



# Interviewing Techniques: An Interactive Workshop

Carolyn Sullins, Ph.D.  
Senior Research Associate  
The Evaluation Center, WMU

# Structured Interviews

- Pre-determined questions with forced choice answers
- Appropriate for:
  - Large amounts of data that must be quantified
  - Large scale telephone surveys
  - Surveying people who are unable to utilize a written survey (young children; people with cognitive difficulties)
- Many semi-structured interviews may have some structured items

# Semi-Structured Interviews

---

- A general framework of open-ended questions, with room for follow-up questions
- Most formal interviews follow this
- Appropriate when:
  - Gathering qualitative information on specific topics
  - Want to stick with main topic, but can be open to new themes

# Unstructured Interviews

- Very loose framework, if any
- Appropriate in:
  - Brainstorming sessions
  - Participant observation
  - Spontaneous conversations that wind up being informative
    - “This is a very interesting topic. Would you mind if I took some notes (w/o your name...) for our report?”

# Important in ALL Interviews

- Establish rapport
- Clarify expectations
- Avoid leading questions
- Body language
- Facial expressions
- Tone of voice
- Member checking



# Put Yourself in Their Shoes

Interviewees may be:

- Anxious about how data may be used
- Eager to have opinions heard
- Annoyed about “Waste of time”



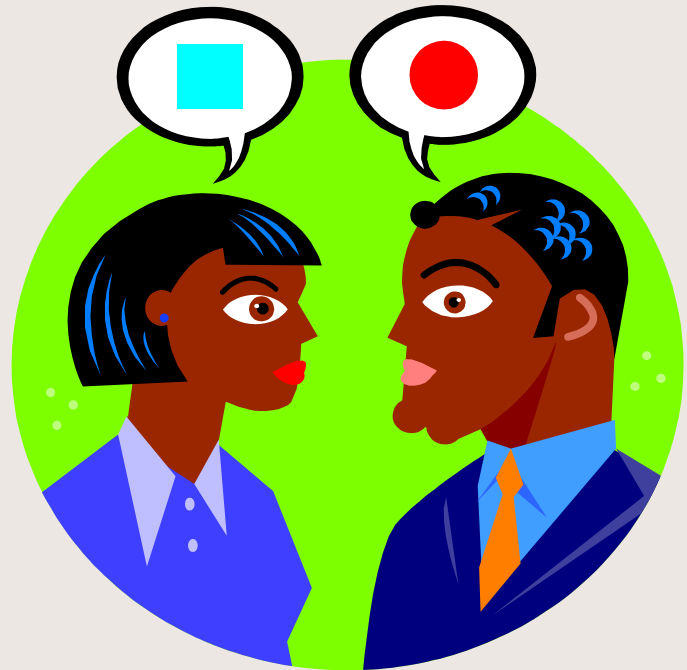


# Clarifying Expectations

- Purposes of interview
- Time commitment
- What types of questions you'll be asking
- Confidentiality
  - Who will have access to their interview data?
- Informed consent
- Voluntary participation

# Member Checking

- Repeating sections of interview back to interviewees for clarification
- Promotes authenticity of data
- Gives stakeholders some “ownership” of evaluation

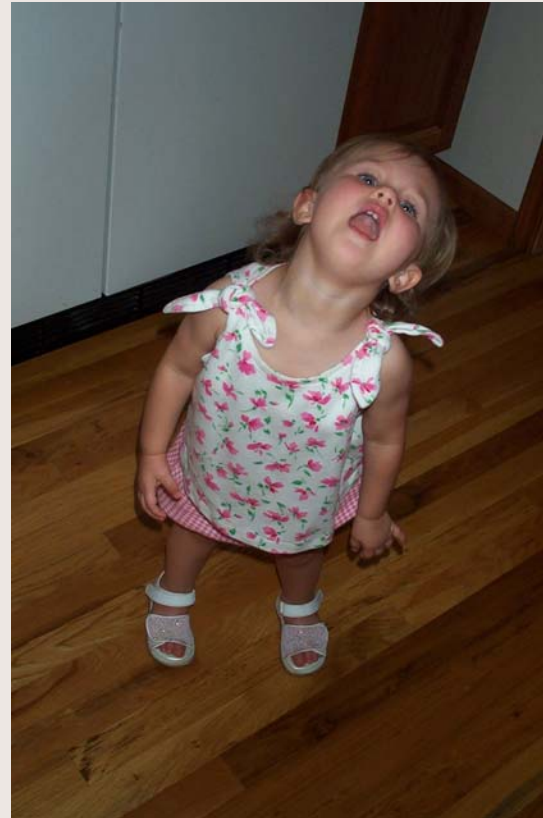




# Interview Challenges

Interviewees may:

- Ask you personal questions
- Withhold or distort information
- Change topics; ramble
- Become emotional



# Recommended Reading

---

Fontana, A., & Frey, J. (1994).

Interviewing: The art of science. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 361-376).

Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.