

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](#)¹, 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:

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.

- 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.
- In a group, 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.

¹ Universal dimensions of social cognition: warmth and competence Susan T. Fiske, Amy J.C. Cuddy and Peter Glick

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.

See the video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iyEbuWLLiII>

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

*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.