

Raymond L. Gorden, Interviewing, op. cit.

6

Tactics in the interview

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Those *chronological patterns* of techniques in the give-and-take of the interview that are aimed at facilitating the flow of relevant information while maintaining optimum interpersonal relations with the respondent are here defined as interviewing *tactics*. Many auxiliary interviewers are responsible for all the tactical decisions in their interviewing. In large-scale survey projects all or most of the tactical decisions are planned in advance by the research director, consultants, or supervisors, leaving only a few of the tactical decisions to the judgment of the specialized interviewer. The proportion of the tactical decisions which can be legitimately frozen into the interview schedule and instructions to the interviewer depends upon the type of information sought, the types of respondents and interviewers available, and the amount of data which need to be collected. In any case it is helpful for all members of a research team to share an awareness of tactical problems and possible solutions.

ADVANCE TACTICAL PLANNING

Assuming that the interviewer knows precisely what bits of information are needed, there are several areas in which he may do advance planning. However, all of these plans must be considered as tentative in the non-scheduled interview. The interviewer must

decide how many subtopics there actually are in his broad topic. He should decide which one to begin with and perhaps work out pivot questions to determine whether subsequent subtopics are relevant to the particular respondent. He might devise lead-in questions which are designed to psychologically prepare the respondent for questions which will follow but which do not intend to directly obtain information relevant to the purposes of the interview. When getting chronological material from the respondent, the interviewer must decide whether to begin the discussion precisely at that point in time relevant to the objectives of the interview or to go back further and do a lead-in designed to help the respondent reconstruct the scene and the situation immediately preceding the relevant period of time. Once the order of topics and the means of getting from one subtopic to another are decided, tentative plans must be made for developing the discussion within each subtopic area. Here the interviewer must decide on all possible alternative wordings of questions, on how contexts can be provided when needed, on alternative sequences of questions; and above all he must select some clear way of recording what has and has not been covered in the progress of the interview. The latter will be a problem particularly when the interviewer does not follow a fixed sequence of specific questions.

2
4
- In addition to deciding what subtopics are needed, possible orders of these subtopics, and methods of expanding each of these subtopics to cover all of the specific information needed, the interviewer must also prepare to meet certain infrequent crises which require special treatment. For example, we might find a question which unexpectedly constitutes an ego threat to the respondent. What do we do? Or what do we do if the respondent simply says, "I'm sorry, I'm too busy now to be interviewed"? What do we do if he says, "Ask someone else who knows something about this topic; I don't know anything about it"? Or if he says he does not want to have his voice tape recorded or he stops in the middle of the interview to ask, "Why are you taking notes?" If he responds to a question by saying he does not remember or does not know, are we to take this literally? If, in response to a question, he uses the Yankee system of asking you the question, what tactics should be used? Or what if we merely suspect that the respondent is resisting, that he is not giving all the information he has and is withholding something? What can we do to test a hypothesis of this kind?

This chapter deals with these problems of arranging topics and

subtopics, pivot questions, lead-in questions, and transitions; developing each topic to cover the specifications of the interview; meeting resistance by the respondent, and testing whether or not he is actually resisting. To a certain extent, successful use of tactics depends upon basic skills which have been developed, but perhaps to a larger extent it depends upon an awareness of what kinds of tactical problems might arise and planning some possible ways of meeting these problems. Once we know how to make these plans, all that remains is to practice planning for a wide variety of interviews so that required basic skills can be developed.

ARRANGING TOPICS AND SUBTOPICS WITHIN AN INTERVIEW

It is possible to have an interview so simple in its objectives that there are no topics or subtopics. The simplest possible interview might contain only one question:

"As you know, _____ and _____ are running for President of the United States. For whom do you intend to vote?" At the other extreme, an interview's objectives might include the opinions of the respondent on several public issues, certain personality traits that he might have, some of his social background characteristics such as religion, social class, political views, the amount of influence he has on others, and his position in the community. The number of topics or subtopics perceived within such a complex interview depends upon the degree of relationships between the various objectives and the level of abstraction used to hold the topics within the common frame of reference. For example, a respondent's opinion on three topics such as antivivisection, the United States' role in the United Nations, and parent-child relations in the United States might be conceived as three separate, non-related topics. However, if the objectives of the interview include discovering the respondent's personality characteristics and relating them to his opinions on selected public issues, then these three topics become merely three selected public issues and are subtopics more related to each other than to a battery of questions regarding the respondent's personality traits. This example illustrates that what might be a whole interview in one case is a topic within an interview in another case; it could also be a subtopic within a topic of another interview. Regardless of how finely we slice the total subject matter of the interview into

topics, we are faced with the problem of deciding how the specific questions must be grouped into topics or subtopics and what their chronological order will be.

Chronological order of topics and subtopics

Although it is impossible to provide specific rules for determining the chronological order of subtopics within an interview, it is possible to indicate some of the most important questions that must be considered when determining the order of topics. However, these questions can be answered specifically only within the context of a particular interview problem. Too frequently, the interviewer tends to arrange the order in a purely logical fashion in order to simplify the coding and analysis of the data, or to arrange questions in a sequence that seems natural to him. Although both of these criteria are important, the criterion which has precedence over either of these is the effect upon the respondent's willingness and ability to give the relevant information. If the order which maximizes the flow of valid, relevant information is also the logical order which will minimize the problems of analyzing the data, this is fortunate. But it is not always the case.

Let us look at some examples in which the order of topics has an effect upon the flow of information.

Ego threat. Frequently one sequence of topics is more ego threatening than an alternate sequence of the same topics. If we wish to discover the relationship between a person's premarital sex behavior and his subsequent marital adjustment, the interview obviously contains a minimum of two separate topics. In this case, we might have to do several exploratory interviews to determine which of these topics seems to threaten the respondent the least. Is he more likely to withhold the details of his premarital sex behavior after discussing his marital adjustment, or vice versa?

To give another example, suppose we want to discover the relationship between the respondent's opinion on foreign aid and his religious participation. Foreign aid is an opinion topic while his religious participation (such as what his church affiliation is, how many times a year he attends, whether he participates in action projects sponsored by the church) is not. In this case, it is highly probable that the interview should first discuss the respondent's opinions on foreign aid before reminding him of his religious connections. If the procedure were reversed, there would probably be a greater tendency

for the respondent to present his opinions on foreign aid as being more harmonious with his professed religious principles.

In other instances the respondent's ego is threatened by the fact that the sequence of topics is structured in a logical fashion that makes him aware that his arguments are not logical, and contain some threatening inconsistencies. For example, an interview might contain five subtopics represented by the following questions:

(1) Do you believe that the United States has sufficient military power to destroy the Russian industrial civilization?

(2) Do you think that Russia has enough military power to destroy the United States industrial civilization?

(3) Do you think that either Russia or the United States has an efficient system of defense which would prevent the other from destroying its industrial civilization in the event of an all-out atomic war?

(4) Do you think that Russia feels that the present military power of the United States is sufficient to crush her industrial civilization in the event of an all-out atomic war?

(5) Do you feel that the United States should continue to put an increasing proportion of her national wealth into augmenting her military power?

It is highly probable that the respondent who feels that the United States should continue increasing its military power would feel threatened in stating this opinion if the question were preceded by the other four as suggested above. It is possible that such a respondent would find himself in the position of saying that the purpose of armaments and military power from the point of view of the United States is to deter Russia from attacking. He may also feel that we have enough military power to destroy the Russian industrial civilization and that Russians believe that we have such power. Furthermore, he may feel that there is no way for either Russia or the United States to defend themselves against an all-out atomic attack of the other. In view of these premises, he might find it quite difficult to justify his feeling that we should continue to increase the military power of the United States.

Stimulating the memory. It is often possible for the sequence of topics to have an effect upon the respondent's recall of relevant detail, and subsequently upon the possibility of chronological or inferential confusion clouding his reports.

There are several remedies for this. For example, the respondent might be asked to give the most easily recalled facts first. These may be more easily recalled because they happened more recently or because they were more ego-involved for the respondent. In an interview to determine the relationship between student adjustment to a field of study and the factors which influenced him to pursue this field, it might be preferable to begin by discussing his adjustment to the field in which he is presently engaged. After this has been developed sufficiently, an abrupt transition could be made to the question of how he decided to enter the field. (Reasons for using either abrupt or smooth transitions from one topic to another will be discussed later in the chapter.)

In this case, it is clear that discussing the person's adjustment in his field of endeavor is inevitably going to bring about certain associations with how he got into the field and how things actually were in the field compared to his expectations. When shifting to the second topic of how he decided to go into the field, every effort must be made by the interviewer to help the respondent overcome chronological confusion by distinguishing between his reasons for preferring the field now that he is in it and his initial reasons which involved preliminary perceptions and expectations.

It is also possible to minimize the problem of inferential confusion in an interview having two distinctly different kinds of topics, one which asks the person for specific factual details about certain events or a certain period of time and another topic which asks the person for his judgments, opinions, or overall perspectives on these events or period of time. In this case, it is highly probable that a more accurate account of the person's overall feelings and views can be obtained if we first develop the detailed facts of the events. In this way, the respondent is allowed to review in detail with the help of the interviewer the specific factual events which have to be considered in order to make a valid overall judgment of the situation.

Maximizing facilitators. If we wish to get off to a good start in the interview and build rapport, it is often helpful to begin with a particular subtopic that maximizes the amount of recognition to be given to the respondent or which gives him a chance to obtain sympathetic understanding or catharsis, or to begin with a topic that stimulates his need for meaning and raises questions that arouse his interest.

In some complex interviews, there may be three or four topics

that would have great natural interest for the respondent and another three or four that would be quite boring or inconsequential for him. Sometimes it is helpful to alternate between one type of topic and another.

Varying the sequence of topics with the respondent. In some cases, it is quite clear that one sequence of topics is better for maximizing the flow of information and maintaining optimum interpersonal relations than another and that this optimum sequence would be the same for all respondents. In other cases, it may be apparent that the optimum sequence varies from respondent to respondent, depending upon the nature of each respondent's particular relationship to the topic or his particular experience. It may be necessary to do exploratory interviews to know whether we can use a fixed sequence of topics or whether we should allow it to vary to fit the needs of a particular respondent.

There are several ways in which the interviewer can allow the respondent to select his own sequence. The first way is simply to begin the interview with a broad question covering all the topics and subtopics and then allow the respondent to begin where he chooses. Once he finishes the subtopic with which he began, the same general question or another slightly narrowed may be asked, allowing him to pursue any of the remaining subtopics. For example, in interviewing disaster victims, we needed to know what the person actually *observed* during the crisis period, what he *did* during the crisis period both to protect himself and to help others, what he thought about what was going on, and numerous subtopics covering the later phase of relief and rehabilitation which may have lasted for days or weeks. The subtopics of the crisis period could be introduced by the general question, "Tell me what happened to you in the storm." The subtopics related to the relief and rehabilitation period could be introduced by the broad question, "Tell me about some of the relief work that went on after the storm was all over."

