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## UNIT 2 INTERVIEW AND INTERVIEWING

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## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

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The primary focus in interview is to find out answers to the problems related to the research topic. This is one method of collecting the data. This is an interactive process in which the interviewer or the researcher interacts with the respondent (interviewee) to elicit the needed information from the latter. It may be structured or unstructured and it may be a conversational type of interview. Either way the data is collected on the topic and the researcher may write the needed information in the questionnaire or interview schedule after completion of the interview. The unit describes the method, puts forward the advantages and disadvantages. It also provides the kind of topic for which interview will be most suited.

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## 2.1 OBJECTIVES

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After completion of this unit, you will be able to:

- define interview as a method of data collection;
- describe the method of interviewing and collecting research data;
- list out the ways in which the interview should be conducted – the do's and don't's; and
- enumerate the advantages and disadvantages of interviewing.

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## 2.2 DEFINITION OF INTERVIEW

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Interview can be broadly defined as a face to face verbal interchange in which there are two persons, that is the researcher or the interviewer and the other is the respondent or the interviewee. The interviewer tries to elicit the needed information on the research topic from the respondent. It appears to be like a conversation but this conversation is more with a specific purpose. In conversation the roles of the persons go on changing. One starts the conversation and the other responds then the other may take lead and the first one may be a listener so there may be alterations in roles. In interview on the other hand there is no changing of the roles of the interviewer and the interviewee. Conversation is unplanned whereas interview is clearly thought out and clearly planned.

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## 2.3 DESCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW

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Some interviews are conducted for gathering information from very important persons to know about their lives, ideas etc. This can be used for biographical writing. Other types of interview are the ones conducted for the purpose of understanding an event that has taken place, such as the suicide of an individual or murder of a person etc. Here the purpose is clear though the method of interviewing may vary considerably. Other type of interview is to have clear questions in order to understand a person and his or her problem. There is another type of interview between the doctor and the patient, where the doctor questions the patient in a particular order as to what the symptoms are and how long the person had it and then based on the interview which is called case history is able to come to an understanding of the diagnosis of the patient's problem.

An Interview, meant for a research study, involves the researcher or his investigators interacting on a one- to-one level with a respondent, who has been selected by the researcher as one of the subjects for the study. The interviewer puts questions to the respondent on a particular subject matter and the respondent's replies are noted down verbatim, where possible or recorded as an audio report.

The interview aims to describe the meanings of central themes in the life of the subjects. The main task in this is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees say. Interviews also can focus on the main aspects of the subject matter. The interview is as a follow-up instrument to get to know about certain responses to the questionnaires, so that one can further investigate their responses.

An interview can be one to one or it can be one to many. Answers to the questions posed during an interview can be recorded by writing them down (either during the interview itself or immediately after the interview) or by tape-recording the responses, or by a combination of both.

Interviews can be conducted with varying degrees of flexibility that is high and low degree of flexibility.

As regards high flexibility, one can take an example of studying sensitive issues such as teenage pregnancy and abortions. The investigator may use a list of topics rather than fixed questions. These may include how teenagers started sexual intercourse, the responsibility girls and their partners take to prevent pregnancy (if at all), and the actions they take in the event of unwanted pregnancies etc. The investigator should have an additional list of topics ready when the respondent falls silent, (example, when asked about abortion methods used, who made the decision and who paid).

The sequence of topics should be determined by the flow of discussion. It is often possible to come back to a topic discussed earlier in a later stage of the interview.

The unstructured or loosely structured method of asking questions can be used for interviewing individuals as well as groups of key informants.

A flexible method of interviewing is useful if a researcher has not much of an understanding of the problem or situation he is investigating, or if the topic is sensitive. It is frequently applied in exploratory studies. The instrument used may be called an interview guide or interview schedule.

In regard to low degree of flexibility, these interview methods are useful when the researcher is relatively knowledgeable about expected answers or when the number of respondents being interviewed is relatively large. In such cases structured questionnaires may be used so that large number of respondents could be covered. To cite an example, after a number of observations on the (hygienic) behaviour of women drawing water at a well and some key informant interviews on the use and maintenance of the wells, one may conduct a larger survey on water use and satisfaction with the quantity and quality of the water.

