

## [Home](#)

[Beginning Research](#) | [Action Research](#) | [Case Study](#) | [Interviews](#) | [Observation Techniques](#) | [Education Research in the Postmodern](#)

[Evaluation Research in Education](#) | [Narrative](#) | [Presentations](#) | [Qualitative Research](#) | [Quantitative Methods](#) | [Questionnaires](#) | [Writing up Research](#)

# Interviews in Education Research

Materials originally prepared by Professor Andrew Hannan.

Now led by Liz McKenzie.

© A Hannan, Faculty of Education, University of Plymouth, 2007

## CONTENTS

- [A. INTRODUCTION](#)
- [B. HOW TO USE INTERVIEWS IN EDUCATION RESEARCH](#)

[1. Why should I use interviews rather than some other device for data collection?](#)

[2. Whom should I interview?](#)

[3. How will I get access?](#)

[4. What questions should I ask?](#)

[5. How should I phrase my questions?](#)

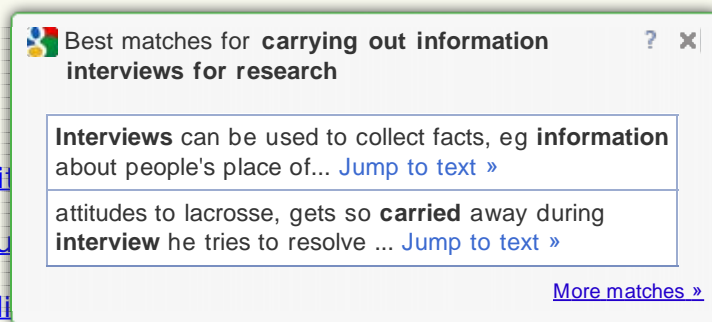
[6. What techniques should I use get the best quality?](#)

[7. How do I decide on what form of interview to use?](#)

[8. What about group interviews or 'focus group' discussions?](#)

[9. How will I record the interview?](#)

[10. How do I analyse the data?](#)



Best matches for **carrying out information interviews for research**

**Interviews** can be used to collect facts, eg **information** about people's place of... [Jump to text »](#)

attitudes to lacrosse, gets so **carried** away during **interview** he tries to resolve ... [Jump to text »](#)

[More matches »](#)

[11. How do I write up the findings?](#)

[12. What should I avoid?](#)

- [C. EXAMPLES](#)
- [D. TASKS](#)
- [E. FURTHER READING](#)

## A. Introduction

1. Interviews can be used to collect facts, eg information about people's place of work, age, etc., but such questions are usually no more than opening items which precede the main substance. The bulk of interview questions seek to elicit information about attitudes and opinions, perspectives and meanings, the very stuff of much of both psychology and sociology. Interviews are also in common use as a means of selection - for entry to school or college, getting a job or obtaining promotion. They are widely used because they are a powerful means of both obtaining information and gaining insights. We use them because they give us an idea of 'what makes people tick', of the personality and the motivations of the interviewee.
2. Interviews are available in a range of styles, some of which are pre-packed and mass marketed so they can be more or less picked off the shelf. If you have ever been stopped in the high street to be quizzed about your use of toiletries, you'll know what a closed-ended, structured interview feels like on the receiving end. Social scientists make similar use of tightly controlled pre-set interviews which have been piloted on sample groups to test their efficiency and accuracy before being tried out on larger populations.
3. These structured interviews in their simplest form are sometimes little more than oral questionnaires - used instead of the written form in order to obtain a higher response rate or with respondents, especially children, who might not be literate or capable of correctly completing a complex questionnaire.
4. At the opposite extreme in interview design are completely unstructured conversations between researcher and respondent, where the latter has as much influence over the course of the interview as the former.
5. There is a half-way house, where the researcher designs a set of key questions to be raised before the interview takes place, but builds in considerable flexibility about how and when these issues are raised and allows for a considerable amount of additional topics to be built in in response to the dynamics of conversational exchange. These are known as semi-structured

interviews. They are the form most often used in education research.

