

# Interviewing

Resources and Communities Research Group | 2019

# Agenda

Overview of interviewing: the what, when, where, how and why

Practice: Childhood bedroom activity

Discussion: open Q&A

# What is an interview

A conversation between (usually two or more) people with the goal of discovering something [an opinion, a perspective, information about a phenomenon of interest...]

# Why use interviews?

Core method of social science [how we build theory]

Good for:

- Capturing a range of characteristics and/or implications of categories
- Exploring perceptions, perspectives, opinions
- Fill in/detailing/mapping out context...uncover the messiness/contradictions
- Capturing unwritten knowledge/'truth'
- Understanding individuals lives w/ common characteristics
- When you want the respondent to have flexibility in responding
- Building a research network, group of informants

Knowing this, why might you want to use interviewing in your research project?

# Who should you interview?

Depends on your research questions...

- People who are knowledgeable about a subject
- People who have experience with a phenomenon
- People whose opinions/perspectives you are interested in
- People you want to engage in your research project; or who know other people who want to engage in your research project

Who are some people that you might want to consider interviewing?

# What types of interviews can I use

## **STRUCTURED**

*Which of the following organizations do you go to for information?*

## **SEMI-STRUCTURED**

*What are the main natural resource challenges this community is facing?*

## **UNSTRUCTURED / OPEN-ENDED**

*What was it like to grow up here?*

Also...

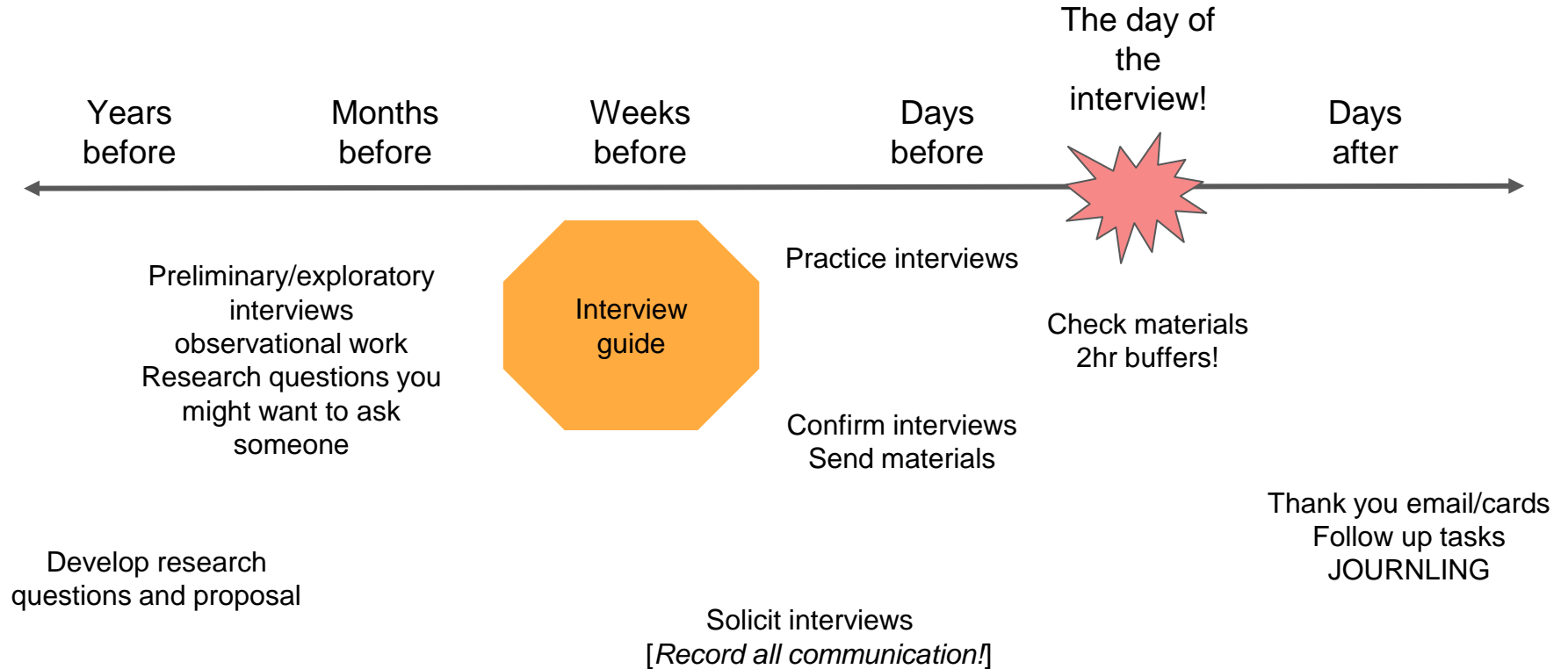
- Focus groups [semi-structured group interviews]
- Oral histories [focused, open-ended]
- Hybrid qual/quant: q-method, delphi surveys, etc.



# How do I know what to ask?

- Preparing an interview guide
  - A list of questions that you want to ask someone
  - Consider:
    - What you are studying
      - What do already \*know\* from the literature
      - What does other research say about our question?
    - The order of questions matters (more on that in a few slides)
    - Do you need to ask everyone the same question? Or do different people need different questions?