Another means of giving the respondent the choice of topic sequence is to simply announce at the beginning that you are going to cover three or four topics and give the respondent his choice as to where he should begin, as in this example:

Metropolitan Studies is interested in your opinion on three issues which are being discussed on the local scene. The first is the antivivisection issue; the second is the issue of metropolitan government; and the third is the juvenile delinquency wave. With which of these would you like to begin?

A third general tactic for allowing the respondent to discuss topics in his own sequence is to use a pivot question to introduce a new topic area. This method is discussed in detail in the following section.

Introducing each topic

Once we have decided whether or not we can predetermine the order of topics and if so how, we need to consider how each new topic or subtopic can best be introduced.

Using lead-in questions. A lead-in question is one that is not directly relevant to the objectives of the interview but which has the function of effectively leading the respondent to a relevant question area in a way that prepares him to give more accurate and valid information. In some cases, where none of the questions seems to be of any great interest to the respondent, it is helpful to ask a preliminary question that is interesting to him and also related to the topics which follow. This we might call the interest lead-in question.

For example, in a study of the differences in the amount of interaction between the child, his family and the school in high and low delinquency areas of a large city, the opening question was, "Do you think this neighborhood is a good or a bad place to raise kids?" This question seemed to appeal to heads of households in both types of areas and gave the interviewer an opportunity to build rapport by showing his interest in the problems of child-rearing in the area. This easily led to questions about the amount and type of interaction between child and parents, then between parents and the school.

Another type of lead-in question is the chronological lead-in. This is a question regarding a point or period in time which precedes the period relevant to the objectives of the interview. This type of warm-up question gives the respondent a chance to get in a reminiscent mood which stimulates recall of a particular period of time. It also prevents chronological confusion by having the respondent looking forward in his mind to a bit of the past rather than looking back at it from the perspective of the present. For example, if we are interested in an employee's view of management's handling of an educational meeting for the employees, it might be well to introduce the topic with a question such as, "When did you first know there was going to be a special meeting for the employees?" This question might be followed by other lead-in questions such as, "Where was the meeting held?" "Who did you go to the meeting with?" These ques-

tions all establish a specific, concrete feeling of the past and lead the respondent up to the point of evaluating the meeting itself.

Another function of the lead-in question is to establish an appropriate atmosphere by allowing the interviewer to display the proper attitudes toward the respondent and toward a subject matter closely related to the relevant information. For example, if the purpose of the interview is to discover problems North American students have adjusting to their Colombian host families, the interview with the Colombian *señora* could begin with a lead-in question or lead-in topic about problems *other señoras* have had with their North American guests.

All types of lead-in questions (or statements that imply a question) share one characteristic. The information sought by the lead-in question is not going to be used in the analysis of the data because it is not directly relevant to the objectives of the interview.

Using pivot questions. A pivot question acts as a turning point in the line of questioning by determining which of two or more possible new topics would apply to the particular respondent. The pivot question is sometimes called a "filter question," particularly when used in a questionnaire. Whenever we introduce a new topic for discussion in an interview, we usually make certain assumptions regarding the appropriateness of the new line of questioning. We assume that the respondent has had the appropriate experiences (a) to understand the question and (b) to have some relevant information. The pivot question is an attempt to test these assumptions before proceeding with the next topic.

We cannot always anticipate the need for pivot questions in advance simply because we are not aware of the assumptions we are making regarding the experiences of the respondent. It is often necessary, therefore, to do some exploratory non-scheduled interviews to determine the type and location of needed pivot questions. In this phase, the interviewer instead of using predetermined pivot questions must be constantly alert for unanticipated pivot *responses* which indicate a need for a change in the line of questioning.

For example, in the study of academic freedom mentioned previously, it was assumed that restrictions of academic freedom would center about controversial issues in economics and politics, particularly as they related to Communism. It was discovered that in a small minority of colleges, political issues had neither arisen nor been repressed. Instead, the main issues involved conflicts between funda-

mentalist religious beliefs and the findings of the biological and social sciences. A professor might be threatened with dismissal if he insisted upon discussing Darwin's theory of evolution in a biology course. Only in interviewing a professor at such a college did it become apparent that the study of academic freedom had been based upon the assumption that such controversies between science and religion were no longer live issues on college campuses.

Similarly, in interviewing respondents living in disaster stricken communities, the interviewer would often assume that because the respondent was a resident of the community he would be able to give information on the disaster's effects on the community. In some cases, this was proved incorrect because (a) the respondent was out of town the day the disaster struck, (b) he was immediately rendered unconscious before he was aware of any approaching crisis, or (c) he completely withdrew from the situation and made no attempt to discover what had happened or to help any one. The respondent was usually willing to give information regarding (a) or (b) but would sometimes attempt to prevent the interviewer from discovering (c). In this situation, much confusion could be avoided if the interviewer would ask, "Where were you when the storm struck Judsonia?" If the respondent had been in Judsonia at the time, another pivot question could follow: "Were you injured in any way?" If the respondent had been in Judsonia and was not injured, then a series of questions on his participation in the immediate rescue operations became relevant. The interviewer might have these specific pivot questions in mind and obtain the answers without directly asking each question. In any case, it was helpful for the interviewer to know whether he was talking to a rescuer or to one of the rescued.

Although a small number of exploratory interviews might discover all of the pivot questions that are needed, it is often impossible or impractical to do the amount of exploratory interviews needed in order to completely eliminate any surprises regarding the assumptions made. Therefore, in any interview that is complicated by several topics and subtopics, the interviewer will need to be alert for clues indicating that some lines of questioning are not applicable to a particular respondent. The preplanning of pivot questions is even less feasible when interviewing only one or two persons from each category of special respondents.

Providing transitions. Once we have decided upon the order of topics or subtopics and have located the points where pivot questions can determine the appropriateness of a new topic or subtopic, our

next problem is to determine whether it is necessary to provide specific material to act as a bridge from one topic to another. There are at least three reasons for providing a special transition:

a) It may be needed to show the respondent the relationship between the old and the new topic in order to help him maximize any advantages in the particular sequence of topics.

b) It may relate the new topic to the basic objectives of the interview so that the respondent may not become confused or suspicious that the "real purpose" of the interview was not stated in the original explanation.

c) It may be needed to emphasize a change in frame of reference, perspective, or mood so that the respondent will not carry over an inappropriate context from a previous topic.

Let us give an example of transitions fulfilling each of these three functions.

In a study of the effects of foreign travel, we included the following five topics in the order indicated:

- 1) The respondent's specific experiences abroad within the past two years.
- 2) The effects of these experiences in *changing* his views of the foreign country.
- 3) The effects of these experiences in *changing* his views of his own country.
- 4) Courses taken in college that influenced the meaningfulness of the foreign experience.
- 5) Certain personality traits that might affect the respondent's adjustment to the foreign culture.

In the first few exploratory interviews it was discovered that the respondent usually did not make the correct connection between topics (1) and (2). His tendency was often to merely talk about interesting experiences he had abroad under the first topic and then forget to make any connection between these experiences and specific *changes* in his views of the foreign country. It was found helpful to provide the following transition:

You have told me about many of your experiences abroad which you found outstanding. Now that you have had a chance to think about your experiences in Germany, let us move on to a more difficult topic. I would like to know how any of these experiences you have mentioned or any others you might recall changed your views on Germany, the German people, or their culture. It is

sometimes helpful to think of those things which surprised you because they were not what you expected or those which seemed to give you a more positive or negative feeling toward the country. Which of your experiences seemed to change your views on Germany?

Even with this transition aimed at making a connection between specific experiences and changes in beliefs or attitudes, there was still a tendency for the respondent to begin discussing his current views on the foreign country without stating whether these were new views gained by his recent experience or whether they were old views held before going abroad. The interviewer had to be constantly alert to establish which views represented *changes* and which specific experiences were associated with these changes. Needless to say, the respondent often found it difficult to link a particular change to a particular experience. In any case, providing the transition made it easier for the respondent to see the second topic in its proper perspective and reduced the number of times the interviewer had to redirect the respondent toward the objectives of the interview.

The second function of the transition as described in (b) above can also be illustrated with this same interview. Most interviewers discovered in the first exploratory interview that a transition was needed between topics (4) and (5). Since the first four topics had all obviously dealt with effects of foreign travel, specific questions under the fifth topic seemed out of place to the respondent. For example, questions like the following needed some transition:

In a group discussion do you usually tend to be one of the listeners or one who does much of the talking?

Do you enjoy making introductions at a party when you discover that some of the people aren't acquainted with each other?

Without some special attention to topic transition, these questions may seem so out of context to the respondent that he becomes suspicious that the whole interview "is really an indirect attempt to psychoanalyze me." As one respondent put it, "I thought you said you were interested in the affects of foreign experience, but now it looks like you forgot to bring your couch along." This suspicion can be avoided by a transitional statement such as the one that follows:

It is claimed by some people interested in this problem that the same foreign experience would have very different effects upon two people with different basic personality traits. I am going to ask you 10 simple straightforward questions about the type of person you think you are.

This transitional statement proved helpful in allaying suspicion about the relevance of the final 10 questions and also signaled to the respondent that the questions were not intended to be deep or devious.

The third function of the transitional statement described in (c) above is perhaps the most frequent. When two consecutive topics involve different but related frames of reference which might become confused in the respondent's mind, it is necessary to make a complete break between the two topics so that the old frame of reference is not unconsciously retained in the new topic. For example, in a study of factors influencing college students' choice of a vocation, college seniors were interviewed to determine: (a) the occupational field they had chosen and the extent to which they were sure of their choice; (b) their conception of the ideal way of making a living; and (c) the compromises with reality students made in selecting an occupation. In the exploratory interviews it was discovered that the respondents found it difficult to shift from the realistic frame of reference in the first topic (a) to the "ideal" frame of reference called for by the second topic (b). There was a tendency for the students not to want anything obviously beyond their reach. In some cases, it might have been a bit ego threatening to be reminded of the differences between one's realistic plans and one's ideal. The following transitional statement, however, helped encourage the respondent to relinquish his realism and to more enthusiastically discuss the idealistic conceptions called for in the second topic.

You have given me a clear idea of what you want to do vocationally after you graduate, and I get the feeling that you are very realistic and clear in your plans. Now I would like you to just let yourself go, throw realism to the winds and talk about what you see as the *ideal* way of making a living. By ideal, I simply mean that you are to consider only what you would *enjoy* doing for a living. Assume that there would be no question of your having the ability or talent needed, no problems in obtaining the necessary training, the job paid well and had high status in the world. The only taint of reality which I want you to retain is in limiting yourself to choosing some type of job which really exists. So take your pick, what type of job would you enjoy most assuming that you could obtain such a job and were capable of holding it?

