

Every interview has a **degree of structure**, and this degree is determined by interview type, situation, purpose, length, and complexity. Although specific types of interviews may require some unique differences in structure, basic principles and techniques apply to all interviews. **The objectives of this chapter** are to introduce you to these principles and techniques and explain how to apply them to the opening, body, and closing of interviews.

The Body of the Interview

When preparing for an interview, it is tempting to begin by thinking of questions to ask. Focus instead on the **purpose** of the interview. What exactly do you **need in this** interaction with **this party**? With a clear purpose in mind, develop an **interview guide**.

Interview Guide

An interview guide contains topics, not questions.

An **interview guide** is a carefully structured outline of relevant topics and subtopics to be addressed in the interview. The guide identifies specific areas of inquiry to ensure coverage of all important topics. It is not a list of questions, but it will assist in phrasing questions, recording answers, noting impressions and insights, and recalling information when the interview is over.

Structural Sequences

An interview guide provides a clear and systematic outline for the interview, so review sequences learned over the years. Five sequences are common in interviews.

Sequences help organize topics and impose a degree of structure on interviews.

A **topical sequence** follows natural divisions of a topic or issue. For example, if you are planning to interview an attorney about law schools you might attend, your guide would include such topics as ranking among law schools, areas of specialization, quality of the law school review, number and type of law firms that come to campus for interviews, and cost. The traditional **journalist's guide** consisting of six key words—who, what, when, where, how, and why—is useful in many interview settings.

A **time sequence** treats topics or parts of topics in chronological order. For instance, in an interview with a fire inspector about a recent fire in a residence hall on campus, start with when the fire was detected, and then proceed to when the first crews

arrived at the hall, when they started attacking the fire, when they had it under control, and when they left the scene.

A **space sequence** arranges topics according to spatial divisions: left to right, top to bottom, north to south, or neighborhood to neighborhood. For instance, when interviewing a person about a house on Ocean Isle Beach for a family gathering, you might begin with the number and arrangement of bedrooms, and then proceed to the kitchen facilities, dining areas, recreational rooms, swimming pool size and area, and end with the beach.

A **cause-to-effect sequence** explores causes and effects, but not necessarily in that order. For instance, if it is known that a school bus went off the road and rolled two times before landing on its side, you might focus on possible causes of the accident (driver error, driver distraction, mechanical failure, slippery roadway). If the cause(s) of the school bus accident are known, you might focus on the effects of the accident on the student occupants (death and injuries) and then on the bus (collapse of the top, broken windows, seats coming loose).

A **problem-solution sequence** consists of a problem phase and a solution phase. For instance, if you are concerned about reports that canine flu has appeared in your area, you might interview a veterinarian about the threat this flu might pose for your 10-week-old puppy and how you can avoid this danger.

Developing an Interview Guide

With your purpose firmly in mind, start creating an interview guide by determining the major topics you want to cover in the interview. For example, if you are studying international business and are interested in spending a semester abroad, talk to professors familiar with your interests, study abroad opportunities, and experiences of students who have recently studied abroad. Major topics may include the following:

- I. Top programs abroad in international business
- II. Cultures
- III. Expenses
- IV. Teaching and learning facilities
- V. Research facilities

Once you have identified major topic areas, place subtopics under each.

- I. Top programs abroad in international business
 - A. Vienna
 - B. Prague
 - C. Berlin
 - D. Paris
- II. Cultures
 - A. Language
 - B. History
 - C. Historical sites
 - D. Arts and music

A guide ensures the consideration of all important topics and subtopics.

- III. Expenses
 - A. Food
 - B. Housing
 - C. Travel
 - D. Academic
- IV. Teaching and learning facilities
 - A. Learning and support services
 - B. Courses and independent study
 - C. Resources for learning
 - D. Electronic learning media
- V. Research facilities
 - A. Laboratories
 - B. Libraries
 - C. IT and computing facilities
 - D. Entrepreneur center

Interviews may include more than one sequence or none at all.

With major topics and subtopics outlined, consider subtopics of subtopics. These might include potential language problems or cultural differences and academic costs such as tuition, fees, insurance, or supplies. Sometimes it is difficult to know enough to list all important topics under subtopics until an interview commences. Interviewers often employ more than one outline sequence in an interview because of the nature of topics and subtopics.

Interview Schedules

A Nonscheduled Interview

A nonscheduled interview is merely an interview guide.

If an interview will be brief such as determining date, time, and place of a meeting or a few biographical details, you might conduct the interview from a guide. This is called a **nonscheduled interview**. A nonscheduled interview conducted from an interview guide gives maximum freedom to probe into answers and adapt to the interviewee and situation as the interview progresses. It requires considerable skill, however, because there are no prepared questions and it may be difficult to maintain control during a freewheeling interaction.

A Moderately Scheduled Interview

A moderately scheduled interview lessens the need for instant question creation.

A **moderately scheduled interview** consists of all major questions with possible probing questions under each. The sentences and phrases in a guide become questions. The moderate schedule, like the nonscheduled interview, not only allows freedom to probe into answers and adapt to different interviewees and situations, but it also imposes a greater degree of structure, aids in recording answers, and is easier to conduct and replicate. It is unnecessary to phrase every question on the spot because they are thought out and carefully worded in advance. There are fewer pressures during the interview. Since interview parties tend to wander during unstructured interviews, listing questions makes it easier to keep on track and return to a structure when desired. Journalists,

medical personnel, recruiters, lawyers, police officers, and insurance investigators, to name a few, use moderately scheduled interviews.

