Designing an Interview Protocol

1.   Ground yourself in the literature.
It is important to have a strong understanding of the literature supporting your research interest. Conducting a literature review also can engage your interest in the topic more deeply and help you narrow and refine your research question(s).

2.   Gain informed consent.
You can learn more about informed consent and download templates that are approved by the IRB Policy Committee on OSU's Office of Responsible Research Practices website and QualLab's IRB information page. Define informed consent on an information sheet or blurb that you can provide to your participants prior to conducting an interview.

3.   Create and use a script to open and close your interview process.
A script can help you remember necessary information for the interview and build rapport with your participants. You should share pertinent information with your interview participants before beginning the question portion of the interview. Write a script that 1) outlines what you are studying and why, 2) explains informed consent and confidentiality considerations, 3) builds rapport, and 4) provides an opportunity for the participants to respond and ask questions. At the end of your interview, your script should thank the participants, share next steps, and provide contact information as appropriate. Additionally, let the participants know of any resources you have for them, whether those are in the form of compensation for participation or resources relevant to the topic or the participants' wellbeing.

4.   Design open-ended questions that align with your research questions and the literature review.
Open-ended questions allow participants' stories, perspectives, and experiences to emerge. You can utilize story prompts like, "Could you tell me about a time when..." or "share what it was like to..." Avoid closed-ended questions that prompt participants to answer with only "yes" or "no" and continue to refine your questions as you design and revise your protocol prior to the interviews. The literature may define key terms, so feel free to use those terms and definitions to inform your open-ended questions.

5.   Begin with more basic questions and ask deeper or more difficult questions as the interview progresses (e.g., the "arch" of the interview).
This approach can support rapport-building and help the interviewee become more comfortable before diving into questions that could be more difficult for participants to talk about. Additionally, remember that you designed the questions based on your own interests, experiences, and literature review; the participant may need some more context and concrete questions before eliciting more nuanced information. Keep in mind the resources you may have shared with your participant (such as counseling services, etc.) and feel free to share them as appropriate during this time.

6.   Use prompts and encourage deeper responses.
Sometimes a participant can benefit from prompts or probes, such as providing examples or inviting the participant to expand. You might say something like, "what else" or "what was that like" after a participant shares.

7.   Be present and prepared to revise your protocol in the moment (if your research design allows for it).
You may recognize a need to re-order your questions based on the flow of conversation with your participants. You may also see a need for follow-up questions. Adding questions as you go is considered to be "emergent design" (Creswell, 2007).

8.   Be mindful of the time.
Don't let your interview last too long (many researchers encourage 1.5 hours or less). Be thoughtful about your participants' needs, such as their emotional and physical wellbeing, not to mention the labor and time they are taking to support your study. 6-10 interview questions tends to provide a substantial amount of information in a reasonable amount of time.

9.   Choose an interview approach that matches your research design.
Some methodological approaches have a specific style of interview. For example, there are narrative interviews, phenomenological interviews, oral history interviews, conversational interviews, and so many more. Be sure to choose the interview approach that matches your research design and/or methodology.

10.   Practice your interview with another person.
Practicing with someone outside of the study can help you identify whether your predictions around timing and flow make sense. It can also raise opportunities to revise and clarify your questions with someone else, and become more comfortable with your protocol overall.

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References:

Creswell, J.W. (2007). Qualitative inquiry & research design: choosing among five approaches, (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Jacob, S. A., & Furgerson, S. P. (2012). Writing Interview Protocols and Conducting Interviews: Tips for Students New to the Field of Qualitative Research. *The Qualitative Report, 17*(2), 1-10.

Turner, D. W. (2010). Qualitative Interview Design: A Practical Guide for Novice Investigators. The Qualitative Report, 15(3), 754-760. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2010.1178

Resource:
https://csass.ucsc.edu/certification/peraza.pdf