This preliminary statement helped the respondent make a transition into the mood needed to encourage such unrealistic talk. Once the respondent caught the spirit and realized that the interviewer was not going to judge him for his lack of realism, it was not difficult for him to relinquish the realism of the previous topic. After the second

topic was carefully explored, the respondent was brought back to reality by being asked what real limitations prevented him from aspiring to his ideal job.

In the above examples we have emphasized those situations where special care must be taken in making a transition either to maintain a connection between two topics, to show the relevance of a new topic, or to abruptly sever the connection between one topic and the next to prevent carrying over an inappropriate frame of reference. In some cases, however, the flow of the topics is such that no particular care must be taken in making the transitions because all of the topics obviously fall within the interview objectives, the relationship of each topic is obvious to the respondent, and each topic happily provides an appropriate background or frame of reference for the subsequent one. This lack of any need for special transitional statements is sometimes referred to as the "smooth" or the "natural" transition that can be achieved by merely arranging the topics in the correct order.

Preparing an interview guide

To clarify the meaning of "interview guide," let us compare it with two related instruments, the interview schedule and the questionnaire. Theoretically, the *questionnaire* has built-in all of the techniques and tactics of gathering the relevant information, so that nothing is left for the interviewer to do. The questionnaire may be either mailed to the respondent or handed to him in person, and it is supposed to be completely sufficient in specifying what information is relevant and in motivating the respondent to write in the information.

An *interview schedule*, as the questionnaire, specifies the questions to be asked, fixes their wording, supplies contexts where the need is anticipated, and determines the degree of answer structure to be supplied by the interviewer. Here, the interviewer is still necessary. He is needed from time to time (1) to clarify the intent of the question, (2) to probe for any clarification or elaboration of the responses so as to meet the objectives of the interview, and (3) to motivate the respondent by demonstrating appropriate attitudes toward the interviewing task, the information received, or the respondent himself.

An *interview guide* is used in the non-scheduled interview. In contrast to the interview schedule, which emphasizes the means of

obtaining information, the interview guide emphasizes the *goals* of the interview in terms of the topics to be explored and the criteria of a relevant and adequate response. The interview guide is like the interview schedule in that it provides the framework for recording the responses or for keeping a running inventory of which objectives have been met and which ones have not. Thus the interview guide provides the interviewer with a conceptual map of the areas to be covered and a convenient way of recording the progress of the interview.

In actual practice, plans made by the interviewer may fall at some point between the interview guide, which provides only the *goals*, and the interview schedule, which provides the *complete means* to the objectives of the interview. To give a typical example, an interview guide might contain not only the list of topics to be covered but also a tentative sequence for covering them, alternative wordings of some specific questions, notes indicating where contexts and transitions should be supplied, and possible sequences of detailed questions within topics which may or may not be needed in each interview.

It is advisable, even in an apparently simple interview topic, to prepare an interview guide before approaching the first respondent. This is fruitful even though it may be necessary to change the guide or to structure it in greater detail as a result of experience. In some cases, it is possible and desirable for the interviewer to memorize the interview guide. In other cases, the guide might be memorized except for an answer sheet upon which the respondent's open-ended answers are coded during the interview.

Thus far, we have examined some of the tactical problems in determining the optimum sequence of topics within an interview and of introducing new topics with lead-ins, pivot questions, and transitional statements. Let us now examine the tactical problems of guiding and motivating the respondent toward the objectives of a particular topic. Here we will spell out some of the basic question patterns which can be used to develop a topic.

GENERAL PATTERNS OF QUESTIONS FOR DEVELOPING A TOPIC

It is usually not sufficient for the interviewer simply to have an interview guide listing the general objectives and subtopics of an interview, and then to ask only one question per topic. The inter-

viewer must be constantly alert to guide the respondent toward the objectives of each topic by supplying any additional statements or questions to obtain further clarification or elaboration needed to meet the objectives of the interview. These additional questions, which are not specified in advance for all respondents but which the interviewer sees are needed to obtain more exact information, are usually referred to as "probes."

In this section we will deal with some of the basic patterns of questions that can often be employed in developing a topic to minimize the necessity for probing, and in the next section we will discuss several patterns of probing, showing their strengths and weaknesses.

The two general patterns of questions to be dealt with here are the "funnel sequence" and the "inverted funnel sequence." Each is useful under certain specified conditions that may usually be determined in advance of a particular interview. Both of these sequences are patterns of question-scope described as a technique in the preceding chapter.

The funnel sequence

In the funnel sequence each successive question has a narrower scope than the previous one and is either included within or related to the previous question. This type of sequence may characterize the whole interview as a unit, but it is more likely to occur within particular topics or subtopics of the interview.

For example, if we were interested in discovering how people's views of social problems are related to the magazines they read, we might want to know what sorts of things the respondent thinks of as social problems, the relative seriousness of each, the amount of information he has on the subject, the sources of his information, and whether certain magazines have influenced his thinking on the problem. If we were to ask the following questions, the sequence given below would be a funnel sequence.

- (1) What do you think are some of the most important social problems in the world today, and why?
- (2) Of all the problems you have just mentioned, which one do you think is the most important one to solve?
- (3) Where have you gotten most of your information about problem X?
- (4) Do you read *U.S. News and World Report*?

The above example might be more accurately described as two funnel sequences, since the scope of question (2) is clearly within that of question (1), and the scope of question (4) falls within question (3), but it is not clear that the scope of question (3) falls within that of question (2).

There are several situations in which the funnel sequence will avoid tactical problems and minimize the need for probing. We will discuss the four most important ones.

a) When the objective of the interview is to obtain a detailed description of an event or situation and when the respondent is motivated to give a spontaneous account of his experiences in that situation, then introducing the topic with the broadest question will often eliminate the need for asking myriad, detailed questions.

Under the above conditions it is more efficient if we can avoid asking every detailed question, also it is often more conducive to good interpersonal relations, since the interviewer interrupts the respondent less and is apparently interested in whatever is important to the respondent. Of course, there is always the danger of the broad question allowing the respondent to roam too far afield, but the alert interviewer can prevent this with fewer interruptions than if he had to ask every minute question.

For example, if we wish to know hundreds of details regarding a person's experience when his town was struck by a tornado, we could either begin by asking detailed questions such as, "Were you home when the tornado struck?" "Did you see the black funnel approaching before it struck?" "What did it do to your house?" "Are you married?" "Do you have any children?" "Were any of your immediate family injured?" "Were you injured?" "Did anyone help you after the tornado passed?" "Did you help anyone else?" "Were you able to take anyone to the hospital?" This approach would be much less efficient and much less likely to give the respondent an opportunity for recognition, sympathetic understanding, and catharsis, or to fulfill his need for meaning than if the interviewer had simply asked, "What happened to you in the storm?" This question is not only broad, it puts the spotlight on the respondent's experiences and allows him to tell his own story in his own way. It shows that the interviewer is interested in the respondent and his experiences rather than in countless details.

b) Under the conditions specified in (a) above, the funnel approach helps the respondent to recall details more efficiently since he

is allowed to report them by following his own paths of association.

By giving the respondent greater freedom at the beginning, it is not necessary to interrupt his train of thought constantly to ask hundreds of specific details in an order which might be meaningless or disorganized from the respondent's point of view.

c) By asking the broadest questions first, the interviewer can avoid imposing a perspective or frame of reference upon the discussion before obtaining the respondent's perspective.

Once the respondent's perspective is discovered, the specific questions can be asked within this framework. Then the detailed questions could be worded to conform to the respondent's universe of discourse. Or it could be used where the broader question would allow the respondent to show the sequence in which he had certain experiences; the more detailed questions would then deal with each experience in order.

d) When the objectives of the interview are both to *discover* unanticipated responses and to *measure* the frequency of responses to certain anticipated categories, then the discovery function achieved by the broader question should be pursued first.

For example, we might wish to discover the variety of reasons people have for wanting to go abroad, regardless of where they would like to go. If we also wanted to measure the relative frequency of people's preferences for Mexico, Germany, and France as a place to go, then the questions should be dealt with in that order. In this case, the funnel would consist in the sequence of the two objectives or subtopics, rather than in a sequence of specific questions. The first objective would probably have to be pursued with many questions and probes before moving on to the second which could be achieved with one well-worded question.

The inverted funnel sequence

Under the heading, "Scope of the question," the preceding chapter discussed the conditions under which the narrow question is preferable to the broad question. That discussion considered only the isolated question. Here we will restrict the discussion to cases where a *pattern* of narrower questions followed by broader ones should be

used. The phrase "inverted funnel" is borrowed from Kahn and Cannell.¹

There are at least two kinds of situations in which detailed questions should be followed by broader questions.

a) When the topic of the interview is one which does not strongly motivate the respondent to speak spontaneously either because the relevant experiences are not important to him or not recent enough to be vivid in his memory, it is often helpful to begin with the narrower questions and reserve the broader ones until later.

It seems that the more specific questions are easier to answer than the more general ones when the respondent does not have strong positive motivation to speak on the topic. Often a respondent's feeling of inadequacy can be dispelled if he starts successfully with the simpler tasks and receives praise.

This inverted funnel often motivates the respondent to take an interest in the topic if the initial, specific questions stimulate his need for meaning. This form of intellectual seduction is most successful when the specific questions can be readily answered but where the answers themselves are either contradictory, inconsistent, or unsatisfactory to the respondent for some reason. The logic of his answers may violate his value system. These initial disturbances of his mental equilibrium may rouse the respondent from his complacency and stimulate him to respond more wholeheartedly to broader and more profound questions.

The second situation calling for the inverted funnel deals with the problem of avoiding inferential confusion.

b) If the objective of the interview is to obtain a generalization in the form of a judgment regarding some concrete situation, and if the facts of the situation are unknown to the interviewer but are known to the respondent, then the narrower questions aimed at establishing specific facts should precede the request for an overall judgment.

Two kinds of situations require the inverted funnel tactic to avoid inferential confusion. The first, mentioned by Kahn and Cannell, is the case where the respondent has no strong feeling regarding the topic or does not have a previously formulated judgment of the type sought in the interview. The interviewer's task is to help the respondent

1/ Robert L. Kahn and Charles F. Cannell, *The Dynamics of Interviewing* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1957), p. 160.

ent formulate a generalization by making inferences from specific facts.

In the second type of case, the respondent may have very definite feelings on the topic and a previously formulated judgment based upon prejudice rather than the facts of the case. Here, the interviewer aims at preventing the respondent from stating his prejudicial judgment before reviewing the facts of the case. Once the respondent has stated his position to the interviewer, any attempt to change it constitutes an ego threat. By first reviewing the facts in detail, the respondent is allowed an opportunity to change his position without appearing to have been influenced by the interviewer.