## B. How to use interviews in education research

One way to proceed would be to ask yourself the following series of questions:

### 1. Why should I use interviews rather than some other device for data collection?

Try and generate your own lists of what interviews are good at (strengths) and what they are not good at (weaknesses). Compare your lists to those I've compiled by clicking [here](#). Carefully consider the nature of your research question and the resources you have available - would it be better to use other data collection techniques, eg a questionnaire or participant observation? Could you use a variety of methods to triangulate, ie to elicit information by means of a number of different devices so as to be more confident of its accuracy? Interviews are a very useful means of inquiry, but they do not fit all circumstances. For a critique from a postmodernist perspective, see Scheurich (1995) and [Case Study 3](#) from the RESINED component on [Education Research in the Postmodern](#).

Beware of the fact that interviews themselves are contrived, artificial situations and that interviewees often respond to them in a manner that reflects this. Thus, they may describe what they do in terms that they think you will recognise, making full play of theoretical concepts intended to impress you, or describe what they think they should be doing rather than what they actually do. Teachers interviewed about their pedagogic styles often respond with descriptions drawn from the 'educationist context' that are very different from the manner in which they may be observed to operate in the 'practitioner context' of the classroom.

To contextualise all this in your own context, make a case for choosing interviews as a data collection technique for your own research project, perhaps referring to the literature on research methodology (see section [E. Further Reading](#) for some suggestions). Consider possible criticisms of your choice.

### 2. Whom should I interview?

As in all surveys (using either questionnaire or interview as the means of data collection), you should attempt to obtain as big a response as possible. However, as your survey is using a research instrument that is time-intensive, you will probably be considering a limited number of cases, chosen for particular interest. Your cases are more likely, for example, to be individual teachers than whole school staffs. You'll be looking to pick out those who can provide the best insights, who represent the full range of experience and opinion, who can be said to be typical if you claim representativeness or to be illustrative of certain types if you want to explore theoretical models. You may decide to interview just those you consider to be the most important informants, the most powerful or, perhaps, the least. You may have little choice but to use an 'opportunity sample', ie the people who happened to be available. Whatever choice of sample you make you need to justify it, ie to make a case to the reader who examines your results that he/she has good grounds for taking your findings seriously in terms of their representativeness.

Peter Woods discusses sampling in qualitative research in education in his RESINED component on [Qualitative Research](#):

---

Where qualitative research is seeking to generalise about general issues, **representative** or **'naturalistic' sampling** is desirable. This covers places, times and persons. Thus, if we

were studying teachers' or pupils' perspectives, or the culture of a group, we would need to consider them in different settings, since behaviour can differ markedly in different situations - for example, the formal circumstances of a teacher's classroom or office, the staffroom, different classrooms, the informal ambience of a pub, and the personal stronghold of the teacher's home. The same point applies to time. Weekly and yearly cycles, for example, are critical in schools. If our research sampled at just the beginnings and/or ends of terms, weeks or days, we would end up with a distorted study if we were to claim our results applied more generally. Again, if we are seeking to represent a group in our findings (the 'English Department', the 'Year 10 Girls'), we should ensure that we have sampled across that group according to some appropriate criteria, such as age, gender, ethnicity, experience.

Representative sampling cannot always be achieved in qualitative research because of a) the initially largely exploratory nature of the research; b) problems of negotiating access; c) the sheer weight of work and problems of gathering and processing data using only one set of eyes and ears. Often, one has to make do with an **opportunity sample** in those areas where access is offered; or a **snowball sample**, where the sample is developed through personal contact and recommendation as the research proceeds. In these cases, the basis of the sampling must be made clear and no inappropriate generalising claims made for the findings.

For a discussion of survey research from a largely quantitative perspective, visit <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/survtype.htm>

For advice on using personal interviews in survey research of this kind, visit: <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/interview.htm>

For information about sampling in large-scale surveys, visit: <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/sampling.htm>

All these links take you to *The Research Methods Knowledge Base, 2nd Edition*, Trochim, William M. Internet WWW page, at URL: <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/> (version current as of September 24, 2004).