Interviews also can focus on the main aspects of the subject matter, or can get to know what the topic has to convey behind the scene and what the topic can convey.

Interviews are generally easier for respondent, especially if what is sought includes opinions or impressions. Interviews are time consuming and they are resource intensive. The interviewer is considered a part of the measurement instrument and interviewer has to be well trained in how to respond to any contingency.

### **Self Assessment Questions**

1) Define interview. What are the characteristic features of research interview?

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2) Describe the process of interview.

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3) What are the aims of interviewing method?

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4) What is flexible and non flexible interview?

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## 2.4 TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

The interviews are of many types, as for instance (1) Informal, conversational type, (2) General interview guide (3) Standardised open ended interview (4) Closed fixed response.

### Informal conversational type interviews

In the informal conversational interview, as is implied, the respondents are identified and are involved in a pleasant conversation. This conversation is with a specific research purpose that has been already determined. In the pleasant conversation, the interviewer talks in general, gets acquainted with respondents, after which the purpose of the research study is put across to the respondents and they are told what is expected of this study and how important the respondent and his responses are for the research. Thus from a general approach the researcher moves on to the specific purpose. There are no pre-determined questions, and the researcher indicates clearly that any answer the interviewee provides should be stated without hesitation as there is no right or wrong answers. During the interview the interviewer “goes with the flow” of what the respondent tells.

#### 2.4.1 General Interview Guide

In this, every effort is put in to ensure that no important points are left out and the manner in which the questions should be asked and the sequences are kept up. This general interview guide also helps in conducting the interview to get information from all the respondents, on all the items that have to be covered. The interview guide thus provides the needed focus to the conversational approach and at the same time gives enough freedom to the interviewer and the respondent.

#### 2.4.2 Standardised, Open Ended Interview

This type of interviews gives considerable scope for the respondent to answer fairly in detail his own ideas and opinions on the particular topic instead of answering or tick marking the answers only. These open ended questions are also uniformly put to all the respondents selected for the study. It not only elicits a variety of responses but also makes the research much more rich in contents.

#### 2.4.3 Closed, Fixed-response Interview

In this the answers are provided to all the questions, and the respondents are required to select from within them, that response which is most applicable to them. Thus all respondents will choose answers from amongst the same set of alternatives.

This format is useful where the questions could have clear cut answers and they can be categorised meaningfully into 7 to 10 categories or less, and the respondents, except a few would find their answers within those categories and tick mark the same. Such responses are easy to score code and analyse, as compared to the

responses obtained in the open ended interview. This is so because, the responses in the open ended questions may be so many that the researcher will have to scrutinise all the responses and categorise them after the entire data have been collected.

#### **2.4.4 Telephone Interview**

Another type of interview is the Telephone Interview, in which the researcher gathers information rapidly through telephone. Though these interviews do help to establish a kind of rapport with the person at the other end of the telephone, yet many respondents may just refuse to answer and may put down the phone. At the same time, there is a personal touch which can be transmitted to the respondent. Furthermore the telephone interviews have to be necessarily short as no one would like to answer a large number of questions.

There are varying points of view regarding the advisability and utility of using the telephone to conduct research interviews.

The potential benefits associated with using telephone interviews as a mechanism of data collection include:

- a) using economic and human resources efficiently,
- b) minimizing disadvantages associated with in-person interviewing,
- c) developing positive relationships between researchers and participants, and
- d) improving quality of data collection.

The potential challenges to telephone interviewing include:

- a) maintaining participant involvement,
- b) maintaining clear communication,
- c) communicating with participants who offer extraneous information,
- d) encountering participants with health concerns, and
- e) communicating with a third party.

Telephone interviewing can be an effective method of data collection when interviewers understand the potential benefits as well as challenges. We offer solutions to the identified challenges and make pragmatic recommendations to enhance researcher success based on the current literature and our research practice. Supportive training for interviewers, effective communication between interviewers and with research participants, and standardised telephone follow-up procedures are needed to ensure successful telephone data collection. We have found our 'Manual of Operations' to be an effective tool that assists research assistants to meet the requirements for successful telephone interviewing.