The latter type of problem was encountered in attempts to obtain a respondent's judgment regarding the effectiveness of the rescue operations during a disaster. There was a prejudice that became strongly fixed two or three days after a major disaster that made people say that the rescue operations were carried out with miraculous speed and effectiveness. This was particularly true in communities where no organized agency involving outsiders was participating in the rescue operation. In this case, it was better to deal with the specifics first, later asking for the generalization:

- 1) How many people were killed in the tornado?
- 2) How many do you suppose were injured so seriously that they had to go to the hospital?
- 3) Was there a need for blood transfusions at the hospital the next morning?
- 4) How do you think that most of the people died (electrocution, internal injuries, brain concussions, bleeding, asphyxia, or what other cause)?
- 5) How long was it before most of the injured got to the hospital?
- 6) Did you see anyone administer first aid by giving artificial respiration or stopping bleeding? Who was it?
- 7) Did you have an opportunity to give any first aid yourself? If so, what kind?
- 8) In general, how well do you think the first aid and rescue operations were carried out?

If this eighth question were asked first, the respondent had a tendency to base the generalization on wishful thinking. He was glad

to be alive, and began to feel that it was miraculous that only 50 people were killed in a town of 3,000 where 90 percent of the buildings had been demolished. With this context in mind, his response was that the first aid and rescue operation was something close to a miracle.

However, if the general question were preceded by the seven more specific questions, the respondent's account of the rescue operation would show that people were dug out of the rubble, and the seriously injured laid in rows beside the road waiting for it to be cleared so a truck or ambulance could get through. Once a victim was lined up for the ambulance, the rescuers would go back to dig someone else out. It was rainy and cold; there was often a lapse of one or two hours before a person could be taken to the hospital, and in the meantime the respondent had neither seen nor heard of anyone stopping bleeding or giving other first aid. When this picture began to emerge, the respondent became acutely aware that many people must have bled to death or died of shock while lying in the rain.

In this case, the inverted funnel sequence had the effect of making the respondent able to give a more realistic assessment of the situation, but the ego threat involved in the awful conclusion based upon the evidence the respondent himself had given would often reduce his willingness to verbalize what he had on his mind and subject the respondent to an unnecessary shock. In this case, since the objective was not to have the respondent himself assess the factual evidence, the evidence given by the respondent could be assessed by the interviewer and the last general question omitted. In order to further protect the respondent's ego and avoid a possible breakdown in the rapport, the first five questions in the series could be asked of the hospital officials who would not blame themselves for not having given artificial respiration or having stopped bleeding in the few minutes after the disaster struck. This example illustrates how a specific tactical pattern may be technically effective, but in certain situations have an unfortunate side effect when tested in the field.

We have shown some of the conditions under which the use of the funnel or the inverted funnel pattern can solve certain tactical problems. Regardless of the way the relative scope of questions is arranged in the interview, there still remains a certain amount of probing to be done to adequately meet the objectives. The next section will deal with types of probes according to their tactical relationship to information previously given by the respondent.

PROBING TO MEET THE OBJECTIVES OF THE INTERVIEW

Even though the interviewer makes an appropriate transition to a new topic, asks a well-chosen question introducing the topic, and has planned a pattern of subsequent questions to cover the topic, there is often a need to elicit further clarification or elaboration on the first question before moving on to the next. This is particularly true at the beginning of a funnel sequence where the first question is broad in scope. Once the interviewer has developed understanding of the objectives of the interview and is critically evaluating the responses in terms of these objectives, he becomes aware of the inadequacies of many responses. His perception of the discrepancy between the content of the response and the information needed urges him to probe the respondent for further elaboration and clarification. *Most of the tactical problems of interviewing center around the problem of using the right type of probe at the right time.*

The neophyte interviewer will often ask relevant questions and dutifully record the respondent's reply but his most common weakness is in not realizing that the response is inadequate for the purposes of the interview, or in not knowing how to obtain further information. In the first case, he may move from question to question with ritualistic calm, ignorant of his failure. In the second case, he may move on in panic, not knowing what else to do, or in his attempt to elicit further information, he may actually suggest responses.

To avoid the meager results of the innocent ritualistic plodding or of the panicky flight through the interview, the interviewer must not only be intimately acquainted with the specific objectives of the interview, but also must be able to use skillfully a variety of probing tools when the initial response does not meet the objectives of the question.

The concept of probing is usually used to refer to those attempts of the interviewer to obtain a more relevant, complete or clear answer to the immediately preceding question. This means that the probing must be done at the discretion of the interviewer; it depends upon his judgment whether the response was adequate to meet the objectives or not. If not, he must decide on the nature of the inadequacy and then probe to obtain more relevant information in a way which will make sense in view of what the respondent has already said and elicit more relevant information without suggesting any specific response.

In the fixed-schedule interview, probing is usually restricted to those attempts of the interviewer to obtain a more relevant, complete or clear answer to the immediately preceding question.

To illustrate probing within the scheduled interview the example below shows the relationship between the objective of a question, the actual wording of the question, probing instructions, and some inadequate responses that would require probing to meet the objectives.

Objectives (Specified in the instructions to the interviewer)

Question 7: Since the shooting of Senator Robert F. Kennedy there have been various attempts to legislate restrictions on the sale and possession of firearms to private citizens. We want to know how people now feel on this topic six months after the assassination without being reminded by the interviewer of the use of guns to assassinate public figures. We are interested in discovering *what* the respondent thinks *should* be done in this controversial area. We are not interested in what he thinks *others* want to have done, nor in *why* he feels something should be done, nor in *how* he thinks it could be done.

The question (The seventh question in the interview schedule)

7. What do you think should be done, if anything, to regulate the sale of guns and rifles and other firearms to private citizens?

Possible probing instructions (Immediately following the question)

- a) Probe (for what respondent thinks should be done)
- b) Probe if needed
 - What do *you*, personally, think should be done?
 - Should anything be done or not?
 - What, for example, should be done?
 - Should anything else be done?

Some inadequate responses which need to be probed

- a) I really think it is time to do something about it!
- b) There has been a lot of talk about that lately.
- c) I agree, something should be done quickly!
- d) I hope something will be done but I doubt if it can.
- e) The gun manufacturers aren't going to like any change.
- f) The NRA (National Rifle Association) would object.
- g) I personally feel the federal government should do something.
- h) I haven't the foggiest notion what can be done.

An examination of this small sample of inadequate responses shows that it is impossible to specify the exact probes to meet every possible form of inadequate answer. Instead, the interviewer must have the objectives clearly in mind, carefully listen to evaluate the

relevance and adequacy of the response, then probe to help the respondent provide more relevant information without restricting, distorting or suggesting answers.

Topic control

When the objectives are more exploratory and the schedule less fixed, the interviewer has a broader responsibility in probing.² In this case he is free to decide whether he should probe to clarify the response to a particular question before going on to the next or to take a probe note at the time and wait until later to probe to avoid inhibiting the respondent's momentum or interrupting his chain of associations. In the less structured interview, then, the probe may concern the immediately preceding response or any of the preceding responses. The following situation is one in which the interview is not scheduled. It illustrates the need for a wider range of probing tools. This full range of probing we call "topic control."

A lawyer is questioning in his office a possible witness to an accident in which his client has been involved. He is trying to reconstruct the scene and assess the evidence for guilt.³

I: I need your help in getting a clearer picture of the accident. Could you tell me in your own words what happened? (1)

R: Well, actually I didn't see much. (3) I just came out of Kronsky's pool hall when I heard some brakes screeching, and the cars plowed into each other at the corner.

At this point the interviewer can do a variety of things. The choices are endless, and the progress of the interview will depend upon the alternative chosen by the interviewer at this point. Among the many possible forms of probes are the following:

- I: a) Whose fault was it?
- b) Where is Kronsky's exactly?
- c) Just what did you see of the accident?
- d) Tell me a little more about it.
- e) Pause for three or four seconds

Here, the range of probes varies. The most topic control is (a) where

2/ Barbara Snell Dohrenwend and Stephen A. Richardson, "Directiveness and Non-Directiveness in Research Interviewing: A Reformulation of the Problem," *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 63 No. 5 (1963), pp. 475-85. This is a useful step forward in the conceptualization of the idea of directiveness in interviewing.

3/ The numbers in parentheses indicate the number of seconds of silence.

the focus of the discussion is shifted from "what happened" to "whose fault it was." This probe also demands a *specific* answer to what might be a highly complex question. The lowest degree of topic control is (e) which is a "silent probe." The success of this silence depends upon whether the respondent is actually intending to continue his story without waiting for a specific question and upon the interviewer's ability to show an interested, expectant attitude. It should be noted that the silent probe, if successful, allows the respondent to continue in the same trend of thought, to elaborate some previous response in greater detail, or to change the topic completely.

Probe (b) does not shift the focus outside the scope of the previous response, but narrows it to a specific detail, the location of Kronsky's pool hall. Probe (c) controls the topic less than (b) because it refers to the general area the respondent is already talking about and allows him to select the particular details he wants to mention. Probe (d) exercises even less topic control than (c) because it does not narrow the boundaries of the discussion to what the respondent *saw*; thus, probe (d) would allow him to continue his story, regardless of whether it dealt with what he had or had not seen, felt, heard, or inferred.

The examples of the opinion-poll interviewer and the lawyer illustrate how the variety of probing tactics the interviewer is allowed to use is greater as the interview is less structured by a fixed schedule. Of the seven types of topic control defined below, the first four can be used in both fixed-schedule and unscheduled interviews; the remaining three can be used only in less structured interviews.

Types of topic control. At this point we are not yet concerned with which of the possible probes would be the most productive, but are merely illustrating what is meant by degrees of topic control. In order to be able to discuss this aspect of interviewing technique, we list the following categories of topic control ranked in order of the degree of control with (1) representing the least control. This rank order usually, but not always, holds true since it sometimes depends upon the *context* in which the probe occurs. The interviewer should learn to recognize and to manage his own tendency to control either too strongly or weakly.

1. *Silent probe.* The silent probe is a very useful technique which will allow the respondent to proceed in whatever direction is most interesting and meaningful to him. In a sense, it is the most neutral of all possible probes because it neither designates the area of the discussion nor structures the answer in any

262

way. The interviewer must learn to distinguish between the "permissive pause," which is often very productive and the "embarrassing silence," which can be damaging to rapport.

2. *Encouragement.* This category includes all remarks, non-verbal noises, and gestures which indicate that the interviewer accepts what has been said and wishes the respondent to continue speaking without in any way specifying *what* the respondent should talk about. This includes such things as: "uh huh," "really," "I see," "hummm," "is that so!" a nod of the head, or an expectant facial expression.

