully so that they can shed light onto a particular research problem or area of interest. This check sheet offers a typology of interview questions to help hazards and disaster researchers as they begin to construct an interview guide.

Typology of Interview Questions

Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) typology of interview questions is helpful for developing a comprehensive interview guide that can uncover what cannot be observed, such as their feelings, intentions, opinions, and state of mind. Below are some categories and examples or questions to consider for your interview guides.

Experience and Behavior Questions

- These questions elicit dialogue around things an interviewee did, including behaviors, actions, and activities.
 - For example: "Tell me about a typical day at work before the earthquake."
 - "What did you do during the earthquake?"
 - "How has your work routine changed since the earthquake?"

Opinion and Values Questions

- These questions can help you to understand an interviewee's beliefs or to garner their opinion about something.
 - For example: "What do you think about how municipal leadership has managed the emergency response?"

Feeling Questions

- This type of question helps you to understand whether the interviewee was or is anxious, happy, afraid, intimidated, confident, etc.
 - For example: "How did the earthquake make you feel when it was happening? How do you feel now that the shaking and aftershocks have stopped?"

Knowledge Questions

- This line of inquiry asks for an interviewee's factual knowledge about a situation.
 - For example: "From your expert vantage point as an engineer, why did the bridge fail during the earthquake?"

□ Sensory Questions

- This angle of questioning elicits specific information about what was seen, heard, touched, etc.
 - For example: “From what you could see and hear, how were people reacting during the earthquake?”

□ Demographic Questions

- This type of question yields demographic information, like age, gender, race/ethnicity, highest level of education, number of years of professional experience, etc. It is important not to assume the answers to any demographic questions, but rather ask them directly.
 - For example: “How long have you been working in the field of emergency management?”

REFERENCE:

Merriam, S.B., & Tisdell, E.J. (2016). *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation, 4th ed.* Jossey-Bass.

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