A Highly Scheduled Interview

Highly scheduled interviews sacrifice flexibility and adaptability for control.

On paper a **highly scheduled interview** may look little different from a moderately scheduled interview, but they are very different in execution. Unlike a moderate schedule, all questions in a highly scheduled interview are asked exactly as they are worded on the schedule. There are no unplanned probing questions, word changes, or deviation from the schedule. Highly scheduled interviews are easy to replicate and conduct, take less time than nonscheduled and moderately scheduled interviews, and prevent parties from wandering into irrelevant areas or spending too much time on a topic. Flexibility and adaptation are not options, however. Probing questions must be planned. Researchers and survey takers use highly scheduled interviews.

A Highly Scheduled Standardized Interview

Highly scheduled standardized interviews provide precision, replicability, and reliability.

The **highly scheduled standardized interview** is the most thoroughly planned and structured. You ask all questions and answer options in identical words to each interviewee who then picks answers from those provided. There is no straying from the schedule by either party. Highly scheduled standardized interviews are the easiest to conduct, record, tabulate, and replicate. However, you may not probe into answers, explain questions, or adapt to different interviewees. Respondents cannot explain, amplify, qualify, or question answer options. **Built-in interviewer bias** may be worse than **accidental bias** encountered in nonscheduled and moderately scheduled interviews. Researchers and survey takers use highly scheduled standardized interviews because their procedures must produce the same results in repeated interviews by several interviewers.

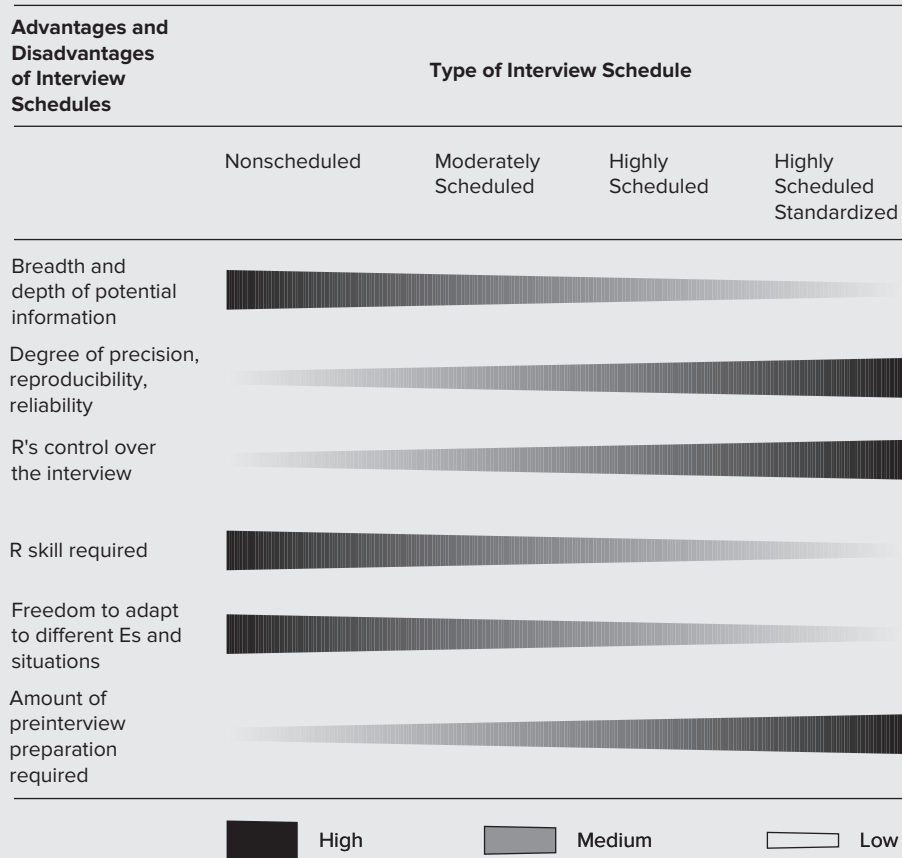
Each interviewing schedule has unique advantages and disadvantages. Choose the schedule best suited to your needs, skills, type of information desired, and situation. One type of schedule does not fit all interview types and situations. A schedule designed for a survey would be a terrible schedule for an employment interview. Consider a strategic combination of schedules. For instance, use a nonscheduled approach when obtaining easily accessible information at the start of an interview and then switch to a moderately scheduled approach when carefully crafted questions are essential. When conducting a survey, employ a highly scheduled approach to ask open-ended questions and then switch to a highly scheduled standardized approach to obtain easily quantifiable information. Figure 4.1 reveals the advantages and disadvantages of each type of schedule and combinations.

Combined schedules enable interviewers to satisfy multiple needs.

Exercise #1—Interview Schedules

Which schedule or combination would be most appropriate for each of the situations below: nonscheduled, moderately scheduled, highly scheduled, highly scheduled standardized? Explain why you would select this schedule.

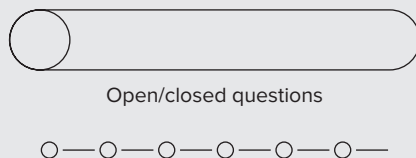
1. You are a journalist interviewing witnesses to a hit and run on campus resulting in critical injuries to two students.
2. You are a recruiter for a computer software firm conducting interviews at a job fair arranged on campus.

