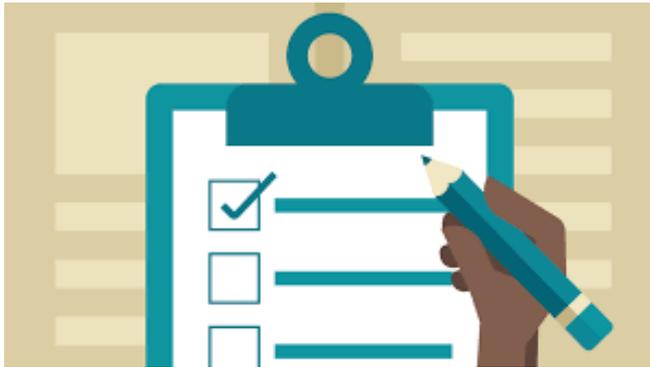


Qualitative Data Collection Methods- 1



Learning Objectives

After this lecture, you will be able to:

1. Identify various data collection approaches in qualitative research.
2. Describe the types of qualitative research interviews.
3. Differentiate between different types of qualitative research interviews.
4. Describe qualitative guideline development.
5. Identify advantages and disadvantages of telephone interviews.
6. Describe the challenges of qualitative interviews.

Lecture outline

- ❑ Definition of qualitative interviews.
- ❑ Types of qualitative interviews.
- ❑ Interview schedule development.
- ❑ The Ten Commandments of Interviewing.
- ❑ Quality of interviews.
- ❑ Challenges of interviews.

Qualitative Data Collection Methods

Interviews

Focus Groups

Observation

Interviews

- Interviewing may be defined simply as a conversation with a purpose. Specifically, the purpose is to gather information.
- The interviewer asks questions and the interviewee, called the informant, the respondent, or sometimes the subject, provides the answers.



What do we mean by interview?

- Interview method is the art of questioning and interpreting the answers (Qu & Dumay, 2011).
- Advantages
 - ❖ Use of open-ended questions gives participants the opportunity to respond in their own words, rather than forcing them to choose from fixed responses.
 - ❖ They allow the researcher the flexibility to probe initial participant responses - that is, to ask why or how. Thus aid in further elaboration on their answers (Stuckey, 2013).

Why interviews can only give us perspectives of events?

- As with all other forms of data collection, interviews are well suited for certain purposes and poorly suited for others.
- The data that one collects through interviews is in the form of words, not actions, and are shaped by the perspectives of the respondents.
- You can ask people about things that they don't really know, and you can get answers this way, but those answers won't really be valid data on the topic.
- In contrast, you can ask people what they think about things that they don't really know and they will tell you what they think. That is good data, not about the topic, but about how people think about the topic.

Why interviews can only give us perspectives of events?

- Let us consider the sorts of things people can reliably discuss in an interview. They can give us their thoughts and feelings on a topic, though it is often difficult to really articulate one's feelings.
- They can tell us how they remember behaving sometime in the past, or how they intend to act in the future, they can tell us why they think or act the way they do, although those descriptions are not likely to be precisely accurate.