### 3. How will I get access?

Generally speaking, people are quite flattered by attention and this sometimes overcomes any inhibitions so that matters quite secret are paraded before the interviewer with seeming abandon. At other times, particularly where an issue has been the subject of recent press attention, the shutters go up and there is no way in. All you can do in such circumstances is to give up and try something else likely to be more productive - you haven't the time to spend on lengthy negotiation. Crucial to the business of initially gaining access is the whole matter of assurances of confidentiality, anonymity, etc, as set out in your **ethics protocol** (see <http://www.edu.plymouth.ac.uk/resined/beginning/begressed.htm#Ethics>). It is advisable to produce an easily readable version of your ethics protocol that you can send in advance or provide for your informants before you begin the interview. They should feel happier telling you all they know if they are confident that you won't use the information in any way that will harm them, that you will respect confidentiality, that you will seek their approval before using anything that might reveal their identity, that you will provide them with a transcript or a copy of your notes, that you will show them how you intend to make use of what they've said in the report you write (perhaps giving them the power to respond or withdraw their statements), that you will stop the recording at any point if requested, etc. It's up to you which of these or other promises you might make, but it's best to have them up front so that the nature of the contract between you as information seeker and provider is

explicit from the beginning. For examples of ethics protocols visit:

<http://www.edu.plymouth.ac.uk/resined/beginning/four%20examples%20of%20ethics%20protocols.doc>

It is not at all easy to get access to the **perspectives of subordinates**, eg if you are a headteacher wanting to know if an appraisal scheme is working well from the viewpoint of heads of department, a teacher wishing to interview pupils about their preferred learning styles or a lecturer who wants to know what your students think about life in college. As a powerful actor, the responses of others to your questions will inevitably reflect their views of you, what they think you want them to say and what they think might be the consequences of their answers. Interviews reveal identities and the lack of anonymity limits openness. Questionnaires, however, can be anonymous and might be preferable if you are trying to get at the truth, eg if you want to evaluate your teaching by asking learners to rate your effectiveness. To some extent you can overcome some of the limitations of interviews in such circumstances if you make cast-iron promises on confidentiality, if you 'triangulate' by collecting information about the same issues using other devices (eg through observation, questionnaire survey and interview) or, more radically, if you get the informants to interview one another on your behalf. Andrew Pollard (1985, p57) did the latter in his own PhD research:

My concern to understand children's perspectives meant that I had to find a way of collecting data which minimised the possible distorting effect of being seen as a teacher. ... the key procedure which I adopted, of working with a team of child interviewers, requires a brief description here. The crucial initiative was to start a dinner-time club for fourth-year children concerned with 'finding out what children think about school'. The children who came to the club regularly called it MID, the Moorside Investigation Department, and it seemed to capture their imagination. Club members invited other children to be interviewed, initiated discussions and emphasised the 'top secret' and confidential nature of the activity. After a period in which confidence and trust developed I became more involved and worked alongside the child interviewers. Interviews were recorded on cassettes and later transcribed. The children also discussed many elements of my analysis with me as it emerged.

## 4. What questions should I ask?

When thinking about the questions to be posed in an interview, you should have in mind the overall research questions with which you are concerned.

- The fundamental question that must then be asked is, **what are you trying to find out?** Every interview must have a purpose, ie it must draw from some underlying hypotheses about what are the important facts or opinions and even make some predictions about which facts may be relevant in explaining the opinions expressed.
- **Write your own rationale**, in terms of statements like, 'I need to know whether or not senior members of staff are more likely to support the moves to introduce appraisal and what reasons they have for the positions they express. I need to find out why junior staff seem opposed, ie are they misinformed about the nature of the reforms or are they protecting weaker colleagues from what is seen as scapegoating in an under-funded profession of whom too much is demanded with too little support?'
- This can be developed so as to **produce a justification for every question used**, eg 'I asked this so as to probe the extent to which those of various positions in the hierarchy valued staff consensus and the feeling of shared purpose, with the intention of seeing whether those who were strongly committed to such views were also more or less opposed to staff appraisal'. If you can't come up with a good rationale, drop the question.

## 5. How should I phrase my questions?

### a) Bias versus rapport

On the one hand you will want to avoid bias, to be careful not to ask questions in such a way that you lead respondents into providing confirmation of your own views rather than eliciting theirs. You will need to be conscious of the interviewee's probable wish to please you, to defer to your expertise, to seek your (nodded) approval. On the other hand, you will want to get the best possible responses by creating a positive relationship with the person with whom you are talking, building up some empathy and developing rapport. This is a fine line to tread! Ideally, interviewers should be monitored in some way to ensure that they do not overstep the mark. If you are part of a team, this can be done by attending one another's interviews or listening to recordings (or watching video recordings). You should at least give the reader the chance to assess possible influences of this kind by providing the questions posed as well as the answers they obtained when presenting your findings.

