Preparing for a Live Online Interview

6

If you begin tasks with the end result in mind, you will be more productive.

—Stephen Covey, 2004

After you study Chapter 6, you will be able to do the following:

- Understand steps needed to plan an online interview;
- Outline specific preparations needed based on technologies, and the type and research context of the online interview; and
- Describe the essential preinterview groundwork needed by online interviewers.

Planning to Interview

Once the researcher has divined a research purpose designed the study, considered ethical issues, obtained approval, planned for sampling, and recruited sample participants, it is time to move to the practical steps of interview planning and preparation. It has been shown in preceding chapters that online interview researchers can and should draw principles from relevant qualitative research methods and methodologies and adapt them as appropriate for use in online interview research. Interview preparation is no exception. This chapter draws relevant suggestions for interview preparation from research theorists and points to additional considerations for online interviewers.

Eliciting descriptions of experiences and perceptions of interviewees is the goal of any research interview. In-depth interaction with research participants should occur at each stage of the process: preparing to collect data, collecting data (see Chapter 7), and analyzing data (see the Appendix). Researchers are wise to see all communications conducted throughout the planning process, both informal and formal, as opportunities for building the relationship, comfort with the process, and trust in the interviewer.

This chapter explores three interrelated areas of interview preparation: preparing questions or discussion themes, preparing to use the interview technology, and individual preparation for the interviewer.

Preparing the Questions

Questioning is central to any interview. Whether the interview is structured, semistructured, or unstructured, the interviewer must discern how the interviewee can contribute insights needed to understand the research questions the study was designed to answer.

Researchers planning for structured or semistructured interviews will articulate all or most of the **main interview questions** in advance and plan the sequence for asking them. Open-ended questions solicit participants' stories, thoughts, and feelings. Researchers planning for structured or semistructured interviews may also ponder ways to encourage interviewees to dig deeper and determine how far they want to go with any particular question. Is it worth possibly sacrificing breadth and leaving some questions unasked if the interviewee wants to keep talking on one topic? If not, how will the interviewer encourage the participant to move on? Rubin and Rubin (2005) spell out a number of kinds of **probes**:

- Continuation probe encourages the interviewee to keep going with the current response.
- Elaboration probes ask for more explanation on a particular point.
- Attention probes ("Okay, I understand," etc.) let the interviewee know you are listening.
- Clarification probes ask for better definition or explanation if the researcher is confused or could not follow the thread of the story.
- Steering probes intend to get the story back on topic.

The sequence of main questions may be predetermined or arranged as the interview proceeds. Although subquestions, **follow-up questions,** or probes can be outlined in advance, the researcher will refine or add to the planned list as needed based on interviewee responses.

Researchers conducting semistructured interviews may develop an **interview guide**, a kind of "cheat sheet" to remind them of the key points to cover. Guides can be very detailed or simply list or outline the subject areas to be covered and key words the researcher wants to make sure to use when posing the question. Researchers can modify Moustakas' (1994) suggested list of questions to fit their own research designs (p. 116):

- What dimensions, incidents, and people connected with the experience stand out for you?
- How did the experience affect you? What changes do you associate with the experience?
- How did the experience affect significant others in your life?
- What feelings were generated by the experience?
- What thoughts stood out or are memorable?
- Have you shared all that is significant with reference to the experience?

Researchers at the unstructured end of the continuum approach the interview with the larger purpose for the inquiry in mind; they develop specific topics and articulate questions as the interview unfolds.