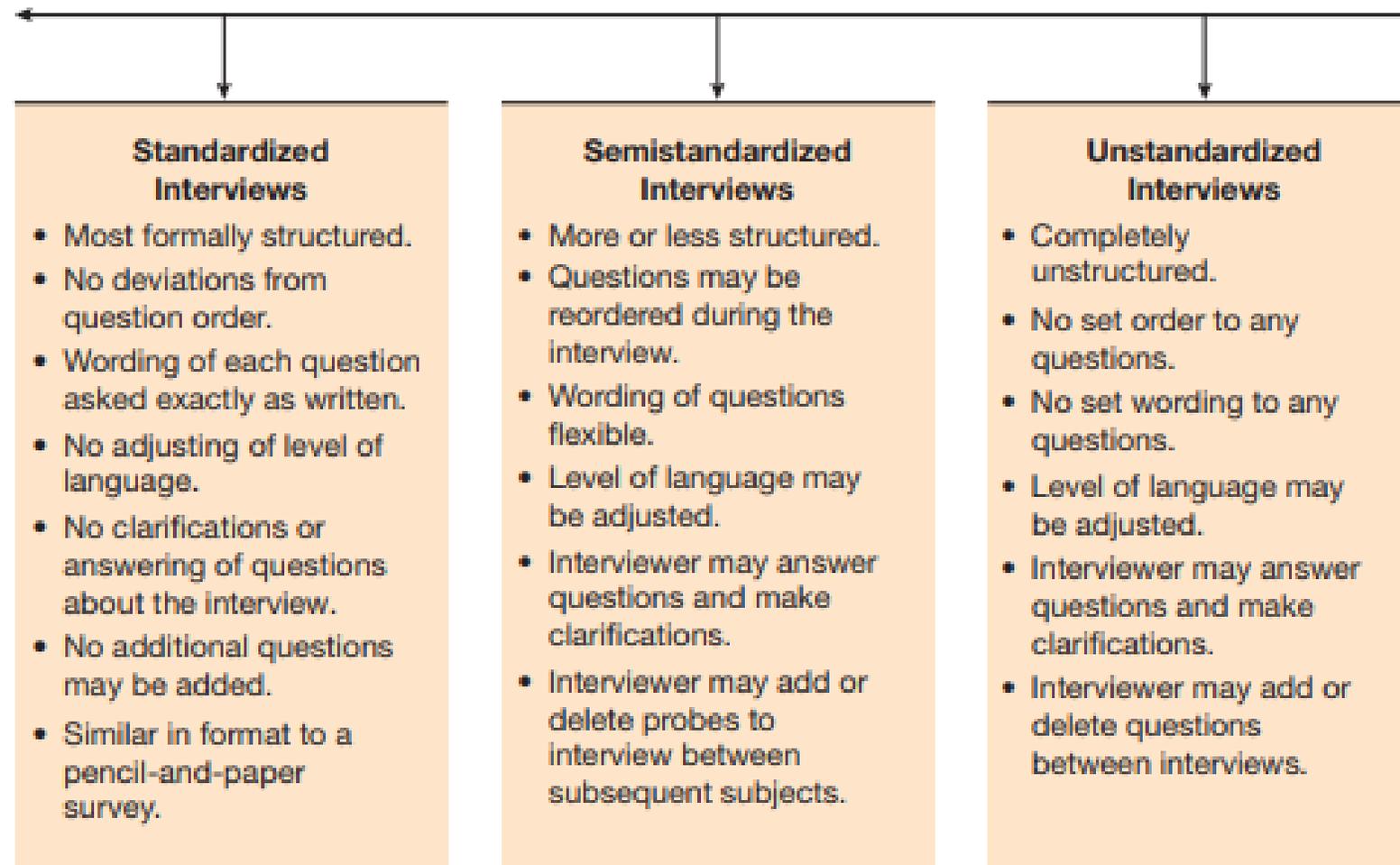
Why interviews can only give us perspectives of events?

- So interviews can give us a glimpse into how people think they think. We can address preferences and intentions.
- We can ask people what they want, what they like, or what they feel good or bad about.
- You can learn about the narrative structure by which someone makes sense of the events of their life. But you cannot call that the “true” story of those events.
- They form one story, from one perspective. Interviews give us that perspective.