Figure 4.1 *Structural options*

3. You are conducting a survey of graduating seniors as part of a nationwide study of the status of the job market for college graduates.
4. You are a developer of an apartment complex near a college campus and are attempting to persuade a member of the city council to vote for your proposal.
5. You are a member of the Parks and Recreation Board and missed the last meeting because of a family emergency. You are interviewing another board member to learn what was discussed and agreed upon at that meeting.

Question Sequences

Once an appropriate **interview schedule** or combination of schedules is determined, choose appropriate **question sequences**. There are six options: tunnel, funnel, inverted funnel, hourglass, diamond, and quintamensional design.

Figure 4.2 *The tunnel (string of beads) sequence*

Tunnel Sequence

A tunnel sequence works well with informal and simple interviews.

The **tunnel sequence**, or string of beads, is a comparable string of open or closed questions. See Figure 4.2. Each question may cover a specific topic, ask for a specific piece of information, or identify an attitude or feeling. A tunnel sequence looks like the following.

I understand that you took part in the 24-hour endurance bicycle race at the Subaru test track to help raise money for the CASA for Kids Fund yesterday.

1. When did you decide to take part in this race?
2. Who organized your team?
3. Where did you get your bicycle?
4. How long did you prepare for this grueling race?
5. What was the toughest part of the race?

The tunnel sequence is common in polls, surveys, journalistic interviews, and medical interviews designed to elicit information, attitudes, reactions, and intentions. Answers to closed questions are easier to record and quantify.

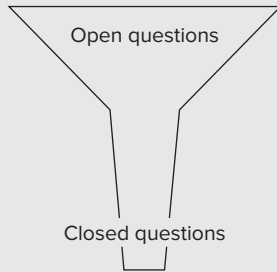
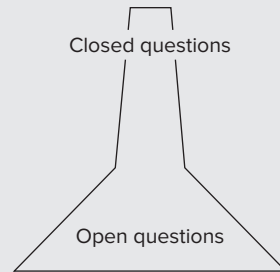
Funnel Sequence

A funnel sequence works well with motivated interviewees.

A **funnel sequence** begins with broad, open-ended questions and proceeds with more restricted questions. See Figure 4.3. The following is a funnel sequence.

1. Tell me about your internship at ESPN.
2. What did you do on a typical day?
3. What were your impressions of ESPN?
4. Which events did you cover?
5. How long were you at ESPN?

A funnel sequence is most appropriate when respondents are familiar with a topic, feel free to talk about it, want to express their feelings, and are motivated to reveal and explain attitudes. Open questions are easier to answer, pose less threat to respondents, and get people talking, so the funnel sequence is a good way to begin interviews. It lessens the chances of conditioning or biasing later responses. If you begin an interview with closed questions, you may force a respondent to take a polar position or signal that you want only brief answers. Open questions invite respondents to explain and qualify positions.

Figure 4.3 *The funnel sequence***Figure 4.4** *The inverted funnel sequence*

An inverted funnel sequence provides a warm-up time for those reluctant to talk.

Inverted Funnel Sequence

The **inverted funnel sequence** begins with closed questions and proceeds toward open questions. It is most useful in motivating interviewees to respond or when interviewees are emotionally involved in an issue or situation and cannot readily reply to open questions. See Figure 4.4. The following is an inverted funnel sequence.

1. When did you hear the first shot?
2. How many shots did you hear?
3. What did you see when you went outside?
4. How did you react when you saw your neighbor lying in his yard?
5. What did you do until the first responders arrived?

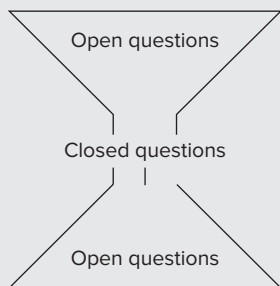
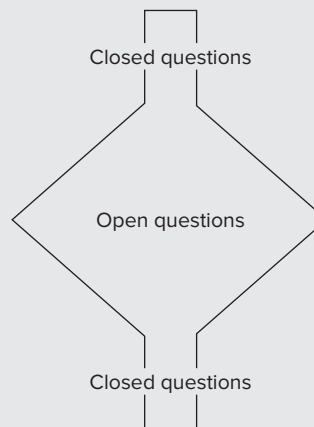
The inverted funnel sequence is appropriate when interviewees feel they do not know enough about a topic or are hesitant. Closed questions serve as warm-ups and memory enhancers when open-ended ones might overwhelm a person or result in disorganized and confused answers. This sequence may end with a clearinghouse question.

Combination Sequences

A combination of sequences enables you to approach interview situations and interviewees with flexibility and adaptability. For example, the **hourglass sequence** begins with open questions, proceeds to closed questions, and concludes with open questions. This sequence allows you to narrow your focus before proceeding to broader concerns when the situation or topic warrants it. See Figure 4.5. A **diamond sequence** places funnel sequences top-to-top by beginning with closed questions, proceeding to open questions, and closing with closed questions. See Figure 4.6.

