

BERG'S TEN COMMANDMENTS OF INTERVIEWING

	Berg's Commandments	Palys's Annotations
I	<i>Never begin an interview cold.</i> Remember to spend several minutes chatting and making small talk with the subject. If you are in the subject's home, use what's there for this chatting. Look around the room and ask about such things as photographs, banners, books, and so forth. The idea here is to set the subject at ease and establish a warm and comfortable rapport.	You're trying to make everybody (including you) feel comfortable and start to build rapport. This "chat" time begins the acquaintanceship process (assuming you're interviewing strangers) and breaks the ice. Avoid being too nosy about things that have no relation to the interview. On the other hand, things that do appear to be related can help strike up conversations and get you on topic.
2	<i>Remember your purpose.</i> You are conducting an interview in order to obtain information. Try to keep the subject on track, and if you are working with an interview schedule, always have a copy of it in front of you -- even though you should have your questions memorized.	Berg gives the wrong impression when he talks about memorization; you do memorize it, but more in the sense that you know what it's about what it's trying to achieve. Jot down notes even if you are tape recording -- participants expect it; it shows you're listening; it helps keep you focussed; and it can be a great backup if something goes wrong with the machine.
3	<i>Present a natural front.</i> Because your questions are memorized, you should be able to ask each one as if it had just popped into your head. Be relaxed, affirmative, and as natural as you can.	I hate the word "front" here, but the central message is a good one, i.e., be "natural" and be "on," i.e., make the questions "fresh" even though you may have asked the same ones a dozen times before. Be animated; don't simply read in some lethargic way.
4	<i>Demonstrate aware hearing.</i> Be sure to offer the subjects appropriate nonverbal responses. If they describe something funny, smile. If they tell you something sad, look sad. If they say that something upset them, try to console them. Do not present yourself as uninterested or unaware.	Good listening is a skill and requires focus and attentiveness. It is tough to do when there are several other things you are thinking about at the same time (which you should be doing, i.e., thinking what you will ask next; determining whether the respondent has answered "enough" or whether you need to probe for more), but that is what you must do. Good interviewers are good at multi-processing.

<p>5</p>	<p><i>Think about appearance.</i> Be sure you have dressed appropriately for both the setting and the kind of subject you are working with. Generally, business attire is most appropriate. If you are interviewing children, a more casual appearance may be more effective. Remember to think about how you look to other people.</p>	<p>Blending in is important, as is being comfortable, and looking/acting professional. People must feel confidence in you, so look/act in a way that inspires that confidence.</p>
<p>6</p>	<p><i>Interview in a comfortable place.</i> Be sure that the location of the interview is somewhere the subject feels comfortable. If the subject is fearful about being overheard or being seen, your interview may be over before it ever starts.</p>	<p>True.</p>
<p>7</p>	<p><i>Don't be satisfied with monosyllabic answers.</i> Be aware when subjects begin giving yes-and-no answers. Answers like these will not offer much information during analysis. When this does occur, be sure to probe with questions such as, "Can you tell me a little bit more about that?" or "What else happened?" Even a simple pause and an uncomfortable <i>silence</i> might yield additional information.</p>	<p>This is particularly important at the beginning of the interview when the respondent looks to you for cues as to how much is "enough." If you let brief answers get through at the beginning, it will be all you hear all the way through. Get people used to the fact that you want them to talk, embellish. One thing we often have to learn is to respect silences instead of being mortified by them; sometimes people want to reflect before they continue; let them.</p>
<p>8</p>	<p>Be <i>respectful</i>. Be sure the subject feels that he or she is an integral part of your research and that any answer offered is absolutely wonderful. Often subjects will say things like, "You don't really want to know how I feel about that." Assure them that you do!</p>	<p>This should be easy to do because it is true.</p>
<p>9</p>	<p><i>Practice, practice, and practice some more.</i> The only way to actually become proficient at interviewing is to interview. Although this book and other manuals can offer guidelines, it is up to you as a researcher to develop your own repertoire of actions. The best way to accomplish this task is to go out and do interviews.</p>	<p>Certainly it is the case that the more interviews you do, the better you get. If you tape record interviews, get in the habit of listening to them again in order to critique your interviewing. Notice places where you missed doors that were opened to you, or where you backed off because you were afraid to ask the question you should have.</p>
<p>10</p>	<p><i>Be cordial and appreciative.</i> Remember to thank the subject when you finish, and answer any questions he or she might have about the research. Remember, you are always a research emissary. Other researchers may someday want to interview this subject or gain access to the setting you were in. If you mess things up through inappropriate actions, you may close the door for future researchers.</p>	<p>"Don't spoil the field" is your main obligation to other researchers. Make sure you leave people with a good taste in their mouths for having participated. Answer any questions they have to the best of your ability. And be sure to honour any agreements that you make (e.g., to follow up with feedback at the end of the study; or make copies of the final report available).</p>