### b) Thought-provoking questions

At least some of your questions should be designed so as to promote thought. Harold Silver used the following questions in the [Innovations in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education](#) project at the end of interviews to get the informants to relax a little, step back from the immediate and the detailed and think about the longer term:

(To a lecturer in an interview about introducing new methods of teaching in HE )

If you were enjoying your retirement on a desert island, sipping a martini, looking back on your time here, would you say you were an innovator and if so, why?

(To a senior manager)

If you were invited to speak at an international conference about innovation in teaching and learning in this university would you attend and if so, what would you speak about?

### c) Difficult topics

Sometimes you will need to use what Wragg (1978) calls 'protective techniques' to handle difficult topics. He gives a number of examples, including the following (p 19):

- **'Guess who' technique** - A researcher investigates under-age smoking. He knows that few children will admit to it, so he says, 'Guess who this describes. This person often smokes secretly. Without telling me the names look through this class list and tell me how many people it might be'. If a whole class come up with a number like 12, 13 or 14 the investigator would have a rough idea of how many were involved without anyone having given away his friends.

- **Critical event** - When people talk about some issues their language is often vague. For example, teachers often talk about classes being 'busy' or someone 'having a firm grip'. A clearer picture of what this means can emerge if the person is asked to describe a few 'critical events', ie things which happen in a lesson which indicated that the class was 'busy' or that a certain teacher had 'a firm grip'.

## 6. What techniques should I use get the best quality answers?

Peter Woods has the following advice to give those undertaking *unstructured interviews* in his RESINED component on [Qualitative Research](#), much of which can also be applied by those making use of *semi-structured interviews*:

Attention will be paid to where the interview is held, arrangement of seating, how the researcher dresses, manner of approach, all in the interests of equality. There might be a certain amount of pleasant chat before getting into explaining what the research is about. If rapport has been established, there should not be a difficulty in getting people to talk. The problem, rather, might be that they talk too inconsequentially, or off the subject, or vaguely. There are a number of techniques researchers use in the natural course of the conversation to aid clarity, depth and validity. Here are some:

- check on apparent contradictions, *non sequiturs*, imbalance, implausibility, exaggerations, or inconsistencies ('Yes, but didn't you say a moment ago...?' 'How can that be so if...?' 'Is it *really*?' 'Does it necessarily follow that...?' 'Why?' 'Why not?' 'What was the point of that?');
- search for opinions ('What do you think of that?' 'Do you believe that?');
- ask for clarification ('What do you mean by...?' 'Can you say a little more about...?' 'In what way?' 'Can you give me some examples?');
- ask for explanations, pose alternatives ('Couldn't one also say...?');
- seek comparisons ('How does that relate to...?' 'Some others have said that...');
- pursue the logic of an argument ('Does it follow, then, that...?' 'Presumably,...?');
- ask for further information ('What about...?' 'Does that apply to...?');
- aim for comprehensiveness ('Have you any other...?' 'Do you all feel like that?' 'Have you anything more to say on that?');
- put things in a different way ('Would it be fair to say that...?' 'Do you mean...?' 'In other words...?');
- express incredulity or astonishment ('In the *fourth* year?' 'I don't believe it!' 'Really??');
- summarise occasionally and ask for corroboration ('So...?' 'What you're saying is...?' 'Would it be correct to say...?');
- ask hypothetical questions ('Yes, but what if...?' 'Supposing...?');
- play devil's advocate ('An opposing argument might run...?' 'What would you say to the criticism that...?').

The researcher engages in 'active' listening, which shows the interviewee that close attention is being paid to what they say; and also tries to keep the interviewee focused on the subject, as unobtrusively as possible. Something of the researcher's self - perhaps involving some similar or contrasting experiences to those of the interviewee - is also put into the interaction in the interests of sustaining rapport and encouraging more discussion. In this sense, the unstructured interview is a process of constructing reality to which both parties contribute.

---

Using other forms of data to prompt discussion in an interview (eg information taken from observation, a questionnaire or a diary) can also be very useful. For information about this method, known as 'Interview Plus', see [http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/lex\\_method\\_final.doc](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/lex_method_final.doc)

## 7. How do I decide on what form of interview to use?

Peter Woods, again in his RESINED component [Qualitative Research](#), discusses the three major varieties of individual interview:

---

A great deal of qualitative material comes from talking with people whether it be through formal interviews or casual conversations. If interviews are going to tap into the depths of reality of the situation and discover subjects' meanings and understandings, it is essential for the researcher:

- to develop empathy with interviewees and win their confidence;
- to be unobtrusive, in order not to impose one's own influence on the interviewee.