Quintamensional Design Sequence

George Gallup, the famous poll designer, developed the **quintamensional design sequence** to assess the intensity of opinions and attitudes. This five-step approach proceeds

Figure 4.5 *The hourglass sequence***Figure 4.6** *The diamond sequence*

The **quinta-**
mensional
design is
effective at
assessing
attitudes and
beliefs.

from an interviewee's awareness of the issue to attitudes uninfluenced by the interviewer, specific attitudes, reasons for these attitudes, and intensity of attitude. For example:

1. *Awareness:* What do you know about the new environmental regulations on using coal to generate electricity?
2. *Uninfluenced attitudes:* How might these regulations affect you?
3. *Specific attitude:* Do you approve or disapprove of these new regulations?
4. *Reason why:* Why do you feel this way?
5. *Intensity of attitude:* How strongly do you feel about this—strongly, very strongly, not something you will change your mind on?

Opening the Interview

It takes **two**
parties to
launch an
interview
successfully.

When you have determined a specific purpose and developed an appropriate structure for an interview that may include some or all of the questions to be asked, create an opening adapted to the purpose, parties, and situation. What you say and do or fail to say and do during the few seconds or minutes of the interaction are critical to your relationship with the interviewee and success of the interview. The **opening** sets the tone and mood of the interview and affects willingness and ability to go beyond Level 1 interactions. The tone may be serious or lighthearted, optimistic or pessimistic, professional or nonprofessional, formal or informal, threatening or nonthreatening, relaxed or tense. A poor opening may lead to a **defensive climate** with superficial, vague, and inaccurate responses.

The opening is critical to **motivating** both parties to participate willingly and to communicate freely and accurately. Motivation is a **mutual product** of interviewer

and interviewee, so every opening must be a **dialogue**, not a **monologue**. Do it *with* the other party, not *to* the other party. Too often interviewees are given little opportunity to say anything beyond single-word responses to opening questions. Interrupting interviewees is common. A study of physicians interacting with patients, for instance, revealed that physicians did not permit patients to complete their closing statements 69 percent of the time.¹

The Two-Step Process

The opening must establish rapport and orient the other party to encourage active participation and willingness to continue with the interview. Interview type, situation, relationship of the parties, and personal preferences determine what is included in the opening and how long it will last.

Rapport

Do not overdo small talk or compliments.

Establishing **rapport** is a process of creating and sustaining a **genuine relationship** between interviewer and interviewee through enhancing feelings of **goodwill** and **trust**. If the relationship is long-standing and positive, consider a simple greeting, tasteful humor, and personal inquiries or references to families, mutual acquaintances, the weather, sports, or news events. Accompany each with nonverbal actions such as a firm handshake, good eye contact, a smile, and friendly voice. Several factors may determine what is **appropriate**, including local and national customs, organizational traditions and policies, status differences of the parties, formality and seriousness of the situation, and interview type. Avoid calling strangers, superiors, or high-status persons by their first names or nick names unless instructed to do so. Do not prolong the rapport stage or overdo “sweet talk” such as praise, congratulations, and admiration. Know when enough is enough and always be sincere.



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Orientation

If the other party is **unfamiliar** with the purpose, length, and nature of the interview; how the information will be used; or why and how they were selected, address these during the opening. Do not **assume** the interviewee party understands what is going to take place during the interview and why. If uncertain, ask.

Interviewers often **assume** that when the other party **appears similar** to them in some ways—gender, age, ethnic background, culture, appearance, language, education—they are similar in ways critical to the purpose and success of the interview.

■ What you do and say in the opening seconds sets the tone for the remainder of the interview.

Be careful of assuming too much or too little about the other party.

LaRay Barna warns that “The aura of similarity is a serious stumbling block to successful intercultural communication. A look-alike facade is deceiving when representatives from contrasting cultures meet, each wearing Western dress, speaking English, and using similar greeting rituals.”² You may falsely assume that you share similar nonverbal codes, beliefs, attitudes, or values. “Unless there is overt reporting of assumptions made by each party, which seldom happens, there is no chance of comparing impressions and correcting misinterpretations.”

Rapport and orientation are often intermixed to reduce **relational uncertainty**. By the end of the opening, both parties should be aware of the genuineness of the relationship, relevant similarities, desire to take part, and level of trust. Poor openings mislead and create problems as an interview progresses. Think about a situation in which you thought you were taking part in a political survey or discussing security concerns in your neighborhood only to discover that the interview was a disguised pitch for a political candidate or a security system for your apartment. The sample opening below illustrates the rapport and orientation steps for an interview taking place at the door of an apartment.

1. **Interviewer:** Hi. I’m Tim Bowers representing an organization of apartment renters such as you who are concerned about the numerous break-ins that are occurring in apartment complexes in this area.
2. **Interviewee:** Hi Tim. Is this a sales pitch for a security system? I’ve been getting calls almost every evening for the last two weeks wanting me to buy an expensive alarm system.
3. **Interviewer:** No; I’m not trying to sell you anything. I live in the Riverside apartments a couple of blocks from here and want to talk for a few minutes about setting up a neighborhood watch system to stop the break-ins. My apartment was robbed a few weeks ago, and I lost my laptop, tablet, and television. It’s been a mess.
4. **Interviewee:** I’m sorry to hear that. So far I have been lucky. My name is Chloe Stark. I am about to send some business e-mails and do not have much time this evening.
5. **Interviewer:** I fully understand. I’m a graduate student at State and have a research paper to complete this evening. If you have about ten minutes, I would like to tell you about the neighborhood watch some of us are trying to form in this area. We would like to get your ideas and how you think this might work.
6. **Interviewee:** Okay. I do have a few minutes to see what you have in mind and who makes up your organization. Come in.

