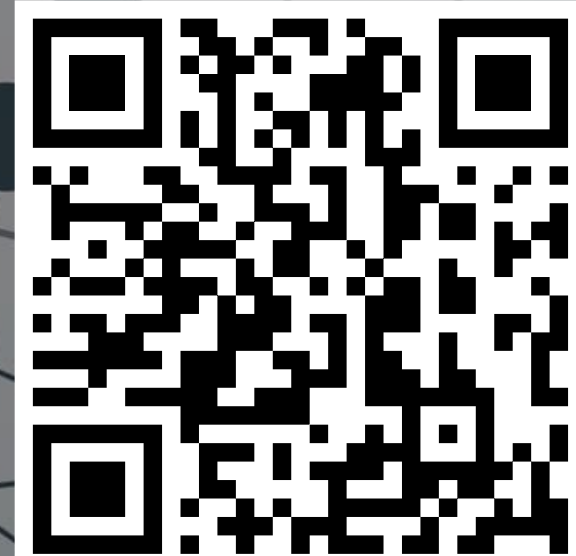


# Interviews in Research

Ismail O. Zembat

15.04.2026



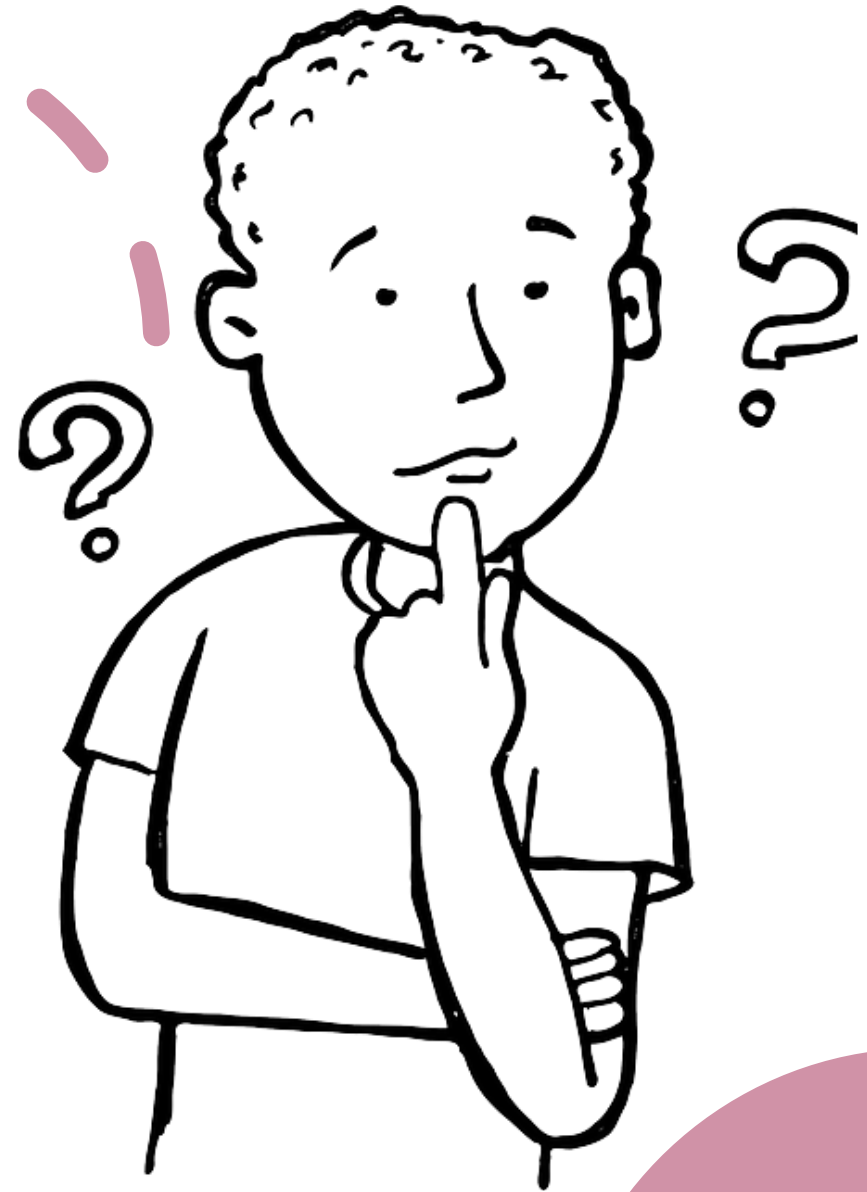
# 1. Description and purpose of interviews...

- A purposeful, ethically managed conversation/interaction used to explore how participants describe, interpret, and give meaning to their experiences.
- The purpose is to learn about those experiences with a closer look!



## Think about a situation for which interviews are suitable

- Any questions or topic areas of interest?
- Who are the participants?
- Why are interviews needed?