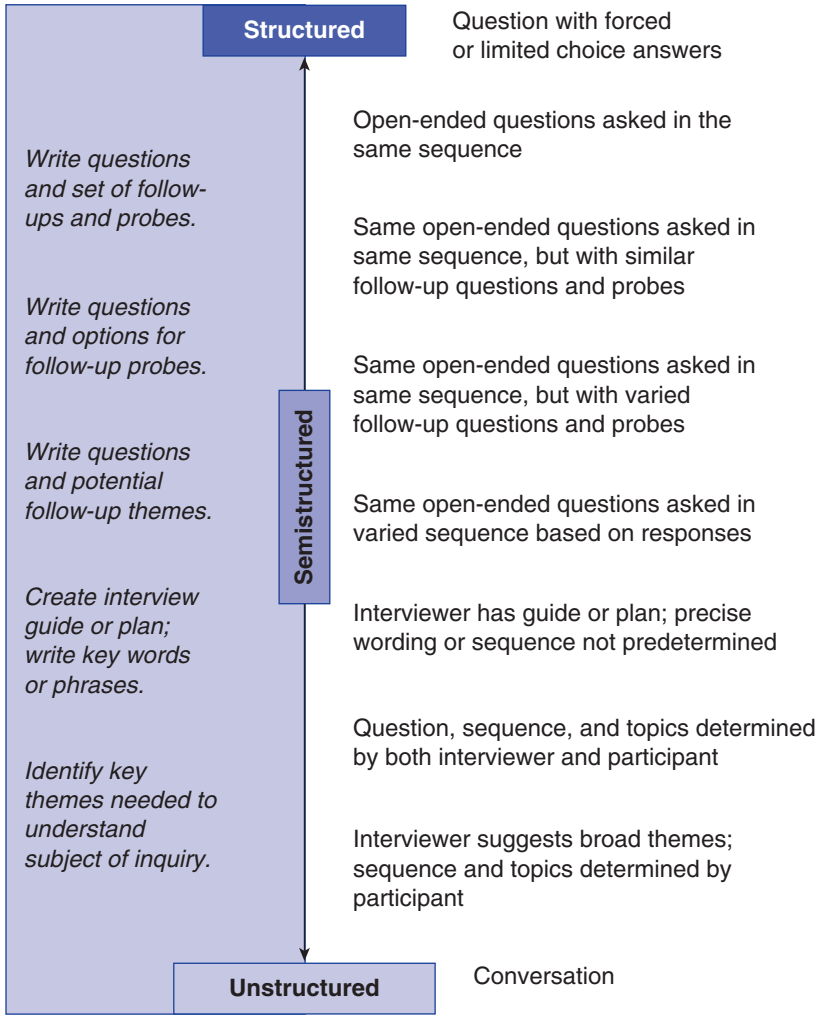
Whether the interviewer spells out each question or maps out key topics, if the interview is to be conducted online, the nature of the technology will influence the options for conveying the question, and receiving and responding to the answer. Will the participant be typing responses using text on a mobile device or chat software on a computer? Will the participant be speaking? Will the participant and interviewer be able to see each other's natural visage or an invented persona? Will they be able to observe and respond to visual examples or media? (See Chapter 8 for more about online visual methods.) Each is a distinctively different communication experience. This means selection of interview technology relates specifically to the kind of planning the interviewer needs in advance of the interview (see Figure 6.1).

Synchronous Technologies and Online Interview Preparation

CONSIDERATIONS FOR ICT SELECTION REVISITED

Synchronous communication allows interviewers and interviewees to interact in real time. Chapter 2 offered an overview of some types of ICTs researchers

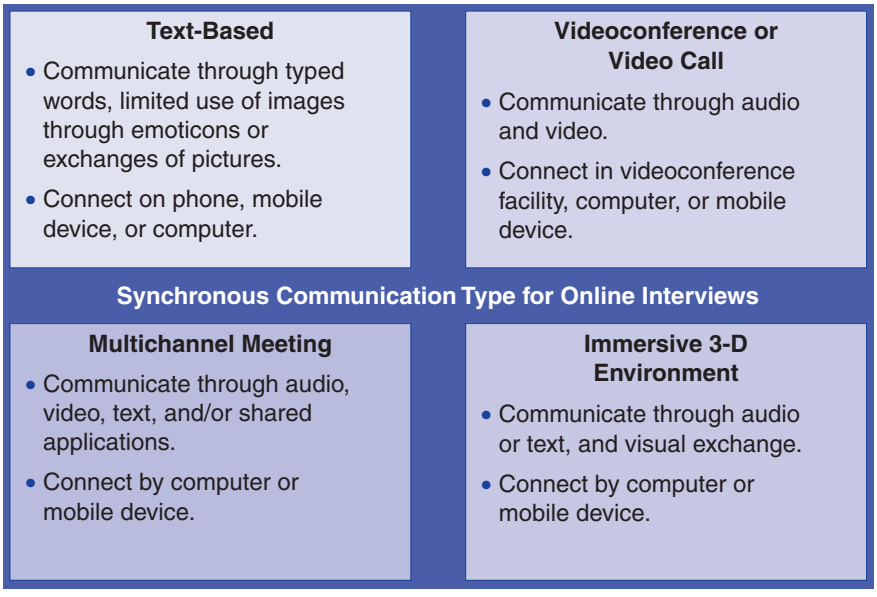
Figure 6.1 Interview Preparation by Type



can use for synchronous interviews. This book focuses on four main types of synchronous ICTs: text-based, videoconference or video call, multichannel meeting space, and 3-D immersive environment (see Figure 6.2).