3. *Immediate elaboration.* The interviewer may go beyond encouraging the respondent to continue speaking by indicating that he would like the respondent to elaborate upon the topic at hand, whatever that topic may be. A request for elaboration may take several forms. First, elaboration might imply a need for continuing the "story" or finishing the trend of thought. This would include such probes as, "... and then?" "Then what happened?" "What happened next?" Note that the interviewer is not asking for anything specific. Second, the elaboration might not imply a "moving on" with the story, but merely requests the respondent to say more about the topic at hand. For example: "Tell me more." "Tell me more about that." "Would you like to tell me a little more about that?" "What else could you say about that?" "Is there anything you would like to add?" "Could you spell that out a little more?" "Would you please elaborate on that?"

4. *Immediate clarification.* The clarification probe not only asks for more information on the topic under discussion, but it also specifies the kind of additional information that is needed. A request for clarification may take many specific forms of two general types. First, the interviewer might request that the respondent give a more detailed *sequence* of events, beginning at a certain point in the action described in the immediately preceding response. For example: "What happened right after you opened the door?" "Where were you just before the lights went out?" "What happened that night after you got home?" Second, the interviewer might probe for more detailed information on some specific aspect, rather than some particular period of time. This would include such probes as: "When did that happen?" "How did you find out about that?" "How did you *feel* when you saw the building collapse?" "Why do you suppose they did that?"

5. *Retrospective elaboration.* In this type of probe, the interviewer indicates a general interest in a topic that has been mentioned by the respondent some time previous to the immediately preceding response, but he does not specify *what* he wants to know about that topic. For example: "A while ago you said that your mother didn't want you to go out with girls when you were 15 years old. Could you tell me more about that?" "Let's go back to the point where you had the argument with your high school chemistry teacher; tell me more about that." Note that the form of these probes is in essence the same as those under

(3) above. The difference is that the topic referred to is *not* contained in the immediately preceding response but was further back in the interview.

6. *Retrospective clarification.* This type of probe specifies what additional information is needed as in type (4) above. The difference is that the area to be clarified was not contained in the immediately preceding response. Here, the topic is changed to one which has been mentioned by the respondent before the immediately preceding response, and the interviewer specifies what he wants to know about this topic. For example: "You told me how you looked out the window and saw this big black funnel and realized it was a tornado; what was the first thing you *did* when you saw the funnel?" "What did you say to your mother that first time she waited up for you and you got in late?" Note that here clarification has the same meaning as in type (4) above, but the *retrospective* clarification refers the respondent to a *previous* topic of discussion.

7. *Mutation.*⁴ This type of probe introduces a new topic that cannot be construed to be an elaboration or clarification of any preceding response. The interviewer takes the initiative in introducing the new topic, rather than waiting for the respondent to lead into it naturally. Sometimes the interviewer softens the abruptness of the transition by bridging it with some specific topic which has already been discussed or by showing how the new topic fits into the overall purpose of the interview. For example: "So far, you have given me a very good picture of how you and the rest of your family got along during the disaster, but I need to know something about what other people in the community were doing meanwhile; could you help me with that?"

The author's analysis of many interviews done by beginners shows the two most "natural" types of topic control are types (4) and (7). The other five types are relatively rare in the neophyte's interviews but are used more frequently once he becomes aware of their value. Usually the beginning interviewer is simply not aware of the wide range of topic control which is possible and so cannot consider the value of the various possibilities.

Using topic control

We cannot assume that the interviewer must always exercise strong topic control to attain the objectives of the interview efficiently. In some types of interviews, strong topic control may lower the respondent's motivation; it may also degenerate the interview into a "battle of wits" or into a rigid question-answer session in which the

4/ This term was borrowed from Merton and is used in the same general way as in Robert K. Merton, "The Focused Interview," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 51 (May, 1946).

respondent plays a passive role; or it may prevent the interviewer's obtaining the respondent's own frame of reference on the topic, or tend to bias the response by suggesting certain contexts or answer categories.

In other interviews, it may be appropriate to exercise strong topic control because a low level of respondent motivation is already present, or because the respondent's task is simply to give a few salient facts such as his name, address, and occupation. Or the topic may be such that if the respondent were given great freedom he would tend to give much irrelevant information.

It must be remembered that even though low topic control may be useful in building rapport, it also may fail to obtain all the relevant information. In some cases, low topic control may make the respondent feel insecure because he is not sure what information is wanted. This insecurity can grow into hostility when the respondent feels that the interviewer has no clear objectives and is merely wasting time in chit-chat. As we consider some of the values and dangers of each type of topic control, it will become apparent that most interviews call for a wide range of topic control.

Values of the silent probe. The silent probe, rarely used by the beginner, has several legitimate functions. Since it exercises absolutely no topic control, it allows the respondent to follow his own path of associations. This is useful when discovering associations is a purpose of the interview, or when the respondent needs to refresh his memory by telling the story his own way. The liberal use of silence also helps to establish a slower pace and a more thoughtful mood. Then, too, the only sure way to know that we are not interrupting the respondent is to use a silent probe before trying a verbal probe. Using the silent probe also gives the interviewer time to think of the most appropriate verbal probe (which is often not needed because the silent probe itself is successful).

Of course, there is a danger in using too much silence at the wrong point in the interview. For example, if the respondent has nothing he is eager to say, does not know exactly what the interviewer expects, and feels a need for some support and direction from the interviewer, then the pregnant pause becomes an embarrassing silence.

Values of neutral probes. The term "neutral probe" refers to two types of topic control, the encouragement probe and the elaboration probe. Both are neutral in the sense that their wording does not tell the respondent what information is desired. They merely imply that

the interviewer understands and accepts what has been said, and that he wants to hear more.

When the respondent actually has more information to give, the neutral probe has several advantages. Like the silent probe, the neutral verbal probes give the respondent freedom in following his own paths of association. The neutral probes also imply a strong interest in what the respondent is saying. Unlike the silent probe, they give the interviewer more opportunity to communicate positive attitudes through the tone of voice used. The interviewer can give the respondent recognition, show sympathetic understanding, and allow the respondent to obtain catharsis when the need is there.

Perhaps the most important value of neutral probes is realized when they are used to follow up a broad question. When the broad-scope question is more appropriate than a series of narrow and specific questions, we need some way of motivating the respondent to continue speaking on the broad topic without having to suggest specific subquestions. As explained earlier, the value of the broad question lies (a) in its ability to obtain specific bits of information without pointing out any ego threatening relationships between them, and (b) in allowing the respondent to provide his own context, frame of reference, or perspective on these specifics without a barrage of detailed questions interrupting his trend of thought. The interviewer needs a tactic which motivates the respondent to elaborate further but does not control the path he takes. This is the unique value of the neutral probe.

Another important tactical function of the neutral probe is to give the interviewer time to formulate a more specific probe which is appropriate. Often, tactical errors are made when the interviewer is caught by surprise and blurts out some specific question that is inappropriate. A great deal of concentration is demanded of the interviewer; he must show an interest in the respondent as a person, listen carefully to what is being said at the moment, evaluate the relevance of the information, and constantly reformulate probes that might be needed in case the respondent stops talking. Needless to say, there are times when the respondent stops talking at an inopportune moment when the interviewer is not clear on what to probe. In this case, the ability to use a spontaneous neutral probe that fits the context of the interview is a great boon. It relieves the interviewer of the fear that he may be caught unprepared and inadvertently bias the response or damage rapport. Of course, the interviewer's non-verbal

communication must not indicate that he is caught unprepared or is using a time-stalling tactic. This tactic should not be used so frequently that topic control becomes weak when it should be strong. In most cases, even if the neutral probe does not succeed in eliciting the desired information, neither does it interrupt the respondent's trend of thought. Furthermore, it allows the interviewer time to organize his own thoughts. This function of the neutral probe can only be fully appreciated by those with experience in non-scheduled interviewing.

Of the two types of neutral probes (encouragement and elaboration), it will be noted that elaboration probes exert more topic control than encouragement probes. The former must at least indicate to the respondent whether he is expected to "move on" with the story or to elaborate the current theme, while the encouragement probe merely indicates that the respondent should keep talking. It is possible, however, that neither one of these neutral probes will furnish the respondent with the guidance and support he needs. The interviewer must be sensitive to the respondent's reaction to low topic control and not allow him to develop a feeling of insecurity or hostility toward the interviewer.

It should be recognized that when encouragement takes the form of praising the respondent for a specific response by saying, "Good!" for example, we are exerting considerable topic control regardless of whether or not the respondent feels that these comments influence his answers. We should distinguish between encouragement by showing an interest in the respondent's efforts and in whatever he may say and showing interest by praising specific comments of the respondent which may bias the results as shown in an experiment by Hildum and Brown.⁵

Elaboration versus clarification. It is obvious that the clarification probe exerts more topic control than the elaboration probe because the latter merely indicates that the respondent should continue on the current theme while the former singles out some particular aspect of the previous response for clarification.

The elaboration probe is most useful in cases where the objective of the interview is to obtain detailed descriptions of objective situations or of subjective reactions and orientations. It is also helpful where the respondent is willing and able to elaborate without undue

strain or without resorting to fabrication in order to fill the vacuum. Under these conditions the elaboration probe has two distinct advantages over the clarification probe: (a) it allows the interviewer to obtain specific details he might never think to ask for, and (b) it often elicits the answer to several detailed questions without the interviewer's having to ask them. Clarification probes, both immediate and retrospective, will be needed after the elaboration probes reach a point where they are not producing much relevant information.

There are conditions where the clarification probes should be used without first trying elaboration probes. If the objectives of the interview call for only a few isolated facts, not related in the respondent's mind to a particular topic, period of time, or event, then the tactic of using specific questions followed by clarification probes where needed is more efficient and less threatening to the respondent's ego.

Immediate versus retrospective probes. The distinction between an *immediate* and a *retrospective* elaboration or clarification might seem arbitrary in that the immediate probe is related to the immediately preceding response while the retrospective probe is related to *any* of the responses before the immediately preceding one. Even though the range of choice in formulating retrospective probes is much greater than it is with immediate probes, in actual practice the distinction between the two seems to be more important than differences within either category. From the respondent's point of view, any probe regarding the current theme exerts less topic control than reverting to some previously mentioned topic. This, in turn, exerts less topic control than a mutation—changing the subject to some new topic not yet mentioned by the respondent.

An important tactical decision must be made repeatedly. Should each elaboration or clarification be obtained immediately, before the respondent can move on to other topics? Or should it be delayed until the respondent's momentum wanes or the topic has been covered as completely as possible with the use of only silent and encouraging probes? When the interviewer decides to wait until later to return to the theme at hand, he is exchanging less topic control early in the interview for more topic control later.