## 2. Types of interviews

- **Structured:** the interviewer asks predetermined questions in the same or nearly the same way, with little scope for deviation or follow-up, so they are useful when comparability across participants matters most.
- **Semi-structured:** the interviewer works from an interview guide or aide-mémoire, but can vary wording, order, and probes in response to what the participant says.
- **Unstructured:** open, conversational interviews without a fixed question sequence, used when the aim is to explore meanings, experiences, or perspectives in depth.
- **In-depth:** extended, usually one-to-one interviews that use mainly open-ended questions to generate rich, detailed accounts from a relatively small number of participants.
- **Clinical:** one-to-one interviews that probe how a learner is thinking through a task or concept, often by asking them to explain actions, reasoning, and interpretations as the interview unfolds.



## 2. Types of interviews

- **Narrative or life history:** interviews designed to generate a story, often about a person's life, identity, or educational journey over time.
- **Phenomenological:** interviews used to examine lived experience and the meaning participants give to a particular phenomenon.
- **Ethnographic:** interviews used within ethnographic research to understand culture, shared meanings, practices, and insider perspectives in a setting; they often begin quite openly.
- **Focus group:** group interviews in which data are generated through interaction among participants on a topic set by the researcher.
- **Stimulated recall:** interviews in which participants are prompted, often by video or another artifact, to recall and comment on their thinking during a prior event.



## Think about the situation you identified previously. Which type of interview is suitable?

- Think about the question or topic of interest again.
- Think again about the participants and their settings.
- What type fits better?
- Why?



# 3. Interview Process

- a. Pre-interview preparation
- b. What to do during the interview
- c. How to close and what to do next



## 3a. Pre-Interview Preparation

- We prepare an **interview schedule** that will guide us throughout the interview
- What **background** is expected of participants?
- Should there be an **introduction**?
- What **questions/tasks** should be asked? How many? Why?
- **Follow-up** questions for possible responses?
- Unexpected **responses**?
- **How long** should the interview take?
- Do you need a **recording**? Why? How?
- Any **materials** to use?

# Sample interview schedule

**Question-1: a)** Can you describe what a volume of any figure is?

- **If the student gives a definition including** “space occupied by a figure” then continue with the following question, question 1-b.
- **If there is no articulate response from the student**, give the box made up of small colourful unit cubes (with the dimensions  $3 \times 4 \times 5$ ) and ask “What could be the volume of this box?” Then follow up by 1.b.

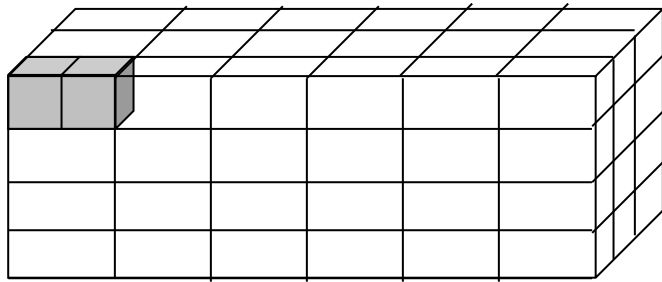
**b)** By depending on this definition, how can you determine the volume of this empty transparent box? (Give an empty transparent box to the student)

- If there is no response from the student, then ask again: What would you do to measure the volume of this box?
- If the student says that “s/he needs measurements of three dimensions of the given box”, then tell her that the box has dimensions of  $height=2units$ ,  $length=8units$ ,  $width=5units$ .
- There are two possibilities for the student to answer this question:
  1. If the student finds the volume by counting the number of unit cubes made up the box, then ask if you have the dimensions like  $h=100$ ,  $w=50$ ,  $l=150$ , are you going to count again?
  2. If the student uses the formula for finding volume of prisms ( $length \times width \times height$ ), then ask him/her “why would this formula work?”
- If the student struggles with the question, ask, “What do those numbers that you just multiplied represent?”
- Follow up by asking “What does it mean to multiply those three dimensions?” and then ask “Why does multiplication work in finding the volume?”



# Sample interview schedule

**Question-3:** What do you think is the volume of the box in the picture?



- *If the student just gives the number of small and big unit cubes without mentioning any measurement, then follow up by asking, “You said there are 72 big and 144 small cubes that can fit in the box. So, what is the volume of this box?”*
- *Then ask “Can a figure have two different volumes?”*



# Sample interview schedule

- If you plan to use worksheets, give one question per sheet.
- If you plan to use materials (e.g., physical, pictures, videos, etc.), make sure that they know how to use them



## 3b. What to do during the interview (initiating stage...)

- Initiating the interview:
  - You tell them about the purpose of the interview
  - Explain what is expected of them during the interview
  - Explain your role and their role in the interview
  - Explain why you need a recording