The best technique for this is the **unstructured interview**. Here, the researcher has some general ideas about the topics of the interview, and may have an aide memoire of points that might arise in discussion for use as prompts, if necessary. But the hope is that those points will come up in the natural course of the discussion as the interviewee talks. Care is needed, therefore, to avoid leading questions or suggesting outcomes, and skill is called for in discovering what the interviewee really thinks. The researcher aims to appear natural, not someone with a special role, but one who engages with interviewees on a person-to-person basis. ....

As with observation, it may be that the researcher begins with a more focused study and wishes to know certain things. In these cases a **structured interview** might be more appropriate. Here the researcher decides the structure of the interview and sets out with predetermined questions. As with systematic observation, this is less naturalistic. Within the spaces, the same techniques as above might apply, but there is clearly not as much scope for the interviewee to generate the agenda. For this reason, some researchers use **semi-structured interviews** - interviews which have some pre-set questions, but allow more scope for open-ended answers.

Both kinds of interview might be used in the same research. For example, the initial stage of a project might be exploratory and expansive. But once certain issues have been identified, the researcher might use more focused interviews. They are still grounded in the reality of the situation.

---

Fundamentally, then, the degree to which the interview is structured, ie the extent to which the content and order of questions are pre-determined, depends on the nature of the research itself and



the overall approach to be adopted.

## 8. What about group interviews or 'focus group' discussions?

Click [here](#) to see notes on using **focus groups** in education research prepared by Professor Rosemary Deem, then of the Department of Educational Research of Lancaster University and now of the University of Bristol (used with permission). I also recommend that you should read Wilson (1997) and, in particular, pages 72-82 in *A Student's Guide to Methodology*, by Clough & Nutbrown (2002).

For further advice visit: [Conducting Focus Groups](#).

An example of an agenda for a focus group discussion is given in [C. Examples](#), below.

## 9. How will I record the interview?

Remember that the more you succeed in **recording** every possible detail of what took place, the more data you will have to analyse. It is all too easy to be swamped by too much information and there is a danger that you will miss seeing the wood for all the trees. Audio-recordings are easy to make now that we have mini tape recorders and sensitive microphones, but transcription can be very time-consuming (often taking four times as long as the interview itself). Video-recordings have the advantage of capturing facial expressions, etc, but it's difficult to get both interviewer and interviewee and the problems don't end there as the researcher still has to find a way of coding visual data (not an easy task!). It should also be taken into account that those you wish to interview may be more reluctant to take part or to reveal their true thoughts the more thorough the recording technique. Interviewees frequently say much more once the tape recorder has been switched off, or give an entirely different view when having a chat over a cup of tea in the staffroom than they do when confronted with a microphone.

On the other hand, relying on what you have remembered from **unrecorded conversations** is likely to be unreliable to some extent, although the sooner you can write down what you've heard the better (distinguishing between verbatim and summarised statements wherever possible). You may not get the precise wording right, but you may get insights in this manner that you would not obtain in more formal contexts. However, given the circumstances of the data collection, you may not be able to attribute the source of such information or you may have to get your informants to approve your use of such material.

Many experienced interviewers rely on **taking notes** whilst the interviews are taking place. Sometimes this is done with the aid of pre-determined categories for possible responses that the interviewer merely has to tick, but to which can be added additional observations. In my own research, I have developed a very effective method of note-taking that relies on a shorthand that only I can decipher, which includes both verbatim quotations of the more 'juicy' statements and paraphrased summaries of the positions taken by the interviewee. I take these notes whether or not I am also tape-recording the conversation. That way, I still have some record if the machine fails (not switched on, batteries flat, volume too low, tape put in the wrong way around, etc). If I have both my notes and the tape I can save myself some time when transcribing by listening for the bits I already know to be important. I have found that interviewees seem to make allowances for my note-taking, giving me time to jot things down and generally pacing themselves to my benefit.

You can, of course, pay for or persuade someone else to do your **transcribing** for you. However, this isn't as simple as it seems since an outsider is unlikely to be as familiar as you with the context and will not recognise the jargon used. Such transcripts often have to be extensively corrected by

the researcher re-playing the tape to plug up on gaps and pick up on mistakes. Full transcriptions are also often very long, including much information that isn't necessary.