The question then becomes, when should the interviewer postpone his probing until later in the interview and when should he probe immediately for elaboration or clarification? In making this tactical judgment the interviewer should probably postpone the probe until later, if

5/ D. C. Hildum and R. W. Brown, "Verbal Reinforcement and Interviewer Bias," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, Vol. 52 (July, 1956), pp. 100-111.

1) the objectives of the interview call for a wealth of detail, including some "unanticipated" information which the interviewer would not think to ask for specifically;

2) topics, subtopics or questions are so interrelated that there are opportunities for the respondent to give several needed specifics in response to subsequent general questions;

3) the topic is one in which the respondent can be motivated to talk fairly spontaneously in response to broad questions; or

4) there is a danger that too many interruptions for needed clarifications might inhibit the respondent's spontaneity, as is often the case early in an interview.

Conditions (1) and (2) depend mainly upon the nature of the problem and are, therefore, more constant throughout the whole interview. Conditions (3) and (4) tend to fluctuate from moment to moment and therefore require the interviewer to vary the amount of topic control he uses.

Whether using an immediate or a retrospective probe, the following precautions should be observed:

1) Do not interrupt the respondent in order to probe; wait until you are sure he has finished his current thought. If you intend to use an immediate elaboration probe, it might be well to first use a silent probe in case it will accomplish the same purpose.

2) Be careful that your probe doesn't give the impression that you have failed to hear something the respondent has said.

3) Use the respondent's own words whenever possible in referring to something he has said.

The following illustrates the difference between a good and a bad probe for immediate clarification.

Example of good clarification probe.⁶

R: In general, I got along fine with both of my parents. We lived out in the country and I went to high school on the bus, so none of the kids came to my house. Of course, we had a little skirmish now and then, but basically I liked my parents and they liked me, even when I was a wild teenager.

I: I see. (3) Tell me a little about some of the skirmishes you had now and then. What were they about?

R: Well, there weren't too many of them. (3) I remember one when I wanted to use the car to go to a basketball game and Dad wanted to go to a Grange

meeting. We finally compromised and he took me to the game and I went home with someone else so he could go to the Grange meeting.

Example of bad clarification probe:

R: By the time I was a senior in high school I guess I gave my folks a rough time now and then. I don't know who I thought I was kidding, because I always came out second best and usually cut off my nose to spite my face.

I: Why do you suppose you usually lost the battle?

R: I wouldn't say I lost the battle because there wasn't really any open fight. I was just stubborn and wouldn't do things just because I thought my folks wanted me to.

Although using the right tactic does not always guarantee complete success, these two excerpts are typical of the tactics and the results obtained by two different interviewers working on the same study of parent-child conflict in families with teenage children. Note that both interviewers are trying to obtain more specific description of some concrete conflict situation. The first interviewer actually has two probes in one in that he first gives an encouraging "I see" followed by a three-second silent probe. He then makes it clear that he has been listening and is interested by using the respondent's own key word, "skirmishes," in phrasing the probe. In return, the respondent gives some detail regarding a concrete instance of conflict with his father.

The second interviewer has precisely the same problem as the first, in that the previous response was general, vague, and unclear. However, his attempt to clarify is unsuccessful for several possible reasons. First, he interrupts the respondent to ask the question (since he allowed no silence before probing); second, he does not use the respondent's own words in phrasing the probe. Instead of asking, "How did you give your folks a rough time?" he attempts to paraphrase what he thinks is the central ideal of the response. This paraphrase is perceived as inaccurate by the respondent who, instead of giving any concrete information, defensively denies that there was a "battle."

The interviewer must take particular care to prevent giving the impression that he has not heard or remembered pertinent information when using retrospective probes. It is also probably more important to use the words of the respondent so that he can immediately recognize the exact point the interviewer is probing. Sometimes it is helpful to preface the retrospective probe with a contextual statement which provides a clearer orientation to the past point being

probed and which gives the respondent recognition for information already given on the particular point. For example:

I: Very good! Now let's go back to the point where you had the first disagreement with your parents over dating. You mentioned that you wanted to take this girl to the strawberry festival and your mother objected. Tell me a little more about that situation.

This is infinitely better than the following probe which indicates a certain degree of insensitivity to the problem from the respondent's point of view:

I: Now tell me something about any disagreements you had with your parents over dating!

This probe does not show the respondent that the interviewer heard, remembered, and appreciated information already given, nor does it provide a concrete "handle" for the respondent's memory to grasp.

The recapitulation probe. The recapitulation probe is a special form of the retrospective elaboration probe which takes the respondent back to the *beginning* of the time period covered by the interview. This return to the beginning of the story is a tactic which has many advantages when used correctly under appropriate conditions.

The recapitulation probe is subject to all the same conditions and precautions as any retrospective probe, plus one additional condition. The topic must be one which the respondent tends to elaborate as a chronologically organized story. There are many types of topics in which the respondent tends to relate events in chronological order, particularly when encouraged by the interviewer to do so. A person's life history or any aspect of it such as his marital relations, his car-buying habits, his experiences in a crisis, his account of an accident he has witnessed, his views of the changes in the social structure of his community, or his political behavior—all may be elicited in story form.

The following three examples of recapitulation probes are taken respectively from interviews on human behavior in disasters, car-buying motivations, and development of delinquency behavior. After each of these interviews had been underway from 20 to 45 minutes, these recapitulation probes proved particularly useful:

You said that the sky turned sort of yellow-green and you looked out the kitchen window and saw this black funnel coming toward you. Can you tell me more about that moment?

You mentioned that the first time you drove a car was when you learned to

drive a jeep in the army in Colorado. You said it gave you a good feeling. Tell me more about how you felt about driving the jeep.

Now the first time you remember ever "lifting" anything was when you were about 11 years old and used to steal candy bars and pocket knives from Schmidt's Drugstore. Could you tell me more about the gang of kids you ran around with then?

Where there is a tendency for the respondent to relate his experiences in story form, he will usually add new detail to the story the second time through. In order to help the respondent cover the whole time period again, it is usually necessary for the interviewer to follow the recapitulation probe with a series of silent probes and neutral probes designed to keep the respondent moving forward in his story. Thus, if the respondent has once covered the relevant period of time but omitted thirty needed details, the interviewer could either ask 30 specific questions or use one recapitulation tactic which might obtain 15 to 25 of the needed details.

This natural tendency of the respondent to give further elaboration in the second telling of the story gives several important advantages to the recapitulation probe. It is often an efficient method of obtaining information since it reduces the number of interruptions of the respondent's thoughts and cuts down on the number of detailed probes needed. This also encourages spontaneity and aids the respondent's memory by giving him freedom to associate events in his own way.

Another advantage is that this tactic provides an indirect way of obtaining material where a direct question would constitute an ego threat. For example, if the interviewer were to ask directly, "Did you remember to take the children with you when you ran from the burning building?" and if the respondent had been so panicky that he ran out without them, the ego threat might cause him to falsify the report by simply answering "Yes." If the interviewer, instead, has the respondent give a detailed chronological account beginning with, "What happened when you first realized that the apartment was on fire?" and then follows with recapitulation probes, it may be obvious that the respondent did not actually think about his children until he saw a neighbor woman leading them out of the burning building.

The recapitulation probe is also an effective exploratory tactic which will maximize unanticipated responses by eliciting relevant information which the interviewer would never think to ask for.

A final and obvious advantage of the recapitulation probe is in obtaining a chronological picture of the respondent's covert or overt

behavior. A series of recapitulation probes will often provide a cross-check on the chronological order of specific events.

The reflective probe. We use the term "reflective" in slightly broader sense than defined by Rogers⁷ who emphasizes the reflection of the respondent's *feelings*. Here, a reflective probe is any attempt by the interviewer to elicit additional information by repeating the respondent's implicit or explicit statement without including a direct question. In the following excerpt, the first, the third, and the last probes are all reflective.

R: The main reason I came to Antioch College was because of the combination of high academic standards and the work program. It appealed to me a lot.

I: It appealed to you a lot?

R: That's right.

I: Could you tell me a little more exactly why it had this appeal for you?

R: I don't know—it was just that the place sounded less stuffy and straight-laced than a lot of places with just as good an academic program.

I: You don't like places that are stuffy and straight-laced?

R: You can say that again. A lot of places spend most of their time trying to work out a way of controlling the students, assuming that they are completely incapable of self-control. They have a housemother in every dorm, require class attendance because classes are so dull that no one would come if there wasn't a cut system, and they require chaperones at every party . . . that sort of thing.

I: Why do you suppose Antioch has less supervision by the administration?

R: Well it is part of the educational philosophy, and it would be ridiculous to send students all over the United States on jobs—New York, Los Angeles, Cambridge Key, and even Paris—where they are on their own and trusted to act like adults with no one to tell them when to go to bed, what to eat, and how to behave with the opposite sex, and then to treat them like children when they get back to campus.

I: Let me see if I have grasped the whole picture—you like a school with high academic standards, but which is not too straight-laced and operates on the assumption that college students can exercise self-control if they are not treated like children. These are the things you like about Antioch?

R: That hits it on the head. People go away to college because they want a chance to grow, to be autonomous as an adult should. I think this is a vital part of a liberal education.

Note that there is considerable variation in the form and function of the three reflective probes. Within our definition there are three subtypes of reflective probes which can be distinguished:

7/ Carl R. Rogers, "The Non-directive Method as a Technique for Social Research," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 51 (1945), p. 143.

a) the *echo* probe, which simply repeats certain words from the previous response;

b) the *interpretive* probe, which does not literally repeat the respondent's words but attempts to reflect the meaning or feeling behind the words in the previous response, and

c) the *summary* probe, which might combine selected elements from a long previous response or from several previous responses.

It is possible to combine types (b) and (c) in the same probe as the interviewer has done in his last comments above. His first remark, "It appealed to you a lot?" is an example of the echo probe and his comment, "You don't like places that are stuffy and straight-laced?" is an example of an interpretive probe where the interpretation is limited to explicitly stating implied feelings.

Under what conditions is each type of reflective probe likely to be useful in achieving the objectives of an interview? In our experience we have found the simple echo probe to be relatively useless if the interviewer repeats the immediately preceding phrase which happens to have little emotional content for the respondent. The most typical response is, "That's right," "Yes," "Uh huh," "That's what I said," or something to that effect. If the interviewer repeatedly uses the echo probe with purely factual details that happen to occur at the end of a response, the respondent may feel that the interviewer is not listening closely or that he is being very mechanical. Regardless of whether the echo is in the form of a statement or whether it is given an upward inflection to imply a request for elaboration or clarification, the result is about the same. However, if the echoed phrase contains material of great emotional implications for the respondent, it is enough to start him elaborating the topic, probably because the respondent feels that the interviewer is aware of the importance of the particular phrase.

