

33. Building the research relationship

When respondents arrive for an interview, they may be: curious, cautious, and slightly anxious (will they have the answers?), possibly intimidated by the setting – as well as looking forward to giving their opinions.

As you chat, they will build confidence in the interviewer (possibly throwing in a couple of tests along the way) and then will reveal some of their more private thoughts and feelings when there is reasonable trust.

The stages of an interview work to fulfil both interviewers and respondents needs.

Stage	How respondent is feeling	Interviewer's task CONTENT	Interviewer's task PROCESS
<i>Interviewer's introduction</i>	<i>Curious but insecure – this is the unknown</i>	<i>To explain the purpose of the research, take care of formalities</i>	<i>Make respondent feel welcome and comfortable through explanation</i>
<i>Respondent's introduction</i>	<i>OK to answer simple questions about themselves</i>	<i>To obtain basic information about the respondent</i>	<i>To develop a strategy for creating rapport by observing respondent</i>
<i>Warm up discussion</i>	<i>Starting to feel accepted and interested but still cautious</i>	<i>Get context for understanding</i>	<i>To foster Inclusion: Recognition, attention, involvement, acceptance</i>
<i>Focusing into the subject</i>	<i>Feel more confident – may test the boundaries of the interview</i>	<i>To start exploring the basic issues in the research</i>	<i>Interviewer needs control of the process, respondent control of the content.</i>
<i>Key issue exploration</i>	<i>Rapport created by the interviewer has built trust.</i>	<i>The tricky topics Deeper probing Use of techniques</i>	<i>Openness: empathy, warmth, co-operation, dropping of personal defence mechanisms and impression management</i>
<i>Summary and close</i>	<i>Should feel listened to and comfortable</i>	<i>To acknowledge the respondents contribution and check own understanding</i>	<i>To break rapport and signal the interview is over.</i>

This particular model of the process is based on the [Firo B](#).

34. The power of a good introduction

The very first impression you create matters. Aim for warm and competent.

What do people subconsciously think when they meet someone new?

According to [Fiske et al](#)⁶, the very first judgment is an evolutionarily based one: is this person a friend or foe? There are two dimensions:

1. Warmth – degree of friendliness indicating their intentions.
2. Competence – how able are they to enact those intentions?

At the start there is always a power imbalance. The interviewer has knowledge power – knowing what will happen. The respondent does not, so they will listen very carefully. The introduction is more than just a warm up and exchange of information:

- It's an explicit and implicit 'contract'. You agree to reward the respondent; they agree to give you information.
- The structure & form of the introduction reassures about content and expected behaviour. The way you deliver the introduction and the language you use indicates the degree of formality, the acceptability of jokes and other verbal behaviour.
- You can set up expectations of exercises and other tasks so they do not come as a surprise.
- The introduction explicitly works against consensus: you emphasise you need their personal opinion
- It helps manage potentially difficult respondents. Give yourself permission to interrupt and move people on, if required.
- It gives respondents permission - to disagree, to be silly, to be creative – whatever you need. It sets the tone.
- It sets out obligations to your 'partners in enquiry' – you will keep to time, they don't have to answer, you will keep the information confidential and so on.

Write your introduction in bullet points so you can easily adapt it for different people. Remember that the way you say it almost as important as what you say.

And the introduction can be used to repeat the assurances made at recruitment relevant to the Code of Conduct and Data Protection. So although it is quick and routine, it is still a powerful psychological communication.

⁶ Universal dimensions of social cognition: warmth and competence Susan T. Fiske, Amy J.C. Cuddy and Peter Glick

Psychology of a good introduction	What you actually say
<i>Sound friendly, warm and competent</i>	<i>Welcome and thanks</i>
<i>Respondents feel more comfortable as they know more</i>	<i>Introduce yourself, company, explain purpose of research</i>
<i>It's OK to criticise, you won't hurt anyone's feelings</i>	<i>Independent researcher*</i>
<i>Feel protected, empowered</i>	<i>Code of Conduct, anonymity, right to withdraw</i>
<i>Reason for recording or viewing **</i>	<i>Your information is very valuable to us and the detail is useful</i>
<i>Set expectations of free interaction</i>	<i>'Chatting' (informal), doing exercises</i>
<i>It's not a test, researcher is non-judgmental</i>	<i>No right or wrong answers</i>
<i>Not others' views or the company message</i>	<i>Your own personal views matter</i>
<i>You can relax. The researcher is expert in process management</i>	<i>Interviewer's job is to ask questions, manage time, move on if necessary</i>
<i>Set an appropriate tone for the subject</i>	<i>Be serious / be creative / be collaborative – whatever you need</i>
<i>Change norms of conversation</i>	<i>Model the language to be used</i>
<i>We will look after all your needs</i>	<i>Housekeeping issues, refreshments, etc.</i>

*If you can't claim to be an independent researcher, then change the statement to show that you have no direct interest in what is being researched. You didn't design it; you are from a different team –anything you can honestly say to show you won't be offended if they don't like it.

** According to the Code, clients who are observing must be presented as such. If that knowledge would adversely affect the interview, the respondent may be told at a later stage. If there is a chance the observer and participant may know each other (as in business to business research), the participant must be told before the interview and given a chance to withdraw.

After this introduction some interviewers ask if there are any questions, then ask the respondent to give some information about themselves.