Interviews

- Interviews can take place in an individual (one to one) or a group setting (focus group).
- Types of individual interviews:
 - Structured (formal, standardized).
 - Unstructured (informal, non standardized).
 - Guided Semistructured (focused, semistandardized).
- The major difference among these different interview structures is their degree of rigidity with regard to presentational structure

Figure 4.1 Interview Structure Continuum of Formality



Structured (standardized) interviews

- Structured interviews (standardized) (Qu & Dumay, 2011)
 - The interviewer asks interviewees a series of pre-established questions.
- The structured (standardized interview) uses a formally structured “schedule” of interview questions, or script. The interviewers are required to ask subjects to respond to each question, exactly as worded.
- The rationale here is to offer each subject approximately the same stimulus so that responses to questions, ideally, will be comparable.
 - The questions would be asked in the same order for all respondents.
 - Structured interviews are rigid as the interviewer reads from a script and deviates from it as little as possible.
 - Since researchers take a very active role in question design, there is a possibility that they inadvertently or overtly bias data collected.
 - Highly standardized procedures are designed to substantially reduce the probability of the results being influenced by the interviewer’s bias.

Structured (standardized) interviews

- Standardized interviews are useful when the data to be gathered concerns tangible information such as recent events or relatively simple matters of opinion.
- They are also a preferred method when multiple interviewers or teams are to conduct comparable interviews in different settings.
- Keeping each interview on the same track makes it possible to aggregate the data despite differences among the interviewers or the subjects.

Structured (standardized) interviews

- In sum, standardized interviews are designed to elicit information using a set of predetermined questions that are expected to elicit the subjects' thoughts, opinions, and attitudes about study-related issues.
- A standardized interview may be thought of as a kind of survey interview.
- Standardized interviews measures tangible facts, without further probing questions about informants' thoughts or interpretations.
- Standardized interviews are frequently used on very large research projects in which multiple interviewers collect the same data from informants from the same sample pool.
- This format is also useful for longitudinal studies in which the researcher wishes to measure, as closely as possible, exactly the same data at multiple points in time.

A typical standardized interview schedule might look like this job history:

1. At what age did you get your first full-time job?
2. What was the job?
3. How long did you work there?
4. Did you have another job offer at the time that you left this job?
5. What was your next full-time job?
6. How long did you hold that job?
7. How many times, if ever, have you quit a job?
8. How many times, if ever, have you been laid off?
9. How many times, if ever, have you been fired from a job?

Structured (standardized) interviews-

Example of interview guide (schedule)

- What do you think is the most effective way of assessing a child's pain?
- Have you come across any issues that make it difficult to assess a child's pain?
- What pain-relieving interventions do you find most useful and why?
- When managing pain in children what is your overall aim?
- Whose responsibility is pain management?
- What involvement do you think parents should have in their child's pain management?
- What involvement do children have in their pain management?
- Is there anything that currently stops you managing pain as well as you would like?
- What would help you manage pain better?

Unstructured (unstandardized) interviews

- More flexible , do not use predefined questions.
- Synonyms: Informal conversational interview, and ethnographic interview (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).
- Rely entirely on the spontaneous generation of questions in the natural flow of an interaction (Patton, 2002).
- Can be considered as a natural extension of participant observation, because they so often occur as part of ongoing participant observation fieldwork (Patton, 2002).
- It is accepted that the structure of the interview can be loosely guided by a list of questions, called an aide memoire or agenda (McCann & Clark, 2005).
- Aide memoire or agenda is a broad guide to topic issues that might be covered in the interview, rather than the actual questions to be asked.
- Unlike interview guides used in structured interviewing, an aide memoire or agenda doesn't determine the order of the conversation and is subject to revision based on the responses of the interviewees (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).
- Note-taking is a traditional method for capturing interview data. But in an unstructured interview, note-taking is likely to disrupt the natural flow of the conversation. Thus, when possible, it is preferable to audio record the interviews by tape or digital recorder (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

Unstructured (unstandardized) interviews

- No specific questions need to be scripted. As much as possible, the interviewer encourages the informant to lead the conversation. In place of an “interview schedule,” researchers prepare a looser set of topics or issues that one plans on discussing, possibly with a preferred order in which to address them.
- These “interview guidelines” serve as notes, or possibly a checklist, for the interviewer. One way or another, by whatever route you and your informant follow, the guidelines indicate the subject matter that you intend to cover.