#### **2.4.5 Validity of Interview**

Studies by Kahn and Cannell (1961), Maccoby and Maccoby (1954) can be mentioned in this connection. There have been found inaccuracies in respondents versions during interviews when compared with the information obtained by other means. In the case of self reports also similar inaccuracies have been found, particularly when the questions are asked about the sexual behaviour. Kanfer and Phillips (1970) who have discussed the methodological problems in using a few

persons self-report as an indicator of his actual experience concluded that, when a person describes his experiences or his internal states in an interview, care must be taken to recognise this behaviour as response that is under the control of both person's history and the interview situation and not to accept it as a true record of past or internal events.

As mentioned by Patterson (1968), the interview is thus not such a measurement device which gives very accurate results. It is fallible and subject to substantial sources of error and bias. But we cannot discard the interview as a means of collecting information. It has great value and has its own advantages. Our effort should be to learn more about the sources of interview bias and influence. We must learn methods to eliminate them or accounting for them.(S.S. Mathur 1985). The interview's validity depends on how much the clinician is trained to obtain the information he wants from the client side.

### Self Assessment Questions

1) What are the different types of interview? Elaborate each of them.

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2) What is telephone interview? What are its advantages and disadvantages?

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3) What is meant by validating interview? How would you do it?

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## 2.5 ASPECTS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH INTERVIEWS

Interviews are completed by the interviewer based on what the respondent says. Interviews are a far more personal form of research than questionnaires. In the personal interview, the interviewer works directly with the respondent. Unlike with mail surveys, the interviewer has the opportunity to probe or ask follow up questions.

Interviews are generally easier for respondent, especially if what is sought includes opinions or impressions. Interviews are time consuming and they are resource intensive. The interviewer is considered a part of the measurement instrument and interviewer has to be well trained in how to respond to any contingency.

## 2.6 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The questions to be included in any interview guide should be very carefully prepared. It must be able to tap the behaviours of the respondents, their moods and emotions and their exact responses which are truthful and objective. Given below are some of the important aspects that should be covered in any interview questions.

- 1) *Behaviours*: These questions try to find out from the respondent what he does or did or would do if given a situation. (Example, Respondent's opinion in regard to making admission to schools for children without screening under Right to Education Act. Here the person may say that he will write articles against it in the newspaper or give lectures or speeches condemning such non screening as it is harmful to children who are normal and intelligent. These indicate the behaviours of the respondent in regard to the topic).
- 2) *Opinions/values*: These questions will also tap the attitudes and opinions of the respondents regarding an issue. Opinions and values are generally strong until something very significant occurs which changes the opinion and value. The questions would be for instance, what does the respondent think of a person marrying out of caste and religion. The respondent may state that he is very much against anyone marrying out of caste and religion. This is his opinion and to an extent perhaps goes with his value system.
- 3) *Feelings*: The questions also elicit the feelings of the individual in regard to what a person feels rather than what a person thinks.
- 4) *Knowledge*: This would ensure that the topic of research and knowledge about the facts regarding the topic is conveyed to the respondent. Thus the respondents get facts about the topic.
- 5) *Sensory*: The Questions that would be included in this section will deal with the respondent's perceptions. That is, what ever he has seen, whatever he has touched, whatever he had heard, whatever he had tasted, whatever he had smelt etc.
- 6) *Background / Demographics*: The respondent is asked questions related to his age, gender, education, income, marital status etc., which are all put together constitute the socio demographic features of the respondent.

### 2.6.1 Sequence of Questions

It is important that the researcher should involve the respondents as early as possible in the interview situation. The researcher or the investigator should start with some factual information such as the date of birth, where they live etc. The controversial matters should be taken up either almost at the end or when the interviewer is very confident that he has been able to establish excellent rapport with the respondent.

The rule is that, start with facts and move on to other more subjective questions. Before asking questions related to any controversial matters, first ask about some facts. Distribute these fact based questions in the entire interview and ask questions about the present before questions about the past or future.

The last questions might be to allow respondents to provide other information they prefer to add and their impressions of the interview.

**Self Assessment Questions**

1) What type of questions should be included in interview?

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2) What purpose do these questions serve in the interview guide?