The selection of technologies to use in the interview, and in other communications between researcher and participant, may depend on a variety of considerations. Besides the obvious practical matters of cost and access, technology selection may also be influenced by the research design and sampling plan.

Figure 6.2 Types of Synchronous Communications for Online Interviews



When online interviews are conducted to investigate face-to-face phenomena then, as noted in Chapter 5, the online environment is the meeting venue, not subject of investigation.

Such a researcher may have limited opportunities to introduce unfamiliar technologies, and the participant may have limited interest in learning new ICTs. In this type of interview, access to and comfort with the tool might be the critical factors for success.

A different set of factors may influence technology choices for online interviews to investigate online behaviors, events, transactions, or experiences. Researchers may want to use the same tools the participants are using in the circumstances being studied. Would a researcher who wants to understand ways facilitators stimulate discussion in online meetings want to carry out the interview in the same meeting space? Using the same example, does the researcher also want to conduct some observations of the facilitator in action? Might the researcher find that conducting interviews in a variety of spaces positive or might it be impractical? Considering that each type of communication medium needs a slightly different preparation, researchers may want to offer a limited selection from which to choose.

Figure 6.3 Questions for Researchers to Consider When Planning Online Interviews About Real-World Phenomena

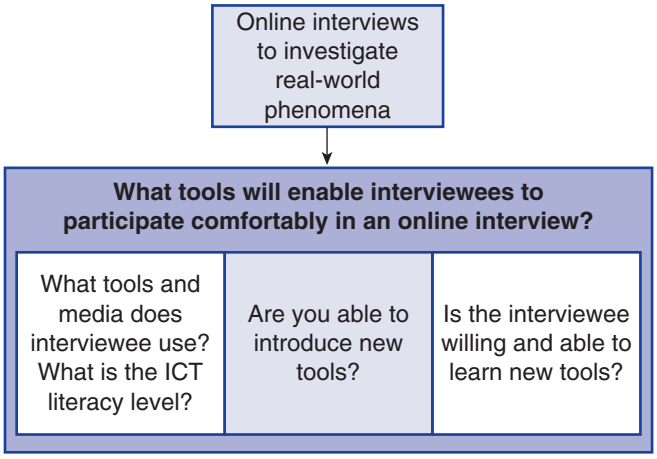
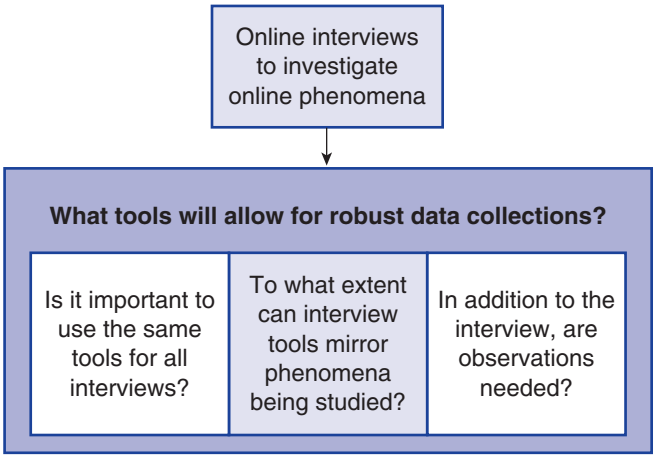


Figure 6.4 Questions for Online Interviewers Studying Online Phenomena



LEARNING THE ICT

Some ICTs require researchers to be actively involved in the management of the tool during the interview. Others, like text chat, are simple to operate or, like videoconferencing in a facility, involve technicians who manage the equipment. Researchers must be fully cognizant of the operation—and perils—of selected interview technologies. Communicating in the medium should come naturally by the time the first interaction with a participant occurs.

Practice interviews are essential, whether or not the researcher is familiar with the ICT. The ideal practice partner is candid and generous with constructive feedback. Researchers may benefit from practicing both roles: interviewer as well as interviewee. By taking the research participant's side the researcher may gain new insights about how to proceed.

It is important to anticipate types of technical problems and either learn to fix them, work around them, or find alternatives that could be quickly made available. Support information or troubleshooting tips must be reviewed. Technical support service phone numbers, links to live chat help, and turnaround time for assistance should be explored. User groups or forums may be helpful for finding solutions to common problems. Implications of last-minute changes must be considered. For example, if it is necessary to switch from VoIP to telephone, will a different recording mechanism be needed?