Unstructured (unstandardized) interviews

- Naturally, unstandardized interviews operate from a different set of assumptions than those of standardized interviews.
- First, interviewers begin with the assumption that they do not know in advance what all the necessary questions are. Consequently, they cannot predetermine a complete list of questions to ask.
- They also assume that not all subjects will necessarily find equal meaning in like-worded questions—in short, that subjects may possess different vocabularies.
- Rather than papering over these individual differences, by forcing each interview down the same path, an unstandardized interview encourages and pursues them.

Unstructured (unstandardized) interviews

- The individual responses and reactions are the data that we want.
- The unstandardized interview process is much more like a regular conversation in which the researcher responds to the informant as much as the other way around.
- Or to think of that differently, the subject determines the flow of topics, rather than the interviewer.

Unstructured (unstandardized) interviews

- The prepared guidelines keep the conversation heading in the right direction while the details are generated in the verbal exchange itself.
- The interview is therefore like an improvised performance in which the performers have agreed in advance on the underlying themes and purposes, but left the details to be worked out in the moment.

Unstructured (unstandardized) interviews

- Loosely structured interviews are sometimes used during the course of field research to augment field observations.
- For example, Diane Barone (2002) undertook a field study that examined literacy teaching and learning in two kindergarten classes at a school considered to be at risk and inadequate by the state. Barone conducted observations in the classrooms and wrote weekly field notes. In addition, however, she included ongoing informal interviews with the teachers throughout the yearlong study.
- Such unstructured interviews, or conversations, permit researchers to gain additional information about various phenomena they might observe by asking questions.

Unstructured (unstandardized) interviews

- Unstructured interviews are optimal for dynamic and unpredictable situations, and situations in which the variety of respondents suggests a wide variety of types of response.
- Consider the following two hypothetical answers to the same question.

Interview 1

- Interviewer: What do you plan to do when this job draws to a close?
- Respondent: Well, I have a few options that I'm looking into, but I might just use the downtime to finish my training certification.

Interview 2

- Interviewer: What do you plan to do when this job draws to a close?
- Respondent: Why do you need to know that?

Unstructured (unstandardized) interviews

- Whereas highly structured interviews assume that the researchers and informants share a system of meaning, researchers undertaking loosely structured interviews typically seek to learn the nature of the informants' meaning system itself.
- Instead of assuming that our questions mean the same thing to all subjects, we explore the meaning that each subject brings to or discovers in the questions.
- The basic framework of questions that you have prepared only serves to open the doors to an entirely different discussion. With an unstructured approach, that can lead to a successful interview of surprising richness.
- And surprises are good, because we then learn about important aspects of our topics that we had not known at the start.
- Of course, not all surprises or forms of improvisation are without risk, which is one reason that IRBs are often quite uncomfortable with unstructured interview approaches.

Challenges of unstructured interviews

- **Requires a significant amount of time to collect the needed information** (Patton, 2002).
 - Especially when the researcher first enters the field and knows little about the setting.
 - Because each interview is highly individualized, the length of each unstructured interview session also might be longer than structured interviews.
- **The challenge for researchers to exert the right amount and type of control over the direction and pace of the conversation** (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).
 - When a new topic emerges in the discussion, it is difficult for the researcher to know whether to follow it and risk losing continuity, or to stay on the major theme and risk missing additional useful information (Patton, 2002).
- To develop your skills in controlling unstructured interviews, both training and experience are important (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).
- **Analysing the data gathered by unstructured interviews** (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).
 - The questions asked in each unstructured interview were dependent on the context of the interview and so can vary dramatically across multiple interviews.
 - Different questions will generate different responses so that a great deal of effort has to be made to analyse the data systematically, to find the patterns within it (Patton, 2002).