In some interview situations such as sales and surveys, you may have a carefully crafted opening from which you must not deviate because each interview must be as identical as possible. This is not the case with most interviews, however, and you should be as creative and adaptive as possible to each interviewee and situation. The “all occasions” opening may be an immediate turn off. **Verbal opening techniques** build rapport and inform the other party.

When possible adapt the opening to each interviewee and situation.

State Your Purpose

Explain **why** you are conducting the interview.

Example: (A junior student to a senior student) I understand that you spent the spring semester studying abroad in Brasilia. That's one of the locations I'm looking into for next spring, and wonder if you could tell me about your experiences in Brasilia and Brazil.

Summarize a Problem

Begin with a brief summary when an interviewee is unaware of a problem, vaguely aware of it, or unaware of details. The summary should **inform** the interviewee.

Know when to end the opening and move on.

Example: (An associate and a supervisor) As you know, we have been encountering some problems with the new composite panels we started using on the Model 23 this fall. It's taking longer to align and install these panels that seem more pliable than those used in the past. I would like to talk to you about some ideas associates on the line have for speeding up this process.

Explain How a Problem Was Discovered

Explain *how* a problem was detected and perhaps *by whom* without placing the interviewee on the defensive.

Example: (A coach and a pitcher on the softball team) Alice [a trainer for the team] has informed me that you have experienced some pain in your left shoulder after the last two games and that it seems to be getting worse.

Offer an Incentive or Reward

Offer an incentive to motivate an interviewee that is significant and appropriate for the situation.

Example: (Interviewer and a student living in an apartment complex) I'm conducting a survey of residents to determine what the owners might do to make Westwood Apartments an even better residence for students. Your input will impact what they focus on in the next few months.

Request Advice or Assistance

Make a request for assistance that is clear, precise, and appropriate for the interviewee.

Example: (Student and a counselor) I would like to apply for an internship for next summer but don't know where to start or what might be available in my field.

Be sincere in offering incentives or requesting advice.

Refer to the Interviewee's Position on an Issue

Be tactful, positive, and accurate when identifying the interviewee's position on an issue.

Example: (Journalist and a public school superintendent) I have read your guest editorials that have opposed the state's ever-increasing funding of charter schools

while lessening state regulations of these schools. I would like to talk to you about your proposals for addressing these concerns.

Identify the Person Who Sent You

Identifying a person the interviewee knows and respects may create a positive connection and begin to establish a relationship. Be sure references have given you permission to use their names.

Example: (Student and a geologist) I'm writing a paper on geological formations of mountain ranges outside of North America, and Professor Hauser in the geology department suggested that I talk to you about your experiences in the Himalayas.

Identify Your Organization

Know what to do if references to an organization generate negative reactions.

It may be important or necessary to identify the organization you represent to establish your identity and legitimacy. Be prepared for situations in which interviewees may have unfavorable attitudes toward your organization because of negative experiences or publicity resulting from published complaints, product recalls, lawsuits, investigations, or scandals.

Example: (A home builder and a prospect) Good morning. I'm Jason Matthews with Rolling Hills Construction.

Ask for a Specific Amount of Time

Make an appointment for interviews of more than 5 or 10 minutes.

Request an amount of time necessary to achieve your purpose. Avoid the most misused and unrealistic request, "Got a second?"

Example: (Client to an attorney). Hi John. Do you have about fifteen minutes to discuss a copyright concern?

Ask a Question

Ask an easy to answer, open-ended question that is nonthreatening and starts the orientation stage of the opening. Beware of closed questions an interviewee can answer with a "No."

Example: (A recruiter to a prospect) What are you looking for in a position?

An interviewee may be turned off by obvious yes-no question.

Example: Are we going to do anything important in class today?
Are you busy?

Make the opening a dialogue between two parties.

Carefully craft each opening from these techniques so it is appropriate for the interviewee and situation. **Involve the interviewee in the opening as a partner rather than bystander; make the opening a dialogue rather than a monologue.** When you are the interviewee, insist on playing an active rather than passive role.

Nonverbal Communication in Openings

What you say in an opening is highly important, but so is **how** you say it. Nonverbal communication—voice, face, gestures, and appearance—is critical in creating a

First impressions often determine the tone and flow of communication.

positive first impression that motivates the interviewee to respond and take part in the interview. How you communicate nonverbally in the first few minutes of the interview reveals level of sincerity, trust, trustworthiness, warmth, and interest.

Territoriality

As human beings, we naturally value our space (office, room, home, place at a table, the surrounding area when standing) and see intrusions as violations of social and organizational norms that dictate proper behavior. Always knock before entering a room, even when the door is open. Wait until the party signals verbally or nonverbally for you to enter and sit down. Never interrupt a conversation. Wait your turn. Women in our society continue to enjoy less territoriality than men. Judy Pearson writes that in the United States, “Few women have a particular and unviolated room in their homes while many men have man caves, studies, or work areas which are off limits to others. Similarly, it appears that more men than women have particular chairs reserved for their use.”³ Be aware of these outdated norms and practices but show equal respect to the space both men and women value and protect.

Appearance, Dress, Face, and Voice

Appearance and dress should send appropriate opening signals.