## 3b. What to do during the interview (initiating stage...)

- A sample entry to an interview with a child working on a math problem:
  - Thank you for accepting to take part in this interview. My purpose in doing this is to figure out how you reason about XXX.
  - Therefore, I will ask you some questions and ask you to think out loud.
  - Some of these questions may be hard, and some are very easy for you. My only purpose is to figure out how you think about them. So, whether you give me the right or wrong answer does not matter. I am only interested in your thinking.
  - In fact, I will not give you any answers because I am interested in your thinking.
  - At times, I may be nodding my head and saying “yes”. Please do not take them as an indication of you being right or wrong. As I said, I am only interested in how you think.
  - At times, I may ask you to clarify your thinking a few times with “why”-type questions. This is because I need to understand how you think.
  - I will be recording our session because I cannot remember everything you say during the interview. The video will only focus on your writing and hand movements, not your face. No one will know who you are or where you are from. If I talk about this conversation anywhere (e.g., , I will not reveal your identity in any form.
  - What you say here will not have any effect on your grades in the class. So, feel free to share your thinking with me as much as possible.
  - Do you have any questions about the process?
  - Let’s start then...



## 3b. What to do during the interview (questioning...)

- We can use two types of questions
  - Leading
    - If you want to lead them to an answer
  - Probing
    - If you are interested in their thinking
- Probing Questions:
  - How did you work that out? How do you know?
  - How did you decide?
  - Why is that true? Does it always work?
  - What made you say that?
  - How would you explain this to your classmate?
  - The other day, another student told me ...  
What do you think about his method?



## 3b. What to do during the interview (wait time...)

- Once you ask a question, you wait 15-30 seconds before asking
  - *What are you thinking?*
  - *Can you say out loud what you are doing? (they may be doing a mental calculation)*
- *Focus on their eyes (e.g., they may be checking a figure in the room, or thinking) or hand movements (e.g., they may be counting)*
- *You always wait after a question and give them time to process the question*



## 3b. What to do during the interview (an example)

- A sample interview with a child trying to solve a subtraction problem ( $70-23=?$ )
  - Are there probing or leading questions?
  - Is wait time being used effectively?
  - What about follow-up questions?
  - Did the interviewer rephrase or paraphrase what the child said?
- Another sample interview:  
<https://youtu.be/gnArvcWaH6l>



## 3b. What to do during the interview (responding...)

- Do not use confirmation words like “right”, “yes”, “well done”, “I agree”, “nice”, etc.
- Do not nod your head to give an indication of a positive/negative answer
- Ask a question and be brief without commenting (this is very hard!!!)
- If they ask, “Is that right?”, tell them, “What do you think? Does it make sense to you? Remember, I am only interested in your thinking.”
- Remind them about your/their roles at times. “I am only asking to clarify ...”

## 3b. What to do during the interview (responding...)

- Do not interrupt them! Let them say what they need to say! Be patient!
- Do not rephrase their wording; use their wording to ask what they meant by it.
- Think about yourself as a detective trying to reveal the particulars of a case
- Ask yourself: Do I know enough about their thinking? If not, probe further; if yes, move on!
- Keep it 15-30 minutes for children, 30-60 minutes for adults



## 3c. How to close and what to do next?

- Say something like, “Thank you for sharing your thoughts with me. It was very useful to me.”
- When they asked, “How did I do?”, do not respond like “you did great!” You can say things like, “you openly talked about your thinking which was very helpful to me.”
- If they say, “Can I receive the results?”, tell them that it is part of research and no one will have access to these until it is in a publishable form.



## 4. What to do with interview data?

- Watch them over and over again to get familiarity
- Transcribing all vs. selective parts?
- Try to make sense of how the interviewee reasons based on the theoretical lens you use – do not summarise interviews but analyse them!



# Some references...

- Atkinson, R. (1998). *The life story interview*. Sage.
- Carpiano, R. M. (2009). Come take a walk with me: The “go-along” interview as a novel method for studying the implications of place for health and well-being. *Health & Place*, 15, 263–272.
- Gill, P., Stewart, K., Treasure, E., & Chadwick, B. (2008). Methods of data collection in qualitative research: Interviews and focus groups. *British Dental Journal*, 204(6), 291–295.
- Hunting, R. P. (1997). Clinical interview methods in mathematics education research and practice. *Journal of Mathematical Behavior*, 16(2), 145–165.
- Lyle, J. (2003). Stimulated recall: A report on its use in naturalistic research. *British Educational Research Journal*, 29(6), 861–878.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Mikecz, R. (2012). Interviewing elites: Addressing methodological issues. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 18(6), 482–493.
- Morgan, D. L. (1997). *Focus groups as qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Sage.
- Morgan, D. L., Eliot, S., Lowe, R. A., & Gorman, P. (2016). Dyadic interviews as a tool for qualitative evaluation. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 37(1), 109–117.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Sage.
- Salmons, J. (2014). *Qualitative online interviews: Strategies, design, and skills* (2nd ed.). Sage.
- Spradley, J. P. (1979). *The ethnographic interview*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston.



# Thanks

Any questions?

[ismail.zembat@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:ismail.zembat@glasgow.ac.uk)