

Interview training for Young Researchers – Young People at a Crossroads project

Recap of part 2 of training

1. 'The one thing I wish I'd known'

Here are some tips about interviewing that the researchers shared from their own experience in the training session, and in a previous training session we ran in September. These tips can help you plan for your interviews:

Don't be afraid of silence in interviews. Sometimes interviewees need time to think about the questions and won't respond immediately. The temptation is often to jump in straight away with another question, but let people think (you could try counting to ten!). Another important tip is to look at their facial expression and if they look confused ask 'would you like me to reword the question or are you just thinking about it?'

Don't make your questions too complicated. Sometimes you can read by the expression on the interviewee's face that they are confused by the question. In this situation you can stop and ask 'would you like me to repeat the question?'. But it is good to try to avoid complicated questions to start off with. This is why it is helpful to ask someone else (the researcher, or maybe a friend or family member who you are not interviewing) to look over the questions and see if they understand them all. Then you can simplify any complicated questions if necessary.

Be flexible with your questions, and responsive to what interviewees say in the interviews. Sometimes we can be a bit too focused on the questions we want to ask, and we don't listen to interviewees' responses and follow up on things that they have said in their responses.

Group your interview questions into themes. This will help both you as an interviewee and the interviewer to follow the flow of the interview. You can say things like 'ok, we're going to move onto a few questions about X topic now' to signal that things are moving on.

Signal that the interview is coming to an end. This can help awkwardness at the end of an interview. You can say something like 'that was the end of my questions, but do you have anything that you want to ask, or do you have anything that you thought we would talk about and we haven't talked about it yet?' This can sometimes lead to new information that you didn't know you were going to get. Make sure you allow enough time for a response: if your interviewee has said they only have 45 minutes, don't ask the question at minute 44:30!

2. Interview tips, tricks and role plays

➤ Closed, open-ended and exploratory questions.

Closed-ended questions more often than not lead to a yes or no answer. Open-ended questions are more likely to make the person give a longer explanation or a story. Both types of questions can be useful, but too many closed-ended questions with someone who isn't very talkative can make it hard to make the conversation flow.

Let's imagine that we want to have a conversation about climate change in the country where they grew up. Have a look at these two questions and decide which is open and which is closed:

- Is there any climate change in the UK?
- How do you think climate change is most noticeable in the UK?

Another tricky thing about starting with a closed question is that the person might say 'no'. And because the whole interview is about climate change, it might make it harder to get started. Not impossible because you can always ask, 'why not?' 'Or do you think in the future it will?' But we don't really want to make it difficult for ourselves.

For that reason it is a good idea to have **exploratory questions** at the start. These are quite broad questions, that allow you and also the interviewee to discover what their points of view are. For example, rather than ask them how climate change is affecting the country where they grew up, you could start by asking them what they think is the most pressing environmental issue in the country where they grew up. In this question, you are not influencing the interviewees' response by assuming that climate change is the biggest problem.

It is important to have an open mind going into an interview and to be prepared that an interviewee might not say what you think they might say. We might think that climate change is the most important thing about the environment that is on everybody's mind, but you might find that your parent has a different opinion or observation.

Another important thing about exploratory questions is to be responsive to them. We might need to adjust our follow up questions to factor in what the interviewee told us in response to those exploratory questions. Perhaps have some phrases prepared that you could use like 'oh, that's interesting, I hadn't thought about that, can you tell me more?'

➤ **Leading questions**

Sometimes when we are super eager to get someone talking we might accidentally ask leading questions, e.g. climate change isn't really a problem in Australia, is it?

Humans are incredibly social creatures and we tend to want to agree with other people and not cause any conflict. While we interview people to hear their stories, it is quite likely that the interviewee, consciously or not, is actually just trying to figure out what you want to hear. When we ask leading questions, people are likely to confirm your point of view.

If you do realise you've asked a leading question, don't worry – even experienced researchers do this. We can also always remind people that we are very interested in their personal point of view and that there is no wrong answer. This is something we can also say right at the start of the interview before we ask any questions.

➤ **What to do when an interviewee goes off topic or keeps going for too long**

It is quite nice to have an interviewee who is eager to talk, but when you only have a set time for an interview you also want to make sure that what the person is talking about is going to help you answer your big question. We need smooth and polite ways to cut back in and keep people on track!

A good way to do this is to wait until they are at the end of the sentence or draw a breath, say something that responds to what they said, and then directly pivot. Examples:

RESPONSES

PIVOTS

That is so interesting.

