

Interviewers Guidelines

If you decide to have volunteers conduct face to face interviews, additional training is necessary. Interviewers need to have a good, positive attitude and be enthusiastic and opened minded. Since interviewing is not for everyone, you will need to screen individuals carefully. A summary of important points to include when training face to face an interviewer follows. Some of these suggestions are also applicable for volunteers who will randomly choose visitors for partial self-administered procedure.

Introduce yourself in a friendly manner. Briefly describe that you would like the potential respondent to participate, rather than ask them to participate. Make a statement such as, "Hello, I work for DAM and would like to ask you a few questions." More people will agree to participate if you do not give them the opportunity to say, "no." If some persuasion is necessary, depending on the situation, you can add, "it will only take X minutes of your time" and " all responses are anonymous", "We are interested in what you think" or "Everyone's opinion is important."

Convene in an area that is private and quiet as possible. Avoid distractions and interview only one person at a time. For the Getty Museum Visitor Survey, we invited; "Third parties" to look through several museum guidebooks that we provided at a nearby table with chairs while their companions participated in the interview. If a randomly chosen visitor does not speak English, but is accompanied by an English speaker, ask the companion to act as a translator.

Respondents should stand or sit across from the interviewer. Do not let respondents see the questionnaire, as this may distract them.

Know the questionnaire form. Understand the purpose and be very familiar with the wording of each question. This will make the interview more natural and conversational. The interviewer will feel more comfortable asking the question.

Create a pleasant, friendly rapport. Be positive, enthusiastic and happy. Visitors will respond in a similar manner. Create a permissive atmosphere, allowing respondents to express themselves. Show acceptance, understanding and interest.

Follow the exact form of the questionnaire. Standardizing is important. Do not skip or change the wording and do not change the order of the questions. Ask every question even though the respondent may have answered a question while responding to a previous question. Simply ask, " You may have mentioned this already, but..."

Be sensitive to your respondent. Place the interview according to the respondent's ability to understand you. The volunteer may repeat something that is not heard or understood. Ask questions in neutral, unbiased tone to allow your respondents to express themselves.

Follow all instructions. Instructions such as "read aloud" or "go to question 5" may appear in the questionnaire. This indicates that the volunteer should read aloud all the possible responses to the respondent.

Most often however, volunteers ask the question, fitting the response into the most appropriate category provided on the questionnaire. Never force a response into a category; use the, "other" option. "(Go to question #5)" refers to filter questions which are asked of only some respondents and which depend upon their answer to the previous question.

Do not suggest answers to the respondent. Volunteers must not pressure a respondent by voicing their own ideas or reactions, either verbally or through gestures. Volunteers must remain neutral at all times.

Be sure the respondent is answering the question. Respondents commonly avoid answering a question without realizing it. For example a visitor asked, "Which art collections do you think the museums holds?"

the visitor responds, "Oh I don't really care what art it is. I'm sure it will be pretty." Volunteers need to ask themselves if the respondent really answered the question.

Record word for word responses to open-ended questions. When a respondent speaks too quickly and the volunteer is unable to record everything, the volunteer can politely ask the respondent to speak more slowly and repeat the answer. The volunteer should accept the responsibility by saying, "I write slowly, can you please repeat that." You may use abbreviations, but be sure to write out the complete word afterwards. Be sure to write legibly, as others may read your recordings.

Probe when necessary. Probing is a technique used to encourage respondents to clarify or add to the answers. All probes must be done using neutral conversation to avoid influencing any responses. An expectant pause, a nod of the head or the murmurs of, "yes" are considered probes. More verbal probes include phrases: "anything else?" "Oh that's interesting, can you elaborate" or "why do you think that is?" When probing the volunteers should use the respondent's language style and choice of words. If the respondent says, "I don't know," the volunteer should provide reassuring remark such as, "take a moment to think about it", or "Many of these questions are involved, so please take your time." If this does not work then integrate the language of the listed responses into another question to further guide them. During this remember to remain neutral and read all of the listed responses. For example, in the Getty Museum Visitor Survey, we asked what collection respondent expected to find at the museum. To guide the respondent, a survey administrator could say: "I'll read you a list of art collections and you tell me which you think the museum holds."

Save chatty conversation for afterwards. Often visitors will want to ask the interviewer about her or his job or how to go about volunteering. Volunteers should explain that they would gladly talk with them once the interview is over.

Review the question before closing remarks. Before letting the respondent resume their visit, check the questionnaire to be sure all applicable questions have been answered and written responses are legible. The respondent should wait until this is done. When completed, thank the respondent for their time. We suggest giving them a token of appreciation such as a post card or cup of coffee.

Excerpted from Visitor Surveys: A User's Manual (AAM Technical Information Service. 1990) p.61-64