# The interview timeline



What is an interview guide?

# How do I contact potential participants?

Dear Greg,

My name is Katie Epstein, and I'm a graduate student at Montana State University in Geography. I'm researching private land and range management and how landowners manage for wildlife like elk.

As part of this project, I'm investigating important sources of information for new private landowners. I recognize the critical role that real-estate agents play in introducing landowners to property and potentially to ranch management, some for the first time and Sandra from the Gallatin Land Trust recommended you to me as someone with insight on and experience with first time ranch buyers.

Given your deep experience working with landowners and your expertise in farm and ranch properties, would you be willing to participate in an interview for this study?

The interview will be confidential and last approximately an hour. My goals are to learn more about what types of property new landowners are interested in and how they learn about conservation and/or wildlife management practices. I would also be grateful for your perspective on how you see trends in private land management and ownership unfolding here in the Greater Yellowstone.

My hope is that findings from this study will increase understanding of private lands and the critical role they play in conserving Montana's natural resources.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

***Who I am and what I am doing. Describe the project in one sentence.***

***How am I choosing my interview subjects. How did I get Greg's contact info.***

***Why do I want to interview Greg.***

***What is Greg in for with this interview and what kinds of questions will I be asking.***

***Why should Greg care about this research. (Taylor answer to participant)***

# The interview, part 1: Preparing your kit

Dress code - Know your audience

Materials –

- Notepads
- Extra pens
- Recorder (check batteries!)
- Paper copies interview guide
- Printouts/pdfs of important resources you might want to share



# The interview, part 2: The setting

## Zoom

- Make sure your participants know “where” to meet you and when
- Practice with the platform
  - Mute, record, etc.
- Know where/how to ‘save’ your data
  - Who will transcribe your data?

THE FAR SIDE® BY GARY LARSON



“Anthropologists! Anthropologists!”

# The interview, part 3: Starting the conversation

“The hook” - establish early rapport and trust by explaining

- Who you are
- What you are doing
- Why it's important
- Why it's **CRITICAL** your interviewee is a part of your project

The legal stuff

- Get consent for recording
- If applicable, introduce recorder and/or note taking strategy



# The interview, part 4: The Question Wave

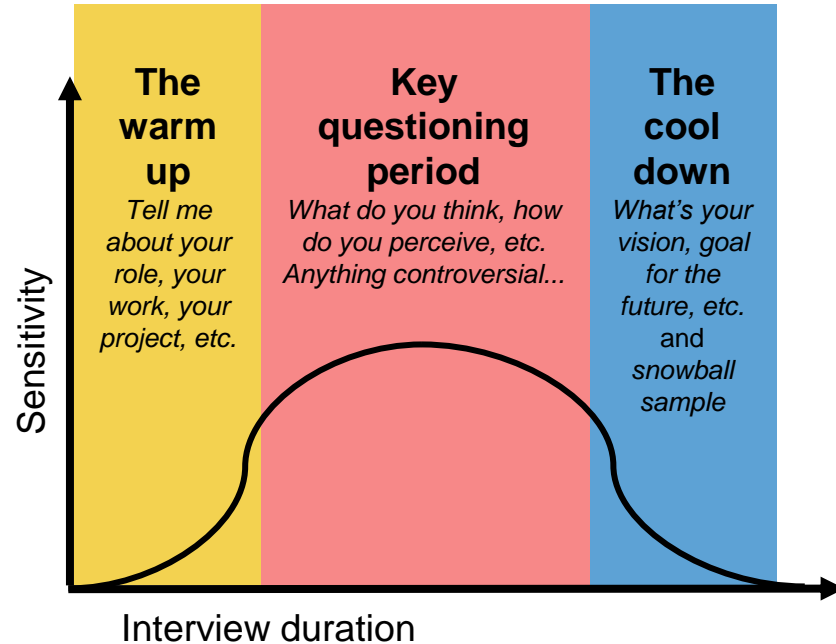
*Especially important for semi-structured & unstructured/open-ended...*

## The warm up

- Non-violent communication (Bourdieu: “its a social relation”)
- Start broad and general

## Key questioning period

- Avoid yes/no and leading questions: “Don’t you think that...”
- Confirm your own perceptions: “So what I’m hearing is..”; “It sounds like...”
- Instead of “what do you mean”, ask for examples
- Prompt, probe, pivot
- Channel your NPR hero: Meghna Chakrabarti, Terry Gross, etc.





# The interview, part 5: Tying it all up

## The cool down

- Snowball sampling: “Who else should I talk to?”; “Can you help me reach them?”
- Describe how you will communicate with them again: send a report, email newsletter, etc.

## Back at the ranch...

- Write all your notes down
- Put the recording online, labeled with code in a separate folder
- Thank you cards

# Big takeaway: Interviewing is its own research skill!

Writing good questions doesn't necessarily make you a good interviewer

*The best interviewers:*

Make people feel comfortable

Make the conversation interesting to both parties

Are genuinely curious about people (or fake it really well)

Like talking and also *\*really\** like listening

# Core skill: Listening

What makes a good listener?

Get into groups of two and take a few minutes to practice interviewing --

The topic is: Childhood bedrooms

Each person takes turn 'interviewing' the other about their childhood bedroom for 3 minutes – and then switch.