Can you also tell me about...

Oh wow. I had no idea.

That actually brings me to my next question.

Thank you for that.

The project is actually very interested in.. .

Yes for sure, but I think we're getting sidetracked.

Let's move to the next question.

3. Trying out interviewing

In this part of the call, those present discussed their interview questions and tried out asking some questions. Some key points that came from this part of the call were:

- Start with more general questions and only move onto more specific questions as the interviewee gets warmed up. The five 'questions to start you off' shared on the handout from week 1 would be good questions to start with in your interview.
- Think about who you are interviewing and what they are interested in. If you have a family member who is interested in politics or gardening or community organising (for example), ask about these things. If your family member isn't very interested in these things (even if you are), it may be better to avoid asking too many questions about this.
- Think about the countries that family members are talking about, and any questions that could be sensitive – e.g. asking about political events in a relatively less democratic country.
- If you are going to talk about current events (either in the country where the family member grew up or in the country where you live now), it may be helpful to show some news headlines or photos that family members can respond to. This could take the pressure off them feeling that they need to be up to date with current news and events.
- Try to get interviewees to talk about their personal responses and feelings about current events/topical issues. For example, if you want to ask how well they think a particular country's government has responded to climate change, first ask them what action *they* would like to see on climate change, what *they* think the priorities should be and why. Once they have shared that, you can then ask them how well they think their government has acted in comparison to what they have said they think should happen. By starting off with their own ideas, this will again take the pressure off feeling like they need to know a lot of information about the government's climate change policies.
- If you need to jump in to interrupt an interviewee who is talking for too long, it is good if you can acknowledge what they were saying, and perhaps use something from what they said to get them back on track – e.g. 'you mentioned climate change education, could you tell me more about this?'

If you couldn't attend the interview training session, or if you want to have some further practice of your questions, please get in contact with Catherine.

4. Practicalities for the interview

We know you will very likely be keen to get on with your interview, but please don't do this before discussing this with the researcher as we need to be there to record it and to support you!

Timings – you should agree with your parent in advance how long you would like to interview them for. It is good to allow up to one hour, even if you don't use all this time. Discuss with your parent when the most convenient time would be for them (i.e. a time when they don't have other responsibilities and can relax and talk).

In terms of the **number of questions** you ask, think about how much your parents like to talk, and which questions they are likely to say more on (although this may not be what you think!).

A great tip overall is to have more questions than you think you'll need, but to prioritise the questions that you think are most important so that you ask them first.

Online or in person?

We want the interview to be something that both you and your parent enjoy. Have a think about whether you would prefer to do the interview online or with the interviewer present in person.

If the interview was *online*, it would be over Zoom and you could suggest the time. You and your parent could be in a comfortable place at home talking to one another with a laptop next to you (you wouldn't need to face the screen), and the interviewer would join by Zoom and record the interview. It would be better if you had your camera on for this. Alternatively, if it is more convenient for you and your parent to join the call separately (e.g. if your parent is travelling), then you could do a three-way Zoom call with you, your parent and the researcher joining separately.

If the interview was *in person*, this could be at home, in a room on the University campus, or in an outdoor space such as a park – bearing in mind what is allowed in terms of covid-19 restrictions at the time. You could suggest the time and place, and the interviewer would come along and record the interview. If you think you would rather do the interview this way, the researcher will go through a covid-19 risk assessment with you and your parent before the interview.

How you do the interview is completely up to you. The most important thing is that everyone feels comfortable. It is also important to think about how the place of the interview could affect how the interview goes, e.g. think about distractions at home, and the different dynamic between an online and an in person interaction.

Please let the researcher know if you will be doing the interview in a language other than English, so we can arrange translation if necessary.

5. The role of the researcher

This is your interview, but the researcher will be there to support you.

The researcher *will*:

- Coordinate the time and place of the interview
- Look over your questions in advance of the interview *if you wish* and give advice
- Introduce the research project at the start of the interview
- Record the interview with you and your parents' permission
- Ask any follow up questions or 'probes' either during or at the end of the interview (you can discuss with the researcher in advance about how you want them to do this)

The researcher *may*:

- Take some notes during the interview
- Stop the interview or intervene if there is any reason for this, and talk to you both about whether you wish to continue

About a week after your interview, the researcher will talk to you and your parent together for around 30 minutes about how you both found the interview and what you felt you learned.

And finally: If you have any questions about anything, please contact Catherine or Ellen . We're always happy to hear from you!