Semi-structured (semi-standardized interviews)

- Semi structured (Semistandardized) interview can be located somewhere between the extremes of the completely standardized and the completely unstandardized interviewing structures.
- This type of interview involves the implementation of a number of predetermined questions and special topics.
- These questions are typically asked of each interviewee in a systematic and consistent order, but the interviewers are allowed freedom to digress; that is, the interviewers are permitted (in fact, expected) to probe far beyond the answers to their prepared standardized questions.
- Certain assumptions underlie this strategy. First, if questions are to be standardized, they must be formulated in words familiar to the people being interviewed (in vocabularies of the subjects).

Guidelines Development -Question order (Sequencing), Content, and Style

- The specific ordering (sequencing), phrasing, level of language, adherence to subject matter, and general style of questions may depend on the backgrounds of the subjects, as well as their education, age, and so forth.

- Additionally, researchers must take into consideration the central aims and focuses of their studies.

Guidelines Development -Question order (Sequencing), Content, and Style

- there are no hard-and fast-rules or rigid recipes for sequencing questions in an interview schedule.
- However, as many writers recommend, it is good to begin with questions that will be fairly easy for the subject to answer, and which are largely questions that are not sensitive or threatening (Grinnell & Unrau, 2005; Trochim, 2005).
- demographic questions are frequently about educational levels, date of birth, place of residence, ethnicity, religious preferences, and the like. Many of these sorts of demographic questions are regularly asked and are likely to receive quick responses with no sense of threat or concern on the part of the interviewee.
- The underlying rationale for this sort of a question sequencing is that it allows the interviewer and the participant to develop a sense of rapport before more serious and important questions are asked.
- As well, it fosters a degree of commitment on the part of the interviewee, since he or she will have already invested some time in the interview by answering these easy questions.

Guidelines development -Question order (Sequencing), Content, and Style

- Of course, you do not want to delay getting into the more important material for too long.
- At the least, you risk establishing a pattern of short questions and short answers that may discourage deeper responses when you need them. At worst, informants may feel ambushed or coerced when you finally get past the easy part and spring some more threatening questions on them.
- But even where the most important questions are not threatening at all, you might have established an undesirable pattern if you had begun with a series of short, irrelevant questions.
- For this reason, it might be best to begin with simple questions that are very much part of the research itself, and not waste your opening on minor details that you already know or don't need

Guidelines Development -Question order (Sequencing), Content, and Style

- The following suggests a general sequencing of types or categories of questions for a semi standardized interview:
 1. Start with a few easy, nonthreatening questions.
 2. Next, begin with some of the more important questions for the study topic (preferably not the most sensitive questions)—the questions should stick to a single concept or topic.
 3. More sensitive questions can follow (those related to the initiated topic).
 4. Ask validating questions (questions restating important or sensitive questions, worded differently than previously asked).
 5. Begin the next important topic or conceptual area of questions (these may include the more or most sensitive questions).
 6. Repeat steps 3 and 4, and so on, through your major topics.
 7. Return to any key concepts that you might have had to bypass or skim through when they first came up.
 8. End by filling in any remaining simple factual points that you have not already recorded

Guidelines Development -Question order (sequencing), Content, and Style

- It is also important to note that each time you change from one topical area to another, you should use some sort of a **transition**.
- This may be a clear statement of what is coming next, such as: “Okay, now what I’d like to do is ask some questions about how you spend your leisure time.” Or, “The next series of questions will consider how your family feels about voting.”
- The logic here is to assure that the interviewee is aware of what specific area he or she should be thinking about when answering questions, and to signal an end to the previous topic even when the informant might have more to say.
- Such transitions allow the interviewer to lead the direction of the conversation without taking too much initiative away from the informant.

Guidelines Development -Question order (Sequencing), Content, and Style

- In order to draw out the most complete story about various subjects or situations under investigation, four types or styles of questions possibly written into the interview instrument:
 1. Essential questions.
 2. Extra questions.
 3. Throwaway questions.
 4. Probing questions.

