## Semi-Structured Interview

**KQ: How and why might a semi-structured interview be used in qualitative research?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level One: Describe</th>
<th>• What are the key qualities of a semi-structured interview?</th>
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</thead>
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| Level Two: Explain   | • What are the connections between the qualities of a semi-structured interview and the example of research in the stimulus? Some of examples could include:  
  o What might have been the general themes in the interview guide?  
  o Why might a conversational interview be beneficial in this context? |
| Level Three: Evaluate| • Limitations of using a semi-structured interview in that research context |

### Level One: What are the key qualities of a semi-structured interview?

The key to understanding how a semi-structured interview is carried out is to look at the name: it’s semi-structured. This means it has some structure, but there’s freedom.

The structure in this interview method comes in the form of the **interview guide** that is planned beforehand. This guide includes the general themes or topics that the researcher wants to cover in the actual interview. The interview will consist of a range of questions, including open-ended questions that allow for the interviewees to provide detailed responses.

So in this structure they ask a combination of open and closed questions, but they are free to provide prompts and go in to more depth depending on the responses provided by the participants. This flexibility is what allows for a lot of data to be collected. It also results in the interview hopefully resembling more of an informal conversation, rather than an interrogation.

To recap: these are the key characteristics of the semi-structured interview you need to remember:

- Follows a general guide
- Asks a combination of open and closed questions
- The interviewer has freedom to ask additional questions and/or provide prompts
- Conversational in nature

![Figure 1: Ideally a semi-structured interview would be more like an informal conversation, rather than an interrogation. A relaxed participant who is talking naturally might offer more valuable answers (i.e. data) than someone who is nervous.]
Level Two: What are the connections between the semi-structured methodology and the example of research in the stimulus?

How might a semi-structured interview be conducted?

- Look at the details of the research to try to come up with general themes that might have been included in the research
- Think of general open-ended questions and possibly provide an example of a type of question that could have been asked

Why might a semi-structured interview be conducted?

- Think about the benefits of having a conversational style interview in the particular context of the research

Level Three: What might be the limitation/s of using a semi-structured interview in this context?

Some possible factors that might be important to think about could be:

- Who was the interviewer?
- Who were the interviewees?
- What was the area of research?

Example of Research Using Semi-Structured Interviews

“Befriending” is a term for developing a friendly relationship between a volunteer and a “befriendee”, i.e. a person who is given the opportunity to have a friend. The purpose of such a relationship is to benefit a person at potential risk: for example adolescents from minority groups. Befriending programmes have been found to benefit the befriended by protecting them from loneliness and social isolation. One such befriending programme in Scotland was concerned with social inclusion of young people from minority backgrounds by establishing relationships between them and members of the majority group.

McVittie, Goodall and Barr (2009) conducted a qualitative study on the befriending programme from Scotland mentioned above. The aim of their study was to investigate the outcome of befriending from the perspective of befrienders. The outcome of the befriending scheme was very much dependent on the motivation and involvement of the participants, i.e. the befrienders.

Therefore the researchers were particularly interested in their view of the scheme and the befrienders’ relationships with the young people. The ten participants in this study were five males and five females ranging in age from 25 to 36.

The researchers collected data with semi-structured interviews, which were audio recorded and transcribed with the participants’ consent. The researchers used inductive content analysis to analyse and interpret the transcripts. The findings of the study showed that the befrienders suggested that they themselves received several benefits from the befriending programme, for example appreciation of other cultures, being welcomed in the families of the young people, and getting insight into the community-based difficulties that minority cultures experience. Overall, the befrienders had a positive view of the programme. Research on befriending programmes has found that befriendedees normally report positive experiences.

- Key Questions: How and why might a semi-structured interview method been used in this study?
- (Sample Exam Question: Explain the use of a semi-structured interview in this study.)