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3) What do you understand by qualitative research interviews?

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4) What are the sequence should we follow while writing interview questions?

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**2.6.2 Stages of Interview**

There are in all seven (7) stages in the interview investigation. These include the following:

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| 1) Thematising:  | The <i>why</i> and <i>what</i> of the investigation.                                       |
| 2) Designing:    | Plan the design of the study.  |
| 3) Interviewing: | Conduct the interview based on a guide.  |
| 4) Transcribing: | Prepare the interview material for analysis.   |
| 5) Analysing:    | Decide on the purpose, the topic, the nature and methods of analysis that are appropriate. |
| 6) Verifying:    | Ascertain the validity of the interview findings.  |
| 7) Reporting:    | Communicate findings of the study based on scientific criteria.                            |



- 1) **Thematising:** In this stage which is stage 1, the researcher tries to give an idea to the investigation as to what is being investigated, what for it is being investigate and what does the researcher hope to get out of the investigation. The researcher thus gives a theme to the entire topic that is being investigated. This sets the trend to what should be focused during the interview.
- 2) **Designing:** This is the second stage of interview in which the investigator or the researcher plans the entire design of the study. The kind of tools that should be used is planned, then sample to which the questions will be put are selected and the analysis of the research findings are also contemplated along with the typical hypothesis that would be tested.
- 3) **Interviewing:** In this third stage, the samples selected by the investigator are identified and are taken up for interview sessions. The researcher may use a interview guide which has the various questions to be put to the interviewee and the researcher follows the sequence to the extent possible, even though the researcher may change the order if it is found that the interviewee is not comfortable with certain type of questions. Thus the researcher may start from the general and move on the specific questions and thus complete the interview and later on take down what ever has been completed.
- 4) **Transcribing:** This is the fourth stage in the interview. Having conducted the interview, the research her has obtained the needed information for all the queries that had been put to the interviewee. Now these have to be adequately and systematically organised and this is what is meant by transcribing the answers in a certain sequence and order to make it more meaningful from the point of view of research.
- 5) **Analysing:** In this stage, the researcher takes the data and analyses the same in terms of the research questions and the hypotheses. Based on the results obtained from the analysis, the researcher either validates the hypothesis or rejects the same and come to clear conclusion regarding the research topic. The answers to the queries are found and the analysis clearly shows in which direction the trend of results move.
- 6) **Verifying:** In this stage the researcher validates the findings and comes to conclusion on different points of the research topic. For example, if the research was on which method of teaching contributes to enhancement of academic performance of children in class 8, and let us say that the researcher finds the tutorial method is better than lecture method in enhancing academic performance, these are put to statistical tests to find out if the differences obtained are statistically significant. Thus the researcher validates the research findings.
- 7) **Reporting:** The last stage is of reporting the findings in the form of a report. The report contains the topic, the methods of investigation, the tools used, the sample that was interviewed, the results obtained, the statistical analysis used and the final findings in terms of the objectives with which the research was taken up. Through the results, the researcher is able to indicate whether the objectives of the research were realised etc.

### 2.6.3 Procedure to be Followed During the Interview

During the interviews the researcher must take care of the following:

- Occasionally verify the tape recorder (*if used*) is working.
- Ask one question at a time.
- Attempt to remain as neutral as possible.
- Encourage responses.
- Be careful about the appearance when note taking.
- Provide transition between major topics.
- Don't lose control of the interview.

Every effort should be made to get all answers to all questions and that too truthfully and objectively. The researcher should if using a tape recorder, check if it works and whether it would be able to record the entire interview of one hour. The tapes should be otherwise changed so that uninterruptedly the interview can go on. Also before using the tape recorder the interviewer should get permission to use the same from the respondent. If there is a need and requested the researcher should be prepared to replay the recorder for the respondent who may like to verify what answers have been given and if they are to be reported etc.

The researcher should be always neutral and even if the respondent gives some kind of emotional statements, the researcher should not respond to it either positively or negatively but record the same as felt and presented by the respondent.

Where ever necessary the researcher must encourage the respondent to answer the questions. Many tactics may be used to get the respondent answer the questions, and it always works if the researcher has established a good rapport with the respondent.