Essential Questions

- Essential questions exclusively concern the central focus of the study.
- They may be placed together or scattered throughout the survey, but they are geared toward eliciting specific desired information (Morris, 2006).

Extra Questions

- Extra questions are those questions roughly equivalent to certain essential ones but worded slightly differently.
- These are included in order to check on the reliability of responses (through examination of consistency in response sets) or to measure the possible influence a change of wording might have.
- For example, having earlier asked an informant something general, such as, “How well do you get along with members of your family,” you might want to return to the subject by asking, “Are there people in your family who you particularly look forward to seeing, or seriously dread seeing?.”

Throwaway Questions

- Frequently, you find throwaway questions toward the beginning of an interview guideline instrument.
- Throwaway questions may be demographic questions or general questions used to develop rapport between interviewers and subjects.
- You may also find certain throwaway questions sprinkled throughout a survey to set the interviewing pace or to allow a change in focus in the interview.
- Throwaway questions, as the term implies, are incidental or unnecessary for gathering the important information being examined in the study. Nonetheless, these throwaway questions may be invaluable for drawing out a complete story from a respondent

Throwaway Questions

- On occasion, throwaway questions may serve the additional purpose of cooling out the subject (Becker, 1963; Goffman, 1967).
- On these occasions, a throwaway question (or a series of them) may be tossed into an interview whenever subjects indicate to the interviewers that a sensitive area has been entered upon.
- The interviewer offhandedly says something to the effect of, “Oh, by the way, before we go any further, I forgot to ask you. . . .” By changing the line of questions, even for only a few moments, the interviewer moves away from the sensitive area and gives the interviewee a moment to cool down.
- This change in focus from sensitive issues to simple facts may also help to remind your informants that your goal is to collect information, not challenge, judge, or argue with them. (Of course, as the interviewer you also need to remember that, and avoid reacting emotionally to statements with which you disagree.)

Throwaway Questions

- Throwaway questions are not the only technique for reacting to emotional tension in an interview, and may not be the best.
- At times, it is better to address the matter directly. For example, if you perceive that your respondent is getting agitated or defensive with some line of questioning, you might consider saying, “I hope these questions aren’t inappropriate,” or “I am getting the sense that you’re not entirely comfortable with what I’m asking. Is there a different way of thinking about this topic that I haven’t considered?”
- In either case, you acknowledge what appears to be a real emotional response on the part of the respondent and offer them the chance to redirect the conversation, up to a point.
- Pressuring a respondent to answer questions that they don’t want to answer is only likely to get you false or highly edited responses. People aren’t going to tell you things that they don’t want to tell you. But if you can redirect the flow of conversation onto more comfortable grounds, or work to establish a more trusting rapport, you can often continue to discuss the same topic without such tensions. Again, there is a degree of art to the performance

Probing Questions

- Probing questions, or simply probes, provide interviewers with a way to draw out more complete stories from subjects.
- Probes frequently ask subjects to elaborate on what they have already answered in response to a given question.
- For example, “Could you tell me more about that?” “How long did you have that?” “What happened next?” “Who else has ever said that about you?” or, simply, “How come?”
- For example, if an informant is telling stories about things that happened without much examination of the meanings of the events, the interviewer can toss in the occasional “how did that work out for you?” or “why not?” to encourage more reflection from the informant.

Probing Questions

- Lofland and Lofland (1984, p. 56) wrote the following:

In interview[s] . . . the emphasis is on obtaining narratives or accounts in the person's own terms. . . . You might have a general idea of the kinds of things that will compose the account but still be interested in what the interviewees provide on their own and the terms in which they do it. . . . If something has been mentioned about which you want to know more, you can ask, "You mentioned _____; could you tell me more about that?" For things not mentioned, you might ask, "Did _____?" or "Was _____ a consequence?"