Similarly, when the reflective probe is one which interprets what is meant by a statement or what feeling is implied by the statement, the respondent feels that the interviewer is interested in what is being said, and responds empathically to the feelings behind what is being said. It is more important to note that the attitude expressed by the interviewer in interpreting the respondent's feelings must be non-judgmental or sympathetic. If the tone is even slightly accusing or rejecting, it would be better if the feelings were left unreflected.

There are times when the *correct* interpretation and reflection of the respondent's feelings may damage rapport. This is true when the

feeling is socially unacceptable (for example, hating one's mother) and the respondent is not yet ready to accept this feeling as his own. His repression of the feeling is complete enough to hide the feeling from himself, and he sincerely believes that the interviewer either has not been listening carefully or is projecting some of his own distorted ideas.

There is also always a danger that the interviewer may incorrectly reflect the respondent's words or implied feelings. This danger is probably greater in the interpretive-summary probe where the number of opportunities to make an error is greater. Richardson⁸ found in one experiment that only one out of 43 times did the respondent correct the interviewer who made an incorrect summary of what had been said. These uncorrected, distorted summaries lead to inaccurate information and, in some cases, a lowered rapport with the respondent, who feels that the interviewer does not understand what is being said.

There are other conditions under which the distorted summary would stimulate a voluminous and spontaneous response that would clarify and enrich the information obtained. On rare occasions, we have found that a summary intentionally distorted to convey an incorrect picture which is less socially acceptable than the respondent's actual behavior may lead the respondent to elaborate upon his actual behavior to correct the interviewer's "misunderstanding." The conditions of success are very similar to those described in the earlier discussion of leading questions.

Mutations. Although a "mutation" is certainly a type and degree of topic control, it cannot properly be called a probe, since it is actually a general question introducing a new topic not yet discussed in the interview.

If a series of topics in an interview are interrelated in the respondent's mind, it is often possible for the interviewer to avoid using mutations to introduce the next topic or subtopic by allowing the respondent to take the lead in moving into the new topic. Whether or not such a smooth transition is desirable has already been discussed earlier in this chapter under the topic of transitions.

In general, the neophyte interviewer tends to use mutations too soon, before exhausting the relevant information on the current topic. Frequently, the beginner actually interrupts the respondent, who is still giving information relevant to the current topic, and

8/ Stephen A. Richardson, "Training in Field Relations Skills," *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (1952).

rushes on to the next topic only to discover, when analyzing the interview data, that the first topic had been sketchily discussed.

It is helpful for the interviewer to get in the habit of asking himself whether the current topic is covered adequately before going on to a new one. Sometimes, if the current topic is complex, several precautions can be taken to avoid leaving it prematurely. First, the interviewer can obtain time to check his interview guide and his probe notes (which are described in the next section) by simply saying to the respondent, "Excuse me for a moment while I check to see if you have given me all the information I need. Meanwhile you might think of something else you would like to add on this topic before we move on." Or, if the interviewer is sure that all of the anticipated information has been obtained and he wants to give the respondent one more chance to give some relevant but anticipated type of information, he can simply give a summary of what the respondent has said and ask if there is anything he would like to change, revise, or add. Before going on to a mutation, the interviewer should always use a silent probe to be sure the respondent has nothing more to add.

There is one situation where it is appropriate to change the topic of discussion before exhausting the current one. This would be advisable when for some reason the respondent needs to be jolted out of some undesirable rut in the current topic by leaving it temporarily. For example, the respondent may have become defensive about the topic or may be fabricating information in an attempt to be consistent with a previous, incorrect statement or to meet what he thinks are the etiquette requirements or the interviewer's expectations. If the interviewer suspects this, it may be useful to act as though the topic has been covered satisfactorily and go on to some unrelated topic. Later, after he has had an opportunity to establish a more sympathetic atmosphere and to show his interest in critically analyzing the information, the interviewer can then approach the old topic from a new angle so that the respondent will not revert to his defensive mood.

Taking probe notes

Taking notes in an interview has two general functions. First, note taking is a method of storing relevant information; and second, the notes are a tactical aid to remind the interviewer which areas have been adequately covered, what points need further elaboration or

clarification and what words the respondent used in talking about points that need further probing. We refer to notes serving the second purpose as "probe notes."

The distinction becomes clear in a non-scheduled interview in which the whole conversation is tape recorded. Obviously, notes are not needed to store the information, since it is on the tape in complete and accurate form. Nevertheless, the experienced interviewer takes probe notes if the interview is complex enough to warrant the use of a tape recorder. The less scheduled the interview, the less topic control used, and the more complex the interview, the greater the need for probe notes.

Assuming that the nature of the interview calls for taking probe notes, there are several points of techniques to be observed if the notes are to be of maximum value:

- 1) The notes should not be voluminous, but should include only key words or phrases to remind the interviewer of what the respondent has said.
- 2) These key phrases should be in the respondent's own words so that if the interviewer wishes to probe, he can use the respondent's own words.
- 3) The key phrases may either be written as a continuous story in the order given by the respondent, or may be recorded under appropriate categories provided by the interview guide. In this case, the guide should provide ample space for notes under each category.
- 4) If certain ideas need further elaboration or clarification, the interviewer can underline or circle the key phrase as a reminder.
- 5) As these points are elaborated and clarified, with or without probing, the key phrases which had been underlined can be crossed out to indicate that a probe is no longer needed.
- 6) If the interview is not tape recorded and the notes must, therefore, also act as a means of storing the information, it is helpful to take triple-spaced notes. The extra space allows the interviewer to fill in omitted words and phrases immediately after the interview.

This system of note taking can be expanded, contracted, or modified, depending upon the complexity of the interview, the degree to which the interviewer is familiar with its objectives, and the amount of topic control called for.

Even when a tape recorder is used, the interviewer often finds it useful to make notes of all the main relevant ideas rather than trying

to note only the points that need probing. There are two reasons for this. First, the interviewer is not always immediately aware that a particular idea needs probing; it may become problematical later when it apparently conflicts with subsequent information. Second, it is often easier to record all relevant key phrases than to decide which ones to omit or include.

Considerable experience is required before an interviewer can gauge the appropriate amount of note taking in various types of interviews and before he prevents its distracting him from listening carefully to the respondent. The skill lies in selecting only key phrases and words. In training interviewers, the author has found that the use of probe notes in tape recorded interviews vastly decreases the amount of missing or ambiguous information in the non-scheduled interview.

DEALING WITH SYMPTOMS OF RESISTANCE

In describing some of the typical forms of resistance by the respondent and in offering suggestions for countering such resistance, we make no promise that the solution will always be effective. No studies have been done of a large enough number of these tactical attempts to show precisely which conditions in the situation account for their success or failure, and the reader may think of a specific circumstance in which some of the following suggestions would not apply. They are offered as possible solutions when nothing obviously better occurs to the interviewer. Each form of resistance will be dealt with, insofar as possible, in the order in which it is most likely to occur in the interview.

"I'm too busy now!"

In situations where the interviewer contacts the respondent without a previous appointment, there is the possibility that the respondent will be too busy at the moment to cooperate or he will use this excuse when the real source of his resistance may be lethargy, ego threat, or dislike of talking to strangers.

The tactics that are possible at this point depend, among other things, on whether (a) the respondent must be included in a sample or whether a substitution can be made, and (b) whether it is possible for the interviewer to return at another time.

In some cases, the interviewer suspects the respondent is making

an excuse, but it is necessary to interview this particular respondent. If it is possible for the interviewer to return, the following tactic may be effective in avoiding a return trip.

I: How do you do? I am Mr. Gregg. I'm helping with a study of the community which is being done by Metropolitan Studies, Inc. You have probably read in the Dayton Daily Times about how this study is going to help plan improvements in traffic, parking, and shopping problems.

R: I think I have heard something about it, but right now I am too busy to talk about it.

I: I see. I realize that you didn't expect me at this time. Since it is so important to talk to a wide sample of people, I will be willing to come back at any time you say—this week or next week, it doesn't matter.

R: Well, I don't know—let's see . . .

I: The interview doesn't take much time, we just want to know something about your shopping habits, where your children go to school and that sort of thing.

R: Both of my children go to high school, and I don't even go downtown to shop any more since the new shopping center went in.

I: You have already answered two of the things I wanted to know. There are just a few more questions like that.

R: Well, if it won't take long, you might as well come in and let's get it over with and you won't have to come back.

I: Thank you very much.

When this tactic is used, the person who is really too busy but would be willing to talk will usually not hesitate to make an appointment. If the respondent actually has the time at the moment, but is hoping to turn the interviewer away, he realizes that this will not work since the interviewer will return again. Also, in this case, once the respondent knew the nature of the questions, she felt less threatened and decided to "get it over with."

In some cases, the interviewer has overcome resistance at this point by explaining how short the interview is, the importance of the project, that the respondent need not stop his work while answering the questions, that Mrs. X (a friend of the respondent's) warned that she would probably be very busy, but she would be able to give the needed information, or that it is very important to get the opinions of busy people rather than the leisure class.

Often, such a situation can be prevented if the interviewer is able to launch immediately into an initial question which rouses the respondent's interest, appeals to his ego, and shows that the interview is not difficult. This can sometimes be done even before a full expla-

nation of the purpose of the study is given. The explanation can be given in installments where it is directly relevant to the information requested.

In rare cases in which the respondent is very fearful of the interview, he may make an appointment and then be out when the interviewer returns. This evasive tactic was found several times in a study of marital success⁹ when making appointments with a few of the people who felt that their marriage had been a failure and did not want the interviewer to discover it. In these cases, the interviewer learned to arrive for an appointment about 15 minutes early. In some instances, he encountered the couple leaving their apartment house 10 minutes before the appointment time.

When the respondent feels the pressure of competing time demands, persuading him to submit to the interview is sometimes of little value. He may feel tense and apprehensive throughout the interview if he is neglecting his own work. In these cases, the interviewer might suggest that he return to finish the interview at another time.

"I don't know anything about that!"

The interviewer who meets this phrase from the respondent just as he has finished his explanation of the purpose of the interview or has asked the first question may become a bit panicky. For example:

I: How do you do? I am Mrs. Karen. I am working with the Community Service in doing a study of people's opinions on antivivisection. Do you know what antivivisection means?

R: Oh yes, it has something to do with cutting animals that are alive. But I don't know a thing about it. Why don't you talk to my next door neighbor? Her husband works at the drugstore and he knows all about that sort of thing. I just couldn't help you a bit.

I: But it's not necessary to know all about it. I just want to find out what people do know.

R: That's easy! I know nothing.

I: Oh, I'm sure you have something to say. You have probably seen it mentioned lately in the paper because there has been a big controversy over it.