The biggest advantage of doing the transcription yourself is that you know what's being discussed. It is possible for you to replay tapes making notes as you go summarising the points made and then pausing the tape, rewinding and writing out verbatim those bits that are of particular interest. A transcription machine, involving pedal controls to free the hands for typing, etc., helps a great deal. You also get to know the data better the more you listen, constructing categories as you go and analysing what has been said as part of the process of testing and generating hypotheses.

Click [here](#) to read *Tinkering with Transcriptions* by Phil Bayliss, a very useful and interesting discussion about transcribing.

In any case, I strongly recommend that you **pilot** your schedule and test your method of recording before you undertake your project itself. It is also a good idea to undertake some preliminary analysis of the data collected in a pilot so that you know you are getting the sort of information you need.

## 10. How do I analyse the data?

Excellent advice on this is given by Peter Woods in his RESINED component [Qualitative Research](#) in section 3 on [QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS](#). This includes several examples of **interpretative analysis**, based on actual interviews.

There are lots of **software packages** which facilitate content analysis of interview responses (see <http://www.soc.surrey.ac.uk/caqdas/>). **Weft QDA** is a free qualitative analysis software application - 'an easy-to-use tool to assist in the analysis of textual data such as interview transcripts, written texts and fieldnotes', which can be downloaded from <http://www.pressure.to/qda/>. **N6** and **NVivo** are provided over the University of Plymouth server to all networked PCs. If you can't find these via Start > All Programs > Software M to O > N > N6 or NVivo 2 try installing via Start -> Settings -> Control Panel -> Run Advertised Programs. Copies of the CD-ROM for home installation can also be obtained via the library (Media Services counter at Exmouth).

Generally, with or without the help of computer software, you will need to sort answers into **analytical categories** in order to undertake content analysis of the different points made. In practice this meant that every statement has to be analysed for content and placed under an appropriate heading, along with any others which are sufficiently similar. These may then be grouped under more general umbrella headings to produce the description of points made with reference to their nature, range and frequency. For an example drawn from the [Innovations in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education](#) project, see [C. Examples](#), below.

A description of '**Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**' as a method for analysing interview data may be found at:

[http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/programmes/elearning\\_pedagogy/lex\\_method\\_final.doc](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/programmes/elearning_pedagogy/lex_method_final.doc). To see how findings from such an analysis are presented visit:  
[http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded\\_documents/LEX%20Final%20Report\\_August06.pdf](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/LEX%20Final%20Report_August06.pdf).

## 11. How do I write up the findings?

I recommend combining the content analysis of responses in terms of their nature, range and frequency (quantitative) with illustrations drawn from the data of particularly significant examples (qualitative). If you just give the latter you may be accused of 'cherry picking', ie of selecting

quotations designed to reinforce your case. Of course, interview transcripts or notes are by their nature bulky and you may not be able to give them all in your research report. However, you may be able to give the data collected in one more particularly significant interview in your appendices so that the reader has a chance of checking your interpretations and selections against their source. For more help, consult the RESINED component on [Writing Up Research](#).

## 12. What should I avoid?

Ted Wragg (1978, p 20) gives the following list of stereotypes to avoid:

**The ESN Squirrel** Collects tapes of interviews as if they are nuts, only does not know what to do with them other than play them back on his Hi-Fi.

**The Ego-Tripper** Knows in his heart that his hunch is right, but needs a few pieces of interview fodder to justify it. Carefully selected quotes will do just that, and one has no idea how much lies on the cutting room floor.

**The Optimist** Plans 200 interviews with a randomly selected group of secondary school Heads by Xmas. Is shortly to discover 200 synonyms for 'get lost'.

**The Amateur Therapist** Although ostensibly enquiring into parents' attitudes to lacrosse, gets so carried away during interview he tries to resolve every social/emotional problem he encounters. Should stick to lacrosse.

**The Guillotine** Is so intent on getting through his schedule he pays no attention to the answers and chops his respondents short in mid-sentence. (He actually does manage to do 200 interviews by Xmas.)