Preinterview communications with the research participant must include an assessment of the experience and comfort level with the selected technology or technologies. If possible, arrange a time when you can meet using the interview technology as part of the preparation. A brief online planning session and orientation to the software will reduce the pressure on both researcher and participant in the interview. This planning session can be used to reiterate expectations spelled out in the recruitment statement (Chapter 5) and to answer any remaining questions. Such informal dialogue is valuable for building the trust and relationship needed for productive and open dialogue in the interview.

Interview Preparation by Information and Communications Technology Type

Some preparation steps common to all and specific to ICT type are outlined here.

COMMON TO ALL ONLINE INTERVIEWS

- Establish protocols for the interview, including basic logistics. These may include agreement on signals to indicate need for more time to answer or time for a break.
- Confirm time frame, anticipated length for interview.
- Schedule time as needed to try the ICT prior to formal data collection.
- Schedule interview(s).

Ethics Tip: Make sure all plans are consistent with the protocols laid out in preinterview discussions and verified in the consent agreement signed by the research participants.

PREPARING FOR A TEXT-BASED INTERVIEW

Text-only synchronous interviews use text messaging or chat. Text-based interviews are a good choice when the following are true:

- Social cues of the interviewee are not important information sources for the interviewer (Opdenakker, 2006);
- Visual anonymity is desired by interviewers (Fielding, 2007; Joinson, 2001);
- The sample population has closed or limited access (such as hospitals, religious communities, prisons, the military, and cults) (Opdenakker, 2006);
- The sample population is comfortable with and/or prefers mobile text-based communication;
- The nature of the research questions makes short responses an acceptable form of data; and
- A written record of the exact interview comments is beneficial.

Text communications have evolved from computer to mobile devices and mobile phone use, creating a nearly ubiquitous means of communication. Text-messaging systems began as basic exchanges of ASCII characters but have evolved to include a variety of fonts, text colors, emoticons, sound, as well as the capacity to attach, embed, or link to nontextual elements. Texters can have some limited visual exchange by sharing images—either photographs on file or those taken in the moment using camera features on the mobile device. (See Chapter 8 for more on visual artifacts in online interviews.) O'Sullivan and colleagues' (2004) research showed that participants gave higher ratings for immediacy when researchers used first-person pronouns, informal and casual language, and graphics, bold fonts with varying sizes, and colors in the text formatting. "The artifacts of the channels themselves are appropriated by users as expressive devices, and are applied to interpersonal purposes, in ways that become a language in and of themselves" (O'Sullivan et al., 2004, pp. 467–468).

To hurry along the slow process of typing conversation, texters use various shortcuts. Electronic paralinguistic expressions such as *lol* meaning "laugh(ing) out loud" or *ttyl* meaning "talk to you later" have evolved as part of a large system of shorthand. Text users allow emoticons as substitutes for social cues  . However, like facial expressions or gestures, they do not have universally shared meanings  . When an interviewer conducts a text-message interview with an interviewee with another cultural background or communication style, the interviewer must pay careful attention to the use of emoticons. It cannot be assumed that emoticons will be interpreted in a manner as meant by the interviewer  (Opdenakker, 2006). Miscommunication can occur during a text interview when a participant is more competent in the use of emoticons or text abbreviations than the interviewer (O'Connor, 2006).

Even with the use of shortcuts, online interviews in the synchronous mode are slow. In one study, researchers reported that text-based synchronous interviews took about twice the length of in-person interviews and produced far fewer words. "A 120-minute online interview produced about seven pages of text. A 90-minute face-to-face interview produced 30 to 40 pages of text. The exchange of questions and responses was clearly influenced by the reading, reflection and typing skills of the respondents" (Davis, Bolding, Hart, Sherr, & Elford, 2004, p. 947). To adapt, they resorted to short, closed questions that fostered simple question-and-answer sequences (Davis et al., 2004).

Although the medium has limitations, Davis and colleagues (2004) observed the following:

> [T]he typed dialogue of online interviews can be seen as textual performance. As such, there is cause to argue that online interviewing is a distinctive social practice and should not be simply equated with FTF interviews. For example, data derived from online interviews are not properly represented as speech. Online interview data is textual performance mediated by the social and technical aspects of the Internet. (p. 949)

Another research team, Chen and Hinton (1999), similarly concluded that the text-based interview bridged an oral/written divide. Although clearly in written format, the type of interactions were very oral in nature, resembling a "written conversation" (Chen & Hinton, 1999). Researchers find this informal style promotes a fruitful exchange.

