

Asking Effective Qualitative Questions

Keys to Success:

- Use plain language (e.g. avoid technical terms and jargon), and keep your questions brief.
- Group questions regarding similar topics and experiences together.
- Begin with more general experiences, and then ask about more specific experiences.
- Begin with less threatening/sensitive experiences; develop mutual trust before delving more deeply.
- Where possible, provide time bounds for participants, so that they can more easily identify experiences or feelings in their memory (e.g. “tell me about the **first time...**,” “in **this school year**, have you...”)
- Avoid asking leading questions. Instead, allow the participant to develop their own thoughts and feelings.

The following section provides examples of qualitative questions:

1) Example: Interviews for a project studying the experience of students playing Quidditch.

Good: What were your reasons for joining the Quiddich Team last year?

○ *Good follow-ups:*

- *How did the experience work out for you? What about the experience made it _____? (fill in blank with participant experience)*

Bad: Quiddich is not really a sport. What made you decide to participate?

○ *Note: leading with the interviewer’s negative feelings will likely change the tone of the response.*

○ *Bad follow-ups:*

- *So you just decided to quit? Why? (note: leads with judgment)*
- *Do you think you’ll join the team again next year? (note: yes/no response)*

2) Example: Interviews studying students’ participation in a research project.

Good: How did you decide to participate in this research project? What were the most important factors?

- *What other research projects, if any, have you participated in since coming to college?*
- *What have you liked most about your experience? What have you liked least?*

Bad: Why would you fail to participate in research, knowing how important it is for grad school?

○ *Note: implying judgment will change the tone of the response.*

- *Are you giving up on the idea of participating in research entirely then? (yes/no, judging)*

3) Example: Interviews about students experiences in the student union.

Good: Think about the last time you were in the student union. How did you feel?

- *What about the people you encountered made you feel that way?*
- *What about the spaces you encountered made you feel that way?*

Bad: Tell me how you feel about the overcrowding in the student union.

○ *Note: Assumes a negative experience in the union rather than leaving open.*

- *Have you told anyone in the union about your experiences? (note: yes/no)*
- *I’ve never had an experience like that. Are you sure you are remembering it correctly? (note: judging, yes/no)*

For more information check out the following documents, located at <http://www.sairo.ucla.edu/AssessmentSupport.html>

- Planning Your Assessment
- Interview Planning Checklist
- Worksheet for Assessment Planning
- Links to Additional Resources.