

Interviews – or talking to people

You can find out what people think by talking to them. When you talk to someone to get their ideas about a particular topic, this is called an interview.

There are lots of different ways to do interviews. You can:

- talk to people on their own
- talk to people in a group
- ask people questions you have already thought about – and perhaps asked other people in other interviews
- ask people to tell you their ideas – or their ‘story’ – about a topic.

Think about how long your interviews should be – in research, a short interview that keeps to the point is much better than a long chat. Have just a few questions to ask.

Think about where you will do your interviews and how to help people relax. Remember to tell people about your research and ask them if they are willing to help. People should be able to say “no” if they do not want to be interviewed – or if they do not want to answer particular questions.

Think about how you will ask your questions. Some people will give better answers if you give them prompts – photographs, pictures or objects to remind them about the topic of your interview – as well as asking questions.

Think about how to keep a record of what happens in the interview. You might want to use a tape recorder so you can listen to the interview again later. Or you (or someone else) can write notes. Writing notes or drawing pictures on a big piece of paper means that everyone can check and agree with what is being recorded from the interview.

You should show that you are interested in what people are telling you – and try to help people say what they mean as clearly as possible. But you should not try to change what people are telling you – for example, to get them to agree with your ideas.

Give the people you interview a chance to check back over what you think they said – either at the end of the interview or later, when you have worked out the main messages. People should have a chance to change what you have recorded if they think you have got their ideas wrong.

However you decide to do your interviews, it is always good to try out your ways of working before you start your interviews for real. If you practice, you will get better at doing interviews. You can ask your friends to let you try out your interview technique with them. Maybe you could ask someone else to watch the practise interview and tell you afterwards what worked and what was not so good. Then you can change things that do not work so well.