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# Study Questions for Esterberg's Chapter 5: Interviews

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As Esterberg affirms, “the interview” is probably the most commonly used method in the social sciences. This is probably so for two reasons: (1) the interview is a method that is compatible with every research tradition; and (2) if you want to know something about people, then certainly at least one part of what we do should be to ask them to tell us about themselves, explain their actions, and share their feelings.

The study questions below highlight some of the main issues that Esterberg discusses that you should know:

1. Esterberg distinguishes between **structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews**. You should know (a) what these refer to and what distinguishes them; (b) what their respective advantages and disadvantages are (and in what situations they are most likely to be used); and (c) the extent to which and ways in which each of them is appealing to qualitative researchers and why.
2. **Deciding Whom to Interview**. Quantitative researchers tend to place a high value on acquiring random samples of some designated population, and the more the better. According to Esterberg, what sorts of **sampling methods** and preferences do qualitative researchers favour, and why?
3. Why would you want to prepare an **interview guide**?
4. What are some principles that you should keep in mind when deciding the **order** of your questions in a structured or semi-structured interview?
5. On pages 98-100, Esterberg offers advice about **question wording**. You should know these principles, be able to recognize a “bad” question that violates one of the principles, and, if given a poorly worded question, be able to change and improve it.
6. Why should you always **pretest** your interview?
7. **During the Interview**. What are some of the things an interviewer can do during the interview to make the respondent feel comfortable and encourage lengthier responses?
8. What does Esterberg suggest you do about the following situations: (a) when the participant starts off by giving **one- or two-word answers** to questions; (b) when there is a period of **silence** that makes you feel uncomfortable; (c) when your participant **gets off track** and starts talking about things you hadn't actually intended or anticipated hearing about?

9. Why is it a good idea to sit down on your own as soon as you can after an interview and write some **field notes** about the interview you just conducted?

10. **Focus Groups Interviews:**

- a. What are some **advantages and disadvantages** of focus group interviews?
- b. What are some circumstances in which they are good to incorporate in your research?
- c. What is the **role of the researcher or moderator** during a focus group?
- d. What **ethical issues** become particularly important when you conduct oral history interviews?