---

## C. Examples of interview schedules (lists of questions or topics to discuss)

Click on the examples given below:

1. [Market research interview](#) (extract)
2. [Structured interview](#) (extract)
3. [Schedule for semi-structured interview](#) from the [Innovations in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education](#) project
4. [Agenda for a focus group discussion](#) from the [Innovations in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education](#) project
5. [Example of analysis](#) from the [Innovations in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education](#) project

Also, *The Question Bank* at <http://qb.soc.surrey.ac.uk/> has many examples of lists of questions used in structured interviews, which it calls 'questionnaires'. It's a good place to look for examples, which you can normally use without worrying about copyright (although you will need to acknowledge the sources in the normal fashion).

## D. Tasks

Tasks, once completed, should be sent to [resined@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:resined@plymouth.ac.uk), making clear:

- which **component** it is from;
- which **task** it is (B or C);
- the name of your dissertation **supervisor**.

It will then be passed on to the component leader (and copied to your supervisor). The component leader will get back to you with comments and advice which we hope will be educative and which will help you in preparing your dissertation proposal once you are ready. (Remember that these tasks are formative and that it is the proposal which forms the summative assessment for the MERS501 (resined) module.) This email address is checked daily so please use it for all correspondence about RESINED other than that directed to particular individuals for specific reasons.

### TASK B (DATA COLLECTION)

- Design your own interview 'schedule' (a list of questions or topics to discuss) on a topic of your choice, describing the target group **and** providing a draft ethics protocol (getting informed consent, being honest, not forcing anyone to take part, giving participants the right to withdraw, protecting them from harm, feeding back the results, maintaining confidentiality).

**I STRONGLY RECOMMEND that the 'ethics protocol' for which you seek approval should take the form of the document you intend to issue to potential participants in order to obtain informed consent, which would cover issues such as confidentiality, right to withdraw, feedback, etc as appropriate. The examples referred to in the Ethics section in the '[Beginning Research](#)' component are statements of this kind.**

### TASK C (DATA ANALYSIS)

- When you have received feedback from the component tutor, pilot your interview with a group of at least three respondents and record the responses in whatever way you think best.
- Undertake an analysis of the data (with or without the help of a computer).

## E. Further Reading

### CD-ROM

Barrett, Elizabeth; Lally, Vic; Purcell, S & Thresh, Robert (1999) *Signposts for Educational Research CD-ROM: A Multimedia Resource for the Beginning Researcher*. Sage Publications, London.

Find the section on Interviews, by going to the 'Departure Lounge', clicking on 'Ready to Depart', then 'Travelogues' (on the world map) and finally 'Interviews'.

Bell, J (1999) *Doing Your Research Project* (3rd edition), Buckingham, OUP - for details click [here](#)

Clough, P & Nutbrown, C (2002) *A Student's Guide to Methodology*, London, SAGE

Cohen, L ; Manion, L & Morrison, K (2000) *Research Methods in Education* (5th edition), London, RoutledgeFalmer - for details click [here](#)

Denscombe, M (2003) *The Good Research Guide: 2nd edition*, Buckingham, OUP - for details click [here](#)

Drever, E (1995) *Using Semi-Structured Interviews in Small-Scale Research: A Teacher's Guide*, Edinburgh, Scottish Council for Research in Education. For details visit:  
[http://www.scre.ac.uk/cat/res\\_guides.html](http://www.scre.ac.uk/cat/res_guides.html)

Mason, J (2002) *Qualitative Researching*, London, Sage (chapter 4 contains some useful advice for interview design and how to ensure that the questions you use are consistent with the research design and theoretical framework you employ).

Pollard, A (1985) *The Social World of the Primary School*, London, Cassell.

Radnor, H (1994) *Collecting & Analysing Interview Data*, University of Exeter, Research Support Unit, School of Education.

Scheurich, J J (1995) A postmodernist critique of research interviewing, *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 8, 3, 239-252.

Wengraf, T (2001) *Qualitative Research Interviewing*, London, Sage. For details search by author at:  
<http://www.sagepub.co.uk/>

Wilson, V (1997) Focus Groups: a useful qualitative method for educational research? *British Educational Research Journal*, 23, 2, 209-224.

Wragg, E C (1978) *Conducting and Analysing Interviews*, Nottingham University School of Education, TRC-Rediguides.

[Beginning Research](#) | [Action Research](#) | [Case Study](#) | [Interviews](#) | [Observation Techniques](#) | [Education Research in the Postmodern](#)

[Evaluation Research in Education](#) | [Narrative](#) | [Presentations](#) | [Qualitative Research](#) | [Quantitative Methods](#) | [Questionnaires](#) | [Writing up Research](#)

[Home](#)