Variations on the text-only interview include using text chat in conjunction with other communication technologies. Text chat also can be used for interviews conducted in several episodes. Easy on-location access, without the need for special equipment, makes it possible for researchers and participants to check in and report on observations or experiences. For example, the interviewer and participant could log in for a couple of short questions on a daily or weekly basis, allowing data collection at strategic times relevant to the purpose of the study.

To prepare for a text-based interview, one should do the following:

- Select a text interview technology with which participants are familiar; discuss platform choice as part of consent agreement.
- Familiarize yourself with communications options in that setting; review archiving function for saving transcript.
- Familiarize yourself with electronic paralinguistic expressions, emoticons, or other communication shortcuts or slang used by the target population. Decide how you will use these shortcuts to save time and keep the conversation moving.
- Articulate a greater number of questions that elicit shorter responses; break big questions into a series of subquestions.

- Write out questions or key phrases in advance so you can cut and paste them into the text window to save time and keep interview flowing.
- Provide any background information in advance so you can move quickly into a dynamic exchange.

PREPARING FOR A VIDEO INTERVIEW

Not long ago studios with costly setups were the only way to meet via videoconference. However, desktop and even mobile videoconferencing options are emerging with the advent of low-cost Web cameras and free online services. Facilities, including videoconference/integrated classrooms, offices, and meeting rooms offer high-quality options for research purposes. Multiple cameras and assistance of trained technicians mean videoconferencing facilities enable either close-up or room visibility, can accommodate groups, or allow for complex interactions or the presence of observers. Many multisite businesses, governmental agencies, and educational institutions have invested in such videoconferencing systems. Per-session rentals are available at commercial sites such as office and business services.

Movement toward greater access and flexibility for desktop videoconferencing is advantageous for interview researchers with small budgets or those without access to such facilities. Many text messaging and chat services now allow users to plug in a Web camera; others such as Skype offer two-way audio, video, and chat in free Internet calls. Depending on whether the technology is a videoconference facility or video call, the researcher will need to decide whether a close-up, waist-up, or wider picture of the person in the room will work best. Testing the setup and communications options is a crucial part of preparation. Additional points include the following:

- Experiment with setup and camera positioning options.
- Review other features, such as text chat or areas for presenting visuals, and determine whether or how to use them in the interview.
- Decide how you want to present yourself. Just as in a face-to-face live interview, the background, your attire, and style all convey messages.
- Carefully review questions or interview guide so you can minimize the need to look down at notes. Take the time, before looking down to read notes, to make the best "virtual eye contact" possible.
- Discuss options and parameters for participant's Web camera. Is it acceptable for the participant to turn the camera off and use audio only?
- If using a facility where others (technicians, camera operators) will be present, determine policies for confidentiality. Depending on the setting and policies, you may decide to ask intimate questions in another way.

PREPARING TO INTERVIEW IN A MEETING SPACE

Online meeting or conferencing platforms integrate text chat, audio, and videoconferencing functions with various combinations of tools that may include shared applications and shared whiteboard. To prepare for an interview in an online meeting space, the researcher reviews the various communication features to determine which to use to convey questions, and what options to make available to interviewees. How will visual, verbal, and/or text options be utilized? (See Chapter 7 for more discussion of communication during the interview and Chapter 8 for discussion of visual methods in online meeting spaces.) The entire interaction is captured and archived, thus providing a data record for the researcher to review and analyze.

Such software suites are typically used for online meetings in business or for instructional purposes. Some are fee-based or subscription services such as Elluminate, Adobe Connect, Live Meeting, or WebEx. These services often offer free or low-cost versions for personal use. Other ad-supported or nonprofit services also are available.

When people log in to an online meeting space, they typically see a screen divided into different areas, with space for text chat, various toolbars for drawing and writing, and icons linking to other services. These links allow researchers and participants to view and comment on websites, documents, media, or applications. A central workspace can be used to show PowerPoint slides, diagrams, photographs, or other visual elements. Text and videoconference applications have been discussed earlier in this chapter, and the visual research potential for the shared whiteboard is addressed in Chapter 8. Three other components found in most online meeting platforms are considered here: the central workspace, shared applications, and the Web tour.

The central workspace can be used to share written or visual details about the study. Key points about the study's purpose or background can be reviewed and discussed by researcher and participant. Interview questions or themes can be presented in the workspace, one by one. For a structured or semistructured interview, questions or key discussion topics can be written on PowerPoint slides in advance of the interview. This allows the interviewer to focus on the conversation, without the need to cut and paste from another document or type during the interview.