Probing Questions

- In standardized or semistandardized interviews, researchers incorporate a structured series of probes triggered by one or another type of response to some essential question.
- In nonstandardized interviews, it is still worthwhile to anticipate patterns of responses and to have in mind the kinds of probes that will encourage further elaboration, often by echoing back to the informant ideas that they have offered up themselves.
- Probes, then, are intended to be largely neutral. Their central purpose is to elicit more information about whatever the respondent has already said in response to a question

Wording of Questions

- In order to acquire information while interviewing, researchers must word questions so that they will provide the necessary data.
- Thus, you must ask questions in such a manner as to motivate respondents to answer as completely and honestly as possible.
- As in the saying about computers, “garbage in, garbage out (GIGO),” so it is in interviewing. If the wrong questions are asked, or if questions are asked in a manner that inhibits or prevents a respondent from answering fully, the interview will not be fruitful—garbage will come out.
- We can think of our questions as invitations to the informants to speak their minds.
- We conduct interviews in order to learn what people think, not to tell them what we think.

Wording of Questions

- Among the more common problems that arise in preparing guidelines or schedules is the double-barrelled question.
- This type of question asks a subject to respond simultaneously to two issues in a single question.
- The logical solution to the double-barrelled question is to separate the two issues and ask separate questions.
- Keeping questions brief and concise allows clear responses and more effective analysis of the answers.
- If you ask a subject about two things at once, he or she will tell you about the second of them, losing sight of the first.

Communicating Effectively- why effective communication is essential in research?

- Perhaps the most serious problem with asking questions is how to be certain the intentions of the questions have been adequately communicated.
- Researchers must always be sure they have clearly communicated to the subjects what they want to know.
- The interviewers' language must be understandable to the subject; ideally, interviews must be conducted at the level or language of the respondents.

Pre-testing the schedule

- Once researchers have developed their instrument and are satisfied with the general wording and sequencing of questions, they must pretest the schedule. Ideally, this involves at least two steps.
- First, the schedule should be critically examined by people familiar with the study's subject matter— technical experts, other researchers, or persons fitting the type to be studied.
- This first step facilitates the identification of poorly worded questions, questions with offensive or emotion-laden wording, or questions revealing the researchers' own biases and personal values.

Pre-testing the schedule

- The second step in pretesting before the instrument can be used in a real study involves several practice interviews to assess how effectively the interview will work and whether you will obtain the information you seek.
- You should record and transcribe the practice interviews and compare the transcripts to the interview guidelines.
- Make note of any point at which you had to clarify or repeat a question; you may want to modify the wording.

Pre-testing the schedule

- At what points, if any, did your subjects become reticent, angry, defensive, or otherwise upset?
- Those sections might need to be moved, reworded, regrouped, or more carefully introduced.
- There might be follow-up questions that you found useful in more than one interview. They should probably be added to the guidelines.
- In general, look for evidence that your research subjects were more or less motivated, more or less likely to go off topic, or likely to give very short answers.

Pre-testing the schedule

- Most importantly, look for signs that your questions had a different meaning to your subjects than that which you intended.
- Finally, you should code the practice interviews as you would any “real” data and attempt to analyse the patterns of responses.
- Ask yourself whether, if you had more data like this, you would know how to answer your research question.
- A careful pretest of the instrument, although time consuming in itself, usually saves enormous time and cost in the long run.

Pre-testing the schedule

- The following questions may guide assessment of interview schedule (Chadwick, Bahr, & Albrecht, 1984):
 1. Has the researcher included all of the questions necessary?
 2. Do the questions elicit the types of response that were anticipated?
 3. Is the language of the research instrument meaningful to the respondents?
 4. Are there other problems with the questions, such as double meaning or multiple issues embedded in a single question?
 5. Are the questions in logical order?
 6. Finally, does the interview guide, as developed, help to motivate respondents to participate in the study?