Appearance, dress, face, and voice communicate interest, sincerity, warmth, urgency, attractiveness, neatness, maturity, and professionalism. Do not signal catastrophe when the interview is routine, friendliness when you are going to discipline a person, warmth when angry, happiness when a major problem needs urgent attention, or closeness with strangers.

Touch

Know when and with whom touch is appropriate.

When shaking hands is appropriate for the relationship and the situation, give a firm handshake. Do not overdo handshaking with acquaintances and colleagues or during informal interviews. Touching is appropriate only when parties have an established and close relationship and expect it.

Reading Nonverbal Communication

Sex and culture regulate nonverbal communication in openings.

Interpersonal communication theorists emphasize the importance of nonverbal clues. For instance, Trenholm and Jensen write, “People read a lot in our facial expressions. They infer some personality traits and attitudes, judge reactions to their own messages, regard facial expressions as verbal replacements, and, primarily, use them to determine our emotional state.”⁴ Regarding first impressions, Floyd notes that “the quality of a person’s clothing is a relatively reliable visual cue to his or her socio-economic status” and type or style of clothing may enable us, often quite accurately, to identify an interview party with a particular cultural or political group.⁵ Stewart warns us, however, that we “tend to *notice* those behaviors [and possibly appearance and dress] that are consistent with the beliefs we have about another and ignore those that are inconsistent.”⁶

The importance of nonverbal communication in openings is indisputable. The trick is to interpret the behavior accurately without underestimating or overestimating its importance in the process. Even people with similar backgrounds differ significantly in nonverbal behavior and the signals they send. For instance, men and women tend

to communicate in different ways. Lillian Glass has catalogued 105 “talk differences” between American men and women in basic areas of communication: body language, facial language, speech and voice patterns, language content, and behavioral patterns. She has found that men touch others more often, tend to avoid eye contact and not look directly at the other person, sound more abrupt and less approachable, make direct accusations, and give fewer compliments.⁷ Other research indicates that women are more skilled at “rapport talk” that establishes and strengthens relationships while men are more skilled at “report talk” that analyzes issues and resolves problems.

While Americans may share rules for greeting others, these rules may not be shared with other cultures. Shaking hands, for instance, is a Western custom, particularly in the United States, so do not ascribe meaning to firmness or lack of firmness when interviewing persons from other cultures who may see handshaking as merely a quaint Western custom of little importance. While Americans expect persons to look them in the eyes to exhibit trust, openness, and sincerity, other cultures consider such eye contact to be impolite and insulting. The United States is not a touching society, but do not be shocked if a party from Italy or Latin America touches you during an opening.

Exercise #2—Interview Openings

How satisfactory is each of the following openings? Consider the interviewing situation and type, the techniques used, and what is omitted. How might each be improved? Do not assume that each opening is unsatisfactory.

1. This is an interview between a professor and a student about a field project.

Interviewer: Professor Kuang, got a minute?

Interviewee: If that’s all it will take.

Interviewer: Uh, I need a bit longer than that.

2. This is an interview between an assistant manager and a manager.

Interviewer: I can’t believe the rumor that you have let Jessie go.

Interviewee: It’s not a rumor.

Interviewer: Is it too late to talk about this?

3. This is an interview in a large publishing company between two editors.

Interviewer: Are you busy?

Interviewee: If I’m not, we’re both in trouble.

Interviewer: I’m sorry. I meant do you have time to talk about the new political science series.

4. This is an interview between a recruiter from a large medical facility and a senior in nursing.

Interviewer: Hi Sam. (pointing to a chair) Did you have any trouble finding us?

Interviewee: Not really.

Interviewer: Good. Well let’s get down to business.

5. This is an interview in the hallway near the U.S. Senate chamber between a NBC Capitol Hill correspondent and a senator. The senator is arriving for a hearing on homeland security.

Interviewer: Senator Morgan (waving and shouting), what's your reaction to the bombing in Paris?

Interviewee: We'll be discussing it during the hearing.

Interviewer: What are your initial reactions?

Closing the Interview

Take your time and be tactful in what you say and do in the closing.

Take the closing of each interview as seriously as you do the opening, because each interaction affects a relational history positively or negatively. For instance, a well-planned and executed closing may enhance the other party's perception of you, the importance of the role played in the interview, and attitudes toward future interactions. On the other hand, an abrupt or ill-planned closing may reduce your credibility and make the other party feel "used" or "taken advantage of."

It is natural to relax and let your guard down when the closing is approaching. Be attentive to everything you say and don't say, do and don't do during the final minutes of an interview. The other party will be listening and watching for signals that reveal interest, appreciation, and sincerity and when the closing is commencing. Focus on this interaction, not on your next task or interview. Be sure the other party is aware the interview is ending.

We signal closings nonverbally before exchanging words. In their classic study of "leave-taking" in interpersonal interactions, Mark Knapp and his colleagues identified a variety of subtle and not so subtle actions that signal closure.⁸ Interviewers may straighten up, lean forward, uncross legs, place hands on knees as if preparing to rise, look at a watch, pause briefly, or break eye contact. More obvious actions are standing up, moving away, or offering to shake hands. Whether subtle or not, nonverbal actions signal that one party wants to close the interview. As an interviewee, watch for signals to detect when a closing is commencing so you are not surprised or have an awkward ending. At the same time, be aware that a person may be checking a watch to see if there is adequate time for additional questions or information sharing, uncrossing legs to get more comfortable, or breaking eye contact to think of a new question. After noticing that students started into leave-taking mode when they glanced at their watches during interactions, the authors placed small clocks inconspicuously on their desks to avoid sending false messages.