For less structured interviews, themes for discussion can be written, diagrammed, or illustrated on the shared whiteboard during the interview. Because questions are communicated both verbally and in writing, participants who are more visually or aurally oriented can grasp them.

In addition to straightforward questions and answers, the shared applications or Web tour features enable the interviewer and/or interviewee to share and discuss media clips, websites, software applications, documents, or other artifacts that illustrate the phenomena under investigation. All elements the researcher intends to share must be selected and tested in advance of the interview. Any intellectual property

issues, such as permissions for use of images or media, should be obtained before finalizing the interview plans.

The main issue that is both an advantage and a disadvantage of the meeting space is the diversity of tools, which some researchers may find overwhelming. With a little practice, researchers can overcome this potential challenge. Highly engaged participants may be less likely to exit out of the interview prematurely. Diverse options for communication make the online meeting environment an ideal choice for the interviewer who wants to cultivate answers from and with participants as the metaphorical gardener or explore answers by traveling through the interview with the participant.

Once the tools, process, and approach have been selected, steps to prepare for the interview include the following:

- Check audio features. If the space allows for only one speaker at a time, determine protocols for turn-taking in conversation and include in preinterview run-through.
- Check recording/archiving features.
- Select or develop relevant diagrams, illustrations, examples, photographs, visual maps, and so on that can be used to show, rather than ask or tell, the participant what you want to discuss. (See Chapter 8 for more discussion of visual methods in online interviews.)
- Some platforms allow for PowerPoint slides, while others allow for shared documents. In addition to posing questions using audio, questions or key topics can be written out on the shared whiteboard. If this approach will be used, develop the slides and documents.
- Some platforms allow media, such as video clips, to be shown. If you are using media, make sure you can easily access, run, and close out of the media and back into the main discussion area.
- Review interactive features of platform; can any of them be used in the course of the interview? These could include asking participants to draw or diagram answers to some questions.

If the meeting space allows for a webcam option, add the following preparations:

- Follow preparatory steps for videoconferencing.
- Practice using the webcam.
- Adjust the webcam to allow for close-up view.
- Determine whether you want to use the webcam during all or part of the interview. For example, you could use the webcam to make contact in the introduction and then turn it off.
- Decide who gets to choose when and how to use the webcam. This decision may be one to discuss in advance of the interview.

PREPARING TO INTERVIEW IN A 3-D IMMERSIVE ENVIRONMENT

Preparing for an interview includes creating (or updating) an avatar that represents the researcher. Williams (2007) calls the avatar a "graphical pseudo-presence." The avatar "explicitly communicates a wealth of information upon the observer's online identity. The choice of pseudonym for the day and the dress and stature of the avatar chosen impact on how the observed react to the observer" (Williams, 2007, p. 11).

Messinger's research team draws on earlier theories by Hull (1943), Kaplan (1975), Swann (1987), and Swann, Pelham, & Krull (1989) to analyze whether people act more in accordance with motives for *self-enhancement* or *self-verification* when creating avatars. Self-enhancement theory is based on the notion that individuals are motivated to promote a positive self-concept and solicit positive feedback from others. People with negative self-views tend to distort personal information in a positive direction, referred to as *compensatory self-enhancement.* In contrast, self-verification theory contends that people are motivated to maintain a consistent self-concept, preserve the truth about them, and seek objective feedback from others. People are motivated to self-verify because portraying one's self-concept in a stable, self-congruent manner bolsters a person's confidence in predicting and controlling the world, and facilitates social interactions (Messinger, Ge, Stroulia, Lyons, & Smirnov, 2008). Messinger et al. (2008) found that people generally balance motives for self-verification and self-enhancement, customizing their avatars to bear similarity to their real selves, with moderate enhancements. Researchers need to decide how to present themselves as an avatar. Additional preparation points include the following:

- Test your "image" with colleagues or friends to assess whether you convey the persona you intend to present to research participants.
- Familiarize yourself with Second Life functions and protocols, including teleporting and sharing items with other avatars.
- Decide where and how to conduct the interview. If you create a space, consider making it private and requiring permission to enter (make sure space is large enough so that audio exchanges are out of range of others who could eavesdrop).
- If it is not your own property, make arrangements to use it for interview purposes. Make sure to schedule and plan to minimize the likelihood that others could be present and eavesdrop.
- If you select a place like a library or academic meeting area, determine what ethical expectations are established by the setting.

Ethics Tip: If you want to collect data through observation, the style of avatar chosen by the participant, or the space built by the participant, make sure you have asked for permission in the consent agreement.

