



Building the research relationship in a depth interview

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. Some might be sceptical or cynical.

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

The research introduction helps to dispel any misapprehensions or anxieties. It is important to make the respondent feel included and valued. The interviewer holds all the cards at the start since s/he knows what will happen. The introduction also evens out the power balance. Once the respondent feels they have some power they may test the boundaries of the relationship. For example, they might emphasise that they must finish on time, or say something provocative about the subject. The interviewer needs to remain professional, tolerant, and able to draw the interview back to the topic.

The aim is to get to a stage of open-ness by building rapport, through a warm-up discussion and a gradual focus into the subject. They will reveal some of their more private thoughts and feelings when there is reasonable trust in the relationship.



Stage	How respondent is feeling	Interviewer's task CONTENT	Interviewer's task PROCESS
Interviewer's introduction	<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>
Respondent's introduction	<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>
Warm up discussion	<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>
Focusing into the subject	<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>
Key issue exploration	<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>
Summary and close	<i>Should feel listened to and comfortable</i>	<i>To acknowledge the respondent's 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](#).

There are a number of models that share a similar pattern. It is not important whether you choose to subscribe to any particular one; what matters is the recognition that there are different stages and that the interviewer needs to do different things at different times.