Both parties make closings successful.

Guidelines for Closing Interviews

First, make the closing a **dialogue** rather than a **monologue**. As an interviewer, encourage interaction through verbal and nonverbal signals including silence. As an interviewee, respond actively to questions, offer opinions and facts not mentioned, and express appreciation when appropriate.

Second, be sincere and honest in the closing. Make no promises or commitments you cannot or will not be able to keep.



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- Remember that the interview is not completed until the interviewer and interviewee are out of sight and sound of one another.

Be careful of what you do and say.

care, employment, counseling, and sales interviews), explain what will happen next, where it will happen, when it will happen, and why it will happen. When necessary, make an appointment before leaving.

Sixth, don't introduce new topics or ideas or make inquiries when the interview has in fact or psychologically come to a close. A **false closing** occurs when verbal and nonverbal messages signal the interview is coming to a close only for you to open it back up. This may be awkward for both parties and such after-the-fact interactions are likely to add little to the interview.

Seventh, avoid what Erving Goffman called **failed departures** that occur when you have brought an interview to a close and taken leave from the other party. Then a short time later you run into the party in the hall, parking lot, or restaurant.⁹ The result may be awkward because both of you have said your good-byes and have nothing more to say. Practice situations to determine what you might say when this happens.

Regardless of technique, involve the interviewee in the closing.

Closing Techniques

Be creative and imaginative when closing interviews. Adapt each closing to the interviewee and the situation. The following techniques may begin the closing process or complete the closing.

Use a Clearinghouse Question

A clearinghouse question enables you to determine if you have covered all topics, answered all questions, or resolved all concerns. The request must be an honest and sincere effort to ferret out unaddressed questions, information, or areas of concern.

Have I answered all of your questions?

What have I not asked that you think is important for me to know?

Questions, intentions, and inquiries allow you to close effectively.

Declare Completion of the Intended Purpose

State the task is completed. The word *well* often signals many closings so, when you hear it, you automatically assume that leave-taking is commencing and begin to wind things up. Is this what you want to happen?

Okay, I think that's all of the information I need.

Well, that's all the questions I have at this time.

Make Personal Inquiries

Be genuinely interested in the other party.

Personal inquiries are pleasant ways to end interviews and to enhance relationships. Be sincere and give the interviewee adequate time to reply.

What are your plans after graduation?

How is your daughter doing in Costa Rica?

Make Professional Inquiries

Professional inquiries are more formal than personal ones, and must be sincere and express genuine interest.

How are things going for you at Ford?

What products are you developing in Seoul?

Signal That Time Is Up

Do not rush the closing but end the interview when most appropriate.

Abide by the time limit agreed to in advance or during the opening, but be tactful and do not appear to be running an assembly line.

We are about out of time, so . . .

I'm sorry to say that our time is up.

Explain the Reason for the Closing

Explain why the interview must end.

I see you have another person waiting to talk to you.

I have a class in 10 minutes, so . . .

Express Appreciation or Satisfaction

Express appreciation and satisfaction for what you have received—information, assistance, evaluation, a story, a sale, a position, a recruit, or time. Be sincere.

Thank you for all of the information you have given me on housing near campus. It will help me to decide where to apply.

Thanks for taking part in my survey.

Arrange for the Next Meeting

If a subsequent interview is necessary, arrange it now.

When appropriate, arrange the next meeting.

I would like to think about the options we have been discussing; could we meet on Tuesday at the same time?

There are so many facets of your experiences that I find interesting. When might we meet again?

If it is unnecessary to set a specific time for another interview, simple phrases may communicate intervals between interactions. For instance, “See you,” or “Until next time” signal short intervals. “Let’s stay in touch” and “Don’t be a stranger” signal moderate intervals. “Good-bye” and “So long” tend to signal lengthy or forever intervals. “We’ll be in touch” and “Don’t call us; we’ll call you” may signal the traditional “brushoff” that means never. Be aware of cultural differences and expectations between parties. Interviewees from other cultures not familiar with the “Don’t call us; we’ll call you” phrase have been known to quit their current positions in anticipation of immediate job offers that never came.

Summarize the Interview

A summary closing is common for informational, performance, counseling, and sales interviews. Repeat important information, stages, or agreements or verify accuracy and agreement.

I think this has been a good meeting. We both agree then that the annual 5-k walk-run along the Heritage trail will be our major fundraiser for the year and that October would be an ideal month. We’ll ask the coach of the women’s crew team to be the kickoff speaker and her team members to lead the run at 1:30.

When planning an interview, consider which closing technique (or a combination) is most suitable to close this interaction with this party at this time. Focus on what your words and actions are **saying** to the other party at this critical time in the interview.

Plan the closing as carefully as you do the opening and body of the interview.

Your role in an interview and your relationship with the other party may require some techniques, rule out others, and determine who will initiate the closing and when. Usually you will combine several verbal and nonverbal techniques into effective closings.

Exercise #3—Interview Closings

How satisfactory is each of the following closings? Consider the interviewing situation and type, relationship, the techniques used, nonverbal communication, and what is omitted. How might each be improved? Do not assume each closing is unsatisfactory.

1. This is a recruiting interview for an HR position with a national chain of home improvement stores. The applicant will soon graduate with a degree in management.