Ethics Tip: If you want to collect data on the participants' activities, group memberships, and so on by reviewing their profiles or other information, make sure you have asked for permission in the consent agreement.

- Make sure participant has all information needed, including meeting place.
- Offer to meet ahead of the interview, so both researcher and participant are familiar with the location and features. If you decide to meet on the participant's property, ask to visit in advance of the interview.
- Decide whether to use text chat or audio features for dialogue in the interview.
- If you are using text, see suggestions for text-based interviews.
- If using VoIP or telephone, check audio operations. Arrange for audio recording.

Getting Ready to Interview

As noted, the online interviewer has three kinds of preparation to make: one is related to preparing questions or discussion themes apropos to the empirical and theoretical basis of the study; a second is related to preparation for use of selected technology; the third is the personal preparation needed to serve as guide and facilitator of the interview—the person behind the monitor in a human-to-human conversation with a purpose.

DEFINING ROLES

Earlier sections have explored researchers' roles in terms of the miner who excavates information, the gardener who cultivates exchange, or the traveler who journeys with the participant (see Chapter 3). Researchers need to have clear intentions in mind. They also need to consider how participants perceive them. Rubin and Rubin (2005) point out that people relate to one another through culturally understood roles in which obligations and responsibilities are known to both parties. In establishing an acceptable role as researcher, it is important to decide how you want to present yourself and how much of your own experience you want to share. In the online interview, unless a full videoconferencing system is used, your visual image may be limited and as a result may seem even more significant. What image do you want to convey as it relates to your role in this study?

EPOCHE, SELF-REFLECTION, AND PREPARING TO LISTEN

As researcher it is important to approach each interview with a clear and fresh perspective; this is what phenomenological researchers call **Epoche** (Moustakas, 1994). Whatever methodological tradition guides the study, starting with an open mind is important for data collection through interview research.

Moustakas (1994) points out that Epoche is "preparation for deriving new knowledge" by listening without expectations for any particular outcome (p. 85). "In the Epoch, we set aside our prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things" (p. 85). It is of course impossible to pretend that researchers have no biases and can listen to answers without sifting through their own experiences and cultural lenses. Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggest that self-reflection is essential; researchers need to continually examine their own understandings and reactions" (p. 31). Moustakas (1994) calls this being "transparent to ourselves" (p. 86).

The attitude of Epoche emerges when the researcher is self-aware and sets aside time to mentally refresh before beginning an interview. The attitude of Epoche emerges when the researcher has sense of deep respect and appreciation for the unique contribution of each participant. When online researchers are confident about the intended direction for questioning and the smooth application of the ICTs, they enter the interview ready to listen deeply and respectfully to the participant.

With ongoing self-reflection and Epoche, each new interview is a fresh experience. This kind of preparation is needed before each interview. Once the interviewer has conducted several interviews certain responses to particular questions may be anticipated; the interviewer who has made a conscious effort to set preconceived notions aside may hear subtle or profound nuances that might otherwise be overlooked.

Closing Thoughts

Preparing for an online interview involves personal, theoretical, and technical steps for the researcher and participant. The exchanges throughout the process—whether routine or substantive—should be seen as meaningful aspects of the overall research relationship. The exchange begins when the researcher describes the study, clarifies expectations, and obtains informed consent agreements (see Chapter 4). The process of planning for the interview offers additional opportunities to communicate and build trust, which are foundational to the successful research interview.

In Chapter 3's discussion of interview structure, a range of very structured to very unstructured interviews were defined. Some interviewers prefer an unstructured conversational style of interviewing. Online, even these interviewers will do best by writing out key phrases or themes in advance if text will be used in the interview.

Although new tools for communication will undoubtedly appear, the basic distinctions of synchronous and asynchronous, visual, and text-based will likely persist. Decisions about the ICT and means of communication are closely interwoven with the research purpose, methodology, and theoretical framework. There is no simple recipe for how to mix them; finding the right synergy will be part of the learning and new knowledge to result from the study.

Researchers' Notebook: Stories of Online Inquiry

Interviews for my study on collaborative e-learning took place online in a virtual meeting space. The Elluminate platform allows for dialogue through VoIP two-way audio, text chat, and shared whiteboard. To prepare for these interviews, I took several important steps. In advance of data collection, three informal focus groups were conducted with educators. These focus groups were not part of the data collection; they were intended as a test for both content and process prior to the actual research interviews. I also carried out preinterview discussions with each research participant.

