

Designing the Interview Guide

Guidelines for Writing Interview Questions

1. What are the exhibit objectives? What are the measurable visitor experience objectives? Translate these into evaluation objectives. Be sure each question is connected in some way to your evaluation's goals and objectives. One evaluation objective can be investigated through several interview questions, thus obtaining rich and varied information by approaching a topic from several angles.
2. Write questions that encourage dialogue and descriptions. Questions should ask about concrete situations and yield descriptive responses: "What did you experience?" "How did it make you feel?" "What did you notice?"
3. Try to avoid using questions that begin with "Why?" Using the word "Why" tends to leave the question open to multiple interpretations. For example, if you ask a visitor, "Why did you come to this exhibition?" many variables could affect the response. A visitor could answer the question on many levels, levels that may be irrelevant to the interview. For instance, a respondent may give reasons related to convenience or money. Instead, a better way of asking this question is to be specific and ask, "What attracted you to this exhibition?"
4. Use follow-up questions that ask visitors to clarify where their thoughts, feelings, and ideas are coming from. For instance, if they make a general comment about an exhibition, ask them what in the exhibition showed them that. This is a way of distinguishing between ideas that the visitor already had versus one he/she formed in the exhibition.
5. Avoid dichotomous questions (such as those that yield yes/no responses) except when you have a follow-up question. Using dichotomous questions turns the interview into a quiz.
6. Use simple vocabulary, but if you have a technical term, define it (except in the case where you are assessing specific knowledge about a technical term). Abstract/academic evaluation questions need to be translated into easy-going colloquial form to generate spontaneous and rich descriptions.
7. Begin the interview with a general, non-threatening question and work up to the more difficult questions after you have established a rapport.
8. Keep questions short.
9. Include only one idea per question. For instance, do not ask, "What did you like and understand about the exhibition?"
10. Avoid leading questions that give the respondent hints about what would be the desirable or appropriate kind of answer. Keep questions neutral. For instance, if you ask, "How satisfied were you with the exhibition?" you have built in a response-bias. The visitor will feel compelled to respond positively to the exhibition.

11. Use presupposition questions. Presupposition questions assume the respondent has something to say and increases the likelihood that the person being interviewed will have something to say. Presupposition questions includes the implication that what is presupposed is the natural way for things to occur. It is natural for visitors to find certain aspects of an exhibition interesting and others not interesting, or to find something confusing or easy to understand. An example is, "What did you find most interesting about this exhibition?" This presupposes that the respondent found something interesting in the exhibit. The visitor is free to say he/she found nothing interesting, while leaving the question open to those who found something interesting. To counterbalance, a good follow up question would be "What did you find least interesting about the exhibition?"