Even if the interview is being tape recorded it is important to note the various emotions and expressions as well as facial expressions of the respondent at the appropriate places. These should be taken as note format and later on incorporated in the recorded interview at the appropriate places in the interview.

As the researcher moves from one topic to another, it must be made in a smooth manner.

The researcher must have complete control over the interview and should not slip at any point of time. Focusing on the interview and concentrating on how the respondent answers and the various expressions that the respondent is using are all to be recorded and used while analysing the data.

### **After the interview**

The researcher should verify if the tape recorder, if used, worked throughout the interview. He should make detailed notes on the ones noted by him during the interview. He should write down observations made during the interview.

#### **Self Assessment Questions**

1) What do we mean by stages of interview? Write in detail each of the stages

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2) Elucidate the procedure to be followed while conducting interview.

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3) What are the precautions to be taken if the interview is being recorded?

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4) What precautions to be taken after the interview is completed?

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## 2.7 CONVERGENT INTERVIEWING AS ACTION RESEARCH

Some times an interview session is followed by a review session constituting a research cycle. The review sessions interpret the data emerging from the interviews and also help plan the questions in order to get a better understanding of the situation. The sampling and the process of gathering data are checked and modified if necessary. By asking more specific questions and pursuing deeper understanding the researcher interprets the data collected, gives explanations and where necessary put forward his disagreements. There is also a need to follow up the explanations and disagreements.

In interviewing one could structure interview or unstructured. In structured interview, the questions are in a certain sequence and put across to all the respondents in the same order and sequence and in the same manner so that the administration of the questions does not lead to any differences. The structured interview is also very useful for *quantitative analysis*. *Such structured interviews are generally used in survey research and not in one to one interviewing method unless it is a situation calling for such interview method.*

Interviewers read the questions exactly as they appear on the survey questionnaire. The choice of answers to the questions is often fixed (close-ended) in advance, though open-ended questions may also be included within a structured interview.

Structured *interviews* can also be used as a *qualitative research* methodology (Kvale, 1996). These types of interviews are best suited for *focus group* studies in

which it would be beneficial to compare/contrast participant responses in order to answer a research question.

For structured qualitative interviews, it is usually necessary for researchers to develop an interview schedule which lists the wording and sequencing of questions. Interview schedules are sometimes considered a means by which researchers can increase the reliability and credibility of research data. This can be done as follows:

- The respondents will have to be given explicit information detailing with the research process in its entirety.
- The research assistants should conduct an initial screening interview to ascertain whether the potential respondent is appropriate for the study
- It is also important to determine the literacy level of the participants and to use vernacular familiar to the respondents that is distinct from literary or research language.
- It is always important to take the informed consent of the participants. If necessary, the respondent's signature may also be taken in the form.
- The advantages and risks associated with the provision of the information have to be clearly delineated at the outset so that the participant can weigh the pros and cons of involvement.
- Research assistants or the data gatherers are crucial to any study. It is of strategic importance that research assistants are fully conversant with their responsibilities, the risks involved and the benefits of being part of a research team.

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## 2.8 RESEARCH TEAM

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Rather than filling these positions randomly from the pool of job seekers in a region that is characterised by high levels of unemployment, it is important to employ a homogenous field team to alleviate some of the problems faced during research.

It is recommended that research assistants be recruited from groups that have similar research interests, such as for example, a class of research methodology students. The research activity should be linked to the curriculum.

Furthermore there is a need to give an adequate and effective orientation to the research assistants in regard to the research that is being conducted. It is imperative that the research assistants be aware of the exigencies of their respective positions prior to the onset of data collection.

### Training of the Interviewers

It is important to train the investigators and the interviewers in the techniques of interviewing because the techniques to establish rapport with the respondents needs to be mastered by the interviewer as otherwise the interview may not be able to get the needed responses from the respondents. They must be trained in the process of interviewing so that they learn how to move from general to specific in regard to topics and areas, the way in which the questions are to be asked and the kind of body language, gestures to be shown and the clarifications etc., to be given to respondents, and many more nuances related to the interview needs to be understood by the interviewers and investigators. For this organising training for them becomes highly essential. The training is thus basically how the interviewer must control the

quality of the result that would be obtained from the interview. It is important to organise in detail and rehearse the interviewing.