R: I said I knew nothing about the subject . . . I think you should interview someone else. (slams door)

Compare the interviewer's performance above with the episode which follows:

9/ E. W. Burgess and Paul Wallin, *Engagement and Marriage* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1953).

I: How do you do? I'm Mrs. Gerhardt. I am working with the Community Service in doing a study of people's opinions on antivivisection. Do you know what antivivisection means?

R: Yes, vaguely. It deals with operating on live animals, but I don't know any more about it than that.

I: I see. Why do you suppose this is done?

R: I don't know. I suppose it is done to give medical students practice so that they won't have to practice on people.

I: Is there any other reason that anyone might operate on a live animal?

R: Well, of course, veterinarians operate on dogs when they are sick or to keep them from having puppies.

The contrast between these two episodes demonstrates a basic principle which emerged from experience with a wide variety of interviews: the interviewer should avoid challenging the respondent or even persuading him to cooperate. In a sense, the first interviewer is almost demanding a declaration of surrender from the respondent before he will formally launch the interview. The second interviewer simply accepts the idea that the respondent knows very little about the topic, but proceeds immediately with a relevant question without formally declaring the interview started and without seemingly trying to persuade the respondent to surrender.

If possible, the interviewer should focus the attention immediately on the respondent as in the following example:

I: How do you do? I am Mr. Black with the National Opinion Research Center. We are doing a study of how people manage in disasters in order to be of some help in planning for future disasters during either peace or war.

R: Well, I can't help you none because I wasn't even in Judsonia when the tornado struck.

I: I see. Where were you at the time?

R: I was all the way over in Searcy when I saw the big clouds over Judsonia way.

I: What did you think it was when you saw the clouds?

R: I was afraid to my bones that it was a twister. And I knowed that some of my family was here and I didn't know what was happening to them.

I: Then what did you do?

R: I got in the pickup truck and high-tailed it for home as fast as I could git. It seemed like a hundred miles because I was in a hurry and the road was full of all kinds of trees, telephone poles, and everything. I had to go off the road several times, but still couldn't get through with a car. I had to walk the last mile and a half. I just couldn't believe my eyes. With all the houses and the water

tower blown away, I could hardly find the way to my house, or I should say the place where my house used to be . . .

As it was, the respondent was well on the way without having formally consented to the interview. The interviewer was able to put the spotlight on the respondent by asking, "Where were *you* at the time?" Instead of this, the interviewer could have gone into a long explanation of why he had to obtain a random sample, what a random sample was, and why the respondents who were not in the town at the moment the storm struck still had useful information. All of this would be more time-consuming and more likely to cause resistance in the respondent.

In the type of study where there is no need for a random sample and where we want to locate key respondents who can give an objective report of specific facts and events, we often should not attempt to persuade a reluctant respondent to cooperate by being interviewed. Instead the interviewer should ask him for advice on who might have the kind of information he is seeking.

"I don't want to be on tape!"

On rare occasions, respondents will consent to being interviewed but will object to having the interview tape recorded. If after an explanation the respondent still objects, the interviewer's next move depends upon whether a tape recording is essential or merely convenient, and whether the respondent also objects to the interviewer's taking notes. If the former is not essential and the latter is permissible, then written notes are the solution.

It is sometimes helpful for the interviewer to clarify the nature of the respondent's objections so that they can be met. The interviewer can simply ask, "Would you mind telling me why you would prefer not to have the interview tape recorded?" This question followed by some appropriate probes put in a sympathetic spirit has elicited responses such as the following:

a) I have heard some of these tape recorded interviews with newspaper reporters on TV newscasts and they sound silly!

b) I don't want everybody hearing what I have to say. I don't mind telling you, but I don't know who else might hear it!

c) My voice sounds bad and I don't see any reason to preserve it for posterity.

d) I might say something that is not correct, or that I don't really mean, and there it is on the record forever.

The first response, if it is the genuine reason for the objection, can easily be overcome by explaining the difference between the purpose of the interviewer and of a news reporter. The second response and its variations can be dealt with by giving any of the following explanations when they are true: that no one but the interviewer will hear the tape; that the tape will be used over again after relevant information is taken off; that the transcribing will be done by people who are far away and do not know anyone interviewed in the study; that no exact quotes will be used; or that if quotes are used, the respondents will not be identified.

The third response can sometimes be overcome by reassuring the respondent that the tape does not sound like the real person since it is not high-fidelity. Or the interviewer might demonstrate how he sounds on the recorder, then ask the respondent whether he thinks it sounds like the real thing. The interviewer might record the response to this question and play it back to show the respondent that having one's voice recorded is not a painful experience. If the respondent's initial resistance seems to be giving way to his curiosity, the interviewer might propose that they try recording the first two or three minutes, and then if it still seems to cause "stage-fright" it can be turned off.

The last response is closely related to the first two, but is more concerned with the apparent permanence of the responses when recorded or with the fact that the tape records precisely what the respondent says rather than what he really means. It could also indicate a fear that the interviewer might pressure the respondent into saying something he does not mean, or not give time for the respondent to carefully consider or to correct his own responses. In this case, several tactics have been found useful. The interviewer can suggest that the tape recorder be used and that if at the end of the interview the respondent still feels the tape recording does not represent his views accurately he can either have the recording erased on the spot or suggest any corrections or additions after listening to it. In such a case, the respondent usually discovers in the progress of the interview that the interviewer is genuinely concerned with helping him express his views as accurately as possible without high pressure tactics, and he loses any desire to eliminate the tape recording.

In this type of situation the interviewer might need to check any

possible inhibiting effects of the presence of the tape recorder by using an informal post-interview which is explained later.

"Why are you taking notes?"

Even though the need for note-taking might have been explained at the outset of the interview, sometimes the respondent seems to become suddenly aware of the fact that the interviewer is taking notes. He may ask directly why notes are being taken, or he may merely show non-verbally or indirectly that he is concerned. His concern may be only with the interviewer's recording a particular statement or with note taking in general. If the interview is being tape recorded, he might merely be curious about what the interviewer chooses to write down and what he omits.

The sensitive interviewer who detects the respondent's concern can discover what is bothering him and give the appropriate explanation. Often, the respondent is satisfied by the interviewer's offer to show him the notes. This offer should not be made if the interviewer cannot follow through without endangering rapport. If the notes are in the respondent's own words and do not involve any interpretation or evaluation, there is little danger in showing them. Any suggestions the respondent might have should be accepted gracefully. Interviewers have discovered repeatedly that the main problem lies in being sensitive to symptoms of the need for an explanation of the note taking. Once the explanation is given, the respondent is usually satisfied.

"I don't remember, I don't know!"

Often after the interview is well underway, the immediate response to a specific question is "I don't know" or "I don't remember." Usually, this is not a form of resistance by the respondent but merely expression of modesty, tentativeness, or cautiousness with which many people preface an answer. Systematic analysis of tape recorded interviews has shown that only rarely does the respondent literally mean that he does not know. It would be safer in many cases to translate this as "give me a moment to think." Apparently, the most successful tactic in this situation is to allow a moment's silence and show by your expression that you are assuming that the respondent is thinking. If this does not bring results, the interviewer can say something to the effect, "I realize that the question might be diffi-

cult to answer without some careful thought. Also, the interviewer can supply some cues in an attempt to aid the respondent's memory.

All of this will be unsuccessful if (a) the respondent never had the information, (b) it is deeply repressed or completely forgotten, or (c) if the respondent has the information but does not want to give it because of ego threat, trauma, or etiquette. In the latter two situations, it is well to avoid directly pressing for the information and wait for recapitulation probes to either stimulate recall or allow time for a more permissive relationship to be built up.

There are two general types of questions that will often obtain the "I don't know" response because the respondent feels that he cannot give a precise enough answer. One of these types is the question dealing with the future such as, "Is your daughter going to college next year?" or "Do you think that prices will be higher or lower six months from now?" If the objective of the interview is to obtain the respondent's best estimate, then the interviewer will have to encourage the respondent to do the best he can. If the respondent says "I don't know," the interviewer can say, "Well, of course, nobody knows for sure, but the way it looks now, what do you think?" Another type is the question which asks for some factual or quantitative information such as, "About how many hours per week do you watch television?" To encourage the respondent, the interviewer can say, for example, "I don't have to know exactly. What is your best guess?"

In some cases, "I don't know" represents a case of incipient resistance. Here it is better to avoid pressing for an answer and to merely accept the response at face value while continuing the discussion. For example, a Colombian interviewer is speaking to a Colombian housewife about the North American student who lived in her home for six months:

I: Was your North American guest the tidy type or not?

R: I don't know.

I: I see . . . you just didn't have an opportunity to observe!

R: Well, not exactly . . . I just don't know how to put it. Because I noticed a lot of things about her behavior in my house, but they are not consistent!

I: What do you mean by "not consistent"?

R: She was very neat in the way she dressed, but she always left the bathroom a mess in the morning. Also, she would make her bed very well, but would leave her shoes and slippers on the floor. She never put her books and papers away, but left them on the desk in her room.

In this case, the interviewer skillfully led the respondent into giving

the answer without the dangers involved in not accepting the response by saying, for example, "Surely, you had some impression of her since she lived in your house for six months!"

"What do you think about that?"

There are several reasons why the respondent might ask the interviewer this question after the interview has been in progress for some time. He might have already expressed his own opinion on the matter and feel uneasy about expressing himself so freely without knowing the interviewer's opinion. This is most likely to happen when discussing controversial issues. At other times, the question merely represents the natural desire to seek some responsiveness from the interviewer. It is also possible that the respondent is simply curious about the interviewer's position on the subject.

The basic problem is to find a way to satisfy the respondent so he will not feel rejected or feel that the interviewer is secretive, and yet avoid offering information which will inhibit or bias subsequent responses. If the respondent's question is in response to a straightforward fact question from the interviewer, and if it is clear that the respondent does not know the answer, the only danger in answering is that it might change the respondent's frame of reference. This is undesirable when the objectives of the interview include discovering the frame of reference used by the respondent. There is also the danger that the respondent might feel inferior or that he is being "tested" by someone who already knows all the answers.

In many circumstances it would be better for the interviewer to say something like, "I'm not sure about that, but even if I knew I'm not allowed to give my opinions. It is your opinion that counts." Or he could say, "I'm not allowed to try to influence you by giving my opinions. My job is to understand and respect your opinion." If the respondents in the study are not in communication with each other, if the interviewer has already used statements similar to those above more than once in the interview, and if there seems to be a danger of the rapport breaking down because of the interviewer's refusal to reciprocate, then the interviewer could say, "I'm not trying to keep any secret from you, but I'm not allowed to say anything to influence your answers. But I will be very glad to answer any questions you have as soon as I get your opinions. I would enjoy that."

There are times when it is in the best tactic for the interviewer to tell the respondent how he feels about the issue being discussed.

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