Interviewer: Well, it’s been a productive interview. We appreciate your interest in our organization.

Interviewee: Thank you.

Interviewer: (Looks at notes but not at the applicant) We'll be in touch. Good luck with your search.

2. This is an interview with Zach and Marge who are looking for a lakeside cottage to rent for the summer.

Interviewer: This cottage seems to meet your needs and is a good price for this area of the lake.

Interviewee: Yes (looking at Marge), well, we need to think about it as we are just beginning to look around.

Interviewer: Okay.

3. This is a performance review of Darrell Smythe who works as a claims adjuster for an insurance company.

Interviewer: You're doing a great job Darrell, just keep in mind some of my suggestions. How's your son doing on the high school baseball team?

Interviewee: He threw a no hitter last week against Deer Creek.

Interviewer: See you soon.

4. This is an interview between a journalist and a whistle blower who has been working for a defense contractor developing a new attack aircraft for the Army.

Interviewer: Well (leaning forward and looking at the interviewee), this has been a very disturbing revelation of the cost overruns being ignored by both the contractor and the Army. Can I get in touch with you at the same cell phone number?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Good. (leaning back) And how long have you known about this?

Interviewee: About 18 months.

5. This is a telephone survey interview being conducted by a survey research organization on an upcoming primary election.

Interviewer: That's all the questions I have.

Interviewee: When will the results be announced?

Interviewer: Why do you ask?

Interviewee: I'm curious about its timing.

ON THE WEB

This chapter has presented guidelines and techniques for developing effective openings and closings. Use the Internet to locate sample interviews on issues such as education, the economy, foreign affairs, and medicine. Critique the openings

and closings used in these interviews. Two useful Internet resources for locating interviews are CNN (<http://cnn.com>) and C-SPAN (<http://indycable.com/cabletv/comastindyupgrade/ch24.htm>).

Summary

Each part of the interview—opening, body, and closing—is vital to its success. Do not underestimate the importance of both words and nonverbal actions and reactions during all three stages. Be conscious of cultural differences that affect the meaning of actions such as handshaking, eye contact, voice, touch, and gestures.

The opening influences how both parties perceive themselves and one another. It sets the tone for the remainder of the interview, orients the interviewee, and influences the willingness of both parties to communicate beyond Level 1. The opening may determine whether the interview continues. Select opening techniques most appropriate for each interview.

Carefully structure the body with an appropriate sequence that guides the interviewer's questions, areas of information, or points systematically and allows the interviewee to understand where the interview is going and why. A nonscheduled interview is simply an interview guide with topics and subtopics an interviewer wants to cover. A moderately scheduled interview contains all major questions and possible probing questions under each. A highly scheduled interview includes all questions to be asked during an interview. A highly scheduled standardized interview contains all questions to be asked with prescribed answer options under each. Question sequences allow strategic structuring of questions within scheduled interviews.

The closing brings the interview to an end and may summarize information, verify agreements, arrange future contacts, and enhance relationships. A good closing should make both parties glad they took part and pleased with the results. Be sincere and honest by not rushing the closing, by making promises and commitments that you can and will keep, and by making sure both parties are actively involved.

Key Terms and Concepts

Accidental bias	Hourglass sequence	Problem-solution sequence
Built-in interviewer bias	Interview guide	Question sequences
Cause-to-effect sequence	Interview schedules	Quintamimensional design sequence
Closing	Inverted funnel sequence	Rapport
Closing techniques	Journalist's guide	Relational uncertainty
Combination schedule	Law of recency	Space sequence
Culture	Moderately scheduled interview	Territoriality
Defensive climate	Nonscheduled interview	Time sequence
Diamond sequence	Nonverbal closing actions	Topical sequence
Failed departures	Nonverbal communication	Tunnel sequence
False closings	Opening	Verbal opening techniques
Funnel sequence	Orientation	
Highly scheduled interview	Outline sequences	
Highly scheduled standardized interview		

Student Activities

1. Select an interview topic and a person you would choose to interview. Develop the body of the interview with a carefully phrased and limited purpose. Create an interview guide (beginning with major topics, proceeding to subtopics) and select one or more outline sequences. Turn your guide into an appropriate question schedule: moderately scheduled, highly scheduled, or highly scheduled standardized. Determine which question sequences you would employ.
2. Watch a televised interview of at least 15 minutes in length. How was the interview opened verbally and nonverbally? How involved was the interviewee? Which type of schedule did the interviewer employ? Which question sequences did the interviewer employ? How was the interview closed verbally and nonverbally? How involved was the interviewee? Rate the effectiveness of each stage of the interview according to the guidelines presented in this chapter.
3. Watch a televised interview of at least 15 minutes in length. Try to construct an interview guide of topics from this interview. From this guide, see if you can detect one or more question schedules and question sequences. From your reconstruction of this interview, what conclusions would you draw about the interviewer's preparation? How would you improve the guide and schedule(s)?
4. Make arrangements to interview an experienced interviewer: for example, a journalist, police officer, counselor, recruiter, insurance investigator, fund raiser. Answer these questions as you prepare for this interview. How will you determine which opening techniques to use? How will you determine whether to operate from an interview guide (a nonscheduled interview), or a moderately scheduled, a highly scheduled, or highly scheduled standardized interview format? How will you determine which closing techniques to use? How will purpose, relationship, situation, and time influence your choices?

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