### **Important aspects related to training**

Interviewers need to know more than simply how to conduct the interview itself. They should have background of the study and why the study is important.

The interviewer may not understand why sampling is so important and if they have to conduct the interview efficiently and adequately they must know not only the background of the research but also why the sampling is important and who are the respondents from whom the information is being collected.

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## **2.9 LET US SUM UP**

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We defined interview and interviewing as a face to face verbal interchange in which there are two persons, that is the researcher or the interviewer and the other is the respondent or the interviewee. The interviewer tries to elicit the needed information on the research topic from the respondent. It appears to be like a conversation but this conversation is more with a specific purpose.

Some interviews are conducted for gathering information from very important persons to know about their lives, ideas etc. There is another type of interview between the doctor and the patient, where the doctor questions the patient in a particular order as to what the symptoms are and how long the person had it and then based on the interview which is called case history is able to come to an understanding of the diagnosis of the patient's problem.

An Interview, meant for a research study, involves the researcher or his investigators interacting on a one- to-one level with a respondent, who has been selected by the researcher as one of the subjects for the study. The interviewer puts questions to the respondent on a particular subject matter and the respondent's replies are noted down verbatim, where possible or recorded as an audio report.

An interview can be one to one or it can be one to many. Answers to the questions posed during an interview can be recorded by writing them down (either during the interview itself or immediately after the interview) or by tape-recording the responses, or by a combination of both.

Interviews can be conducted with varying degrees of flexibility that is high and low degree of flexibility.

Interviews also can focus on the main aspects of the subject matter, or can get to know what the topic has to convey behind the scene and what the topic can convey.

The interviews are of many types, as for instance (1) Informal, conversational type, (2) General interview guide (3) Standardised open ended interview (4) Closed fixed response.

There have been found inaccuracies in respondents versions during interviews when compared with the information obtained by other means. Hence it is important to have the validation of the interviews.

Interviews are completed by the interviewer based on what the respondent says. Interviews are a far more personal form of research than questionnaires.

Topics included in the questions of the interview should cover behaviours, opinions and values of the respondent, their feelings, knowledge and their perceptions.

It is important that the researcher should involve the respondents as early as possible in the interview situation. The rule is that, start with facts and move on to other more subjective questions. Before asking questions related to any controversial matters, first ask about some facts. Distribute these fact based questions in the entire interview and ask questions about the present before questions about the past or future.

There are in all 7 stages in the interview investigation. These include the following:

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|------------------|--|
| 1) Thematising:  | The <i>why</i> and <i>what</i> of the investigation.                                       |
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During the interviews the researcher must take care of the following:

- Occasionally verify the tape recorder (*if used*) is working.
- Ask one question at a time.
- Attempt to remain as neutral as possible.
- Encourage responses.
- Be careful about the appearance when note taking.
- Provide transition between major topics.
- Don't lose control of the interview.

The researcher should verify if the tape recorder, if used, worked throughout the interview. He should make detailed notes on the ones noted by him during the interview. He should write down observations made during the interview. In interviewing one could structure interview or unstructured. In structured interview, the questions are in a certain sequence and put across to all the respondents in the same order and sequence and in the same manner so that the administration of the questions do not lead to any differences. The structured interview is also very useful for *quantitative analysis*. *Such structured interviews are generally used in survey research and not in one to one interviewing method unless it is a situation calling for such interview method.* Then we discussed about the research team and the orientations that they should have.

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## 2.10 UNIT END QUESTIONS

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- 1) Define and describe interview as a research method
- 2) What are the various types of interview? Present these in detail
- 3) What are qualitative research interviews?

- 4) Discuss the manner in which questions have to be written for an interview.
- 5) Describe convergent interviewing as action research.
- 6) What is a research team? How do we select a research team?
- 7) What kind of training is needed for the research team?

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## 2.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

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Kerlinger, Fred, N. 1979, *Foundations of Behavioral Research*, New York, : H 107, Rinehart and Winston Inc.

Kumar. R (2006) *Research Methodology*. New Delhi: Dorling Kingsley