A TEST RUN: FOCUS GROUPS

The sessions each lasted from forty minutes to one hour. Each session involved three to five participants. Participants self-selected based on notices posted in the online communities where educators with a shared interest in technology congregate. Participants were comparable with the target group of research participants in regard to key criteria; that is, they were all experienced online educators with an interest in collaborative methods. Similar to the research participants, the focus group participants represented an international mix.

The sessions utilized the same approaches planned for the interviews. The working definition of collaborative e-learning and the Taxonomy of Online Collaboration (Salmons, 2010) model and conceptual framework were presented through visual images on PowerPoint slides with verbal descriptions. Open-ended questions were posed to participants, who were able to respond by text message, VoIP, and by writing or drawing on the shared whiteboard.

The preresearch focus groups accomplished two important objectives:

- They allowed me the opportunity to practice in the role of questioner and facilitator on the Elluminate platform.
- They allowed me to introduce the definition of collaborative e-learning, the prototype Taxonomy of Online Collaboration, and some of the interview questions and themes to educators.

It was possible to discern that the conceptual framework of the design was understandable to people with no previous exposure to it. Participants did not request additional explanations of the taxonomy elements or levels. Comments such as "These categories or levels are great and well articulated" and "I agree with your dual focus on the content objectives and the ICT goals and process you have laid out" indicated that the description of the taxonomy and its purpose were clear. The interactive, participatory exchange among participants showed effectiveness of the Taxonomy of Online Collaboration as a stimulus for discussion of collaborative teaching methods. This conclusion was verified by the fact that additional sessions were requested so others could attend. These sessions allowed for experimentation with interactive features of the platform; some of them, including the shared whiteboard, were later used to enhance interview dialogue.

PREINTERVIEW DISCUSSIONS

Prior to the interviews, selection criteria and agreements were discussed with research participants and any questions about the process were answered. Research participants were provided with the working definition of collaborative e-learning, the prototype Taxonomy of Online Collaboration, interview topics, and questions. Research participants were encouraged to select a course or program of study to discuss in the interview that best demonstrated collaborative methods of teaching and learning, where more than one level of collaboration was practiced.

The organization and intended purpose for the taxonomy were discussed with research participants. I emphasized that while like most taxonomies, it is organized systematically from simple to complex, with increasing complexity at each level, the sequence presented in the prototype was not fixed. I also emphasized the organization of the Taxonomy of Online Collaboration should be changed depending on research participants' recommendations. The preinterview included a discussion of the ethical framework of the research. All research participants signed the informed consent form.

These preparatory steps resulted in greater confidence on my part and readiness on research participants' part for lively and generative online interviews.

Key Concepts

- Quality of interview research outcomes depends on data contributed by research participants. Establishing productive communications using online technology requires careful planning.
- Whether the inquiry is designed to study online behaviors or face-to-face behaviors may shape the choice of technology tool for conducting online interviews.
- Regardless of technology, the interview researcher must be self-aware and take time to reflect on his or her role as well as biases or presumptions that could influence the way participants' remarks are understood.

Discussions and Assignments

1. Identify an ICT you are interested in using for an online interview. Discuss the specific options available for communicating, how you would use them, and steps you would take to prepare.
2. Create a planning timeline and checklist for an online interview using the ICTs you plan to use.
3. Discuss the concept of Epoche. What could you do to clear your mind in readiness for an online interview?
4. Discuss the point made by Rubin and Rubin (2005): people relate to one another through culturally understood roles in which obligations and responsibilities are known to both parties. When the interview occurs online, how do people know "culturally understood roles" and agree to obligations and responsibilities? Identify any steps researchers (or participants) should make in the planning phase.

On the Book's Website

- Checklists and materials to help you prepare for your interviews

Terms

Epoche: "Setting aside prejudgments and opening the research interview with unbiased, receptive presence" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85).

Follow-up questions: Follow-up questions build on interviewee responses to get a clearer or deeper understanding of the interviewee's response.

Interview guide: A list or outline of key themes to cover during the interview.

Main interview questions: Main interview questions are articulated to elicit overall experiences and understandings.

Probes: Probes encourage the interviewee to provide detail to flesh out and expand on the answer.

- A continuation probe encourages the interviewee to keep going with the current response.
- Elaboration probes ask for more explanation on a particular point.
- Attention probes ("Okay, I understand," and so on) let the interviewee know you are listening.
- Clarification probes ask for better definition or explanation if the researcher is confused or could not follow the thread of the story.
- Steering probes intend to get the story back on topic (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).