

Questions and Their Uses

Highly open

Moderately open
(Some Restrictions)

Questions are the tools of the trade in most interviews. Whether conducting a poll, hiring an employee, counseling a student, getting information from a supervisor, appraising an employee, or talking with a government official, your knowledge of the types and uses of questions is crucial to success. Even when giving information, interviewers employ questions to clarify facts or verify accurate transmission. The sales representative relies on skillful questioning to discover a customer's needs and desires and to further the sales effort. This chapter focuses on the basic types of questions, criteria for phrasing questions, and question sequences.

Types of Questions

Although a listing of types and subtypes of questions can stretch as far as the imagination, the three basic classifications are (1) open or closed, (2) primary or secondary, and (3) neutral or leading.¹

Open Questions

Open questions are broad, often specifying only a topic, and they allow the respondent considerable freedom in determining the amount and kind of information to give. Some questions are highly open with virtually no restrictions, such as the following:

Tell me about yourself.

What do you know about Ford Motor Company?

What are your feelings about legalized abortion?

How do you think this city can be improved?

Other questions are moderately open with some restrictions:

Tell me about your hobbies.

What do you know about the foreign operations of Ford Motor Company?

An open question lets the respondent do the talking and allows the interviewer to listen and observe



How do you feel about Representative Smiley's stand on legalized abortion?

How do you think the parks in this city can be improved?

Market researchers and public opinion surveyors may hand a statement, picture, or product offer to a person and ask, "How would you respond to this statement?" "What comes to mind when you look at this picture?" or "What are your feelings about this offer?"

Open questions have several advantages. For instance, they let interviewees do the talking and volunteer information, thus allowing them to reveal what they think is important and determine the nature and amount of information to give. Thus, open questions communicate interest and trust in the interviewee's judgment. Answers to open questions can reveal interviewee uncertainty, intensity of feelings, frames of reference, prejudices, or stereotypes. And open questions are easy to answer and pose little threat to the interviewee.

Open questions also have disadvantages. Answers may consume a large amount of time because interviewees are dwelling on irrelevant information. On the other hand, interviewees may withhold information thought to be irrelevant or obvious. Interviewers must be skilled in controlling and recording lengthy answers, and replication is difficult because each interviewee determines the length and nature of answers. Finally, results from lengthy, rambling answers may be impossible to code and tabulate.

Closed Questions

Closed questions are restrictive in nature and may supply possible answers. Some are *moderately closed*, asking for a specific piece of information, such as the following:

- What was your salary on your last job?
- How old are you?
- How long has it been since your last physical examination?
- What kind of automobile do you drive?

Other questions are *highly closed*, where the interviewee selects an appropriate answer from a list. Multiple-choice questions such as the following are common in surveys and research interviews:

Which of these brands of gasoline did you purchase last?

- ___ Amoco
- ___ Phillips 66
- ___ Union 76.
- ___ Sunoco
- ___ other _____

What educational level have you achieved?

- ___ some high school
- ___ high school graduate
- ___ some college
- ___ college graduate

I would like you to rate the following brands of coffee on a scale from one to five. If you strongly like the brand, give it a five. If you like the brand, give it a four. If you neither like nor dislike the brand, give it a three. If you dislike the brand, give it a two. If you strongly dislike the brand, give it a one.

Folgers	1	2	3	4	5
Maxwell House	1	2	3	4	5
Sanka	1	2	3	4	5
Nescafe	1	2	3	4	5
Stewart	1	2	3	4	5

ample:

Do you usually purchase colas with or without caffeine?

Do you live in a rural or urban area?

Are you a blue-collar or white-collar worker?

Other bipolar questions ask for an evaluation or attitude:

Do you agree or disagree with the new tax proposal?

Do you approve or disapprove of mandatory drug tests?

Do you like or dislike diet soft drinks?

Perhaps the most common bipolar questions ask for a yes or no response.

Did you vote in the last Presidential election?

Do you smoke?

Are you familiar with the new safety requirements?

Bipolar questions assume that there are only two possible answers and that the answers are poles apart: like/dislike, approve/disapprove, high/low, yes/no. What about interviewees who are undecided, have no opinion, do not know the answer, or are mildly or strongly for or against only a part of the question? Too many interviewers ask bipolar questions out of habit or carelessness when they actually do not want a simple yes or no. Think before asking bipolar questions.

Closed questions have several *advantages*. For example, the interviewer can control answers and ask for specific information. Closed questions require little interviewer effort and allow more questions, in more areas, in less time. And answers are easy to replicate, code, tabulate, and analyze.

Closed questions also have *disadvantages*. Answers to closed questions often contain too little information, requiring additional questions, and they do not reveal *why* an interviewee has a particular attitude. Interviewers tend to talk more than interviewees when asking closed questions, and interviewees have little opportunity to volunteer information. And finally, it is possible for interviewees to rate, rank, select an answer, or say yes or no without knowing anything about the topic.

Figure 4.1 illustrates the major advantages and disadvantages of open and closed questions.² As the interviewer applies more constraint to a question, the amount of data decreases. As the amount of data decreases, the interviewer's control increases, less time and skill are required, and the degree of precision, reliability, and reproducibility increases. On the other hand, as the interviewer lessens constraint, the amount of data increases, and interviewees reveal knowledge level, understanding, reasons for feeling or acting, and hidden motives. Many interviews include open and closed questions with varying degrees of constraint in order to get the information desired.

Figure 4.1 Question options

Advantages and Disadvantages of Question Types	Type of Question			
	Highly Open	Moderately Open	Moderately Closed	Highly Closed
Breadth and depth of potential information	[Highly Open]			
Degree of precision reproducibility, reliability	[Moderately Open]			
R's control over question and response	[Moderately Closed]			
Interviewer skill required	[Highly Open]			
Reliability of data	[Moderately Open]			
Econ. use of time	[Moderately Closed]			
Opportunity for E to reveal feelings and information	[Highly Open]			

High
 Medium
 Low

Primary and Secondary Questions

Questions may be primary or secondary.³ Primary questions introduce topics or new areas within a topic and make sense out of context: Where were you when the tornado struck your house? What is your favorite hobby? Tell me about your last accounting position. All examples of open and closed questions presented earlier are primary questions.

Secondary questions attempt to elicit further information following a primary or another secondary question. They may be open or closed and are often called "probing" or "follow-up" questions. Secondary questions are useful when the interviewee does not respond or answers seem incomplete, superficial, vague, suggestible, irrelevant, or inaccurate.

Sup

Sup

If you feel an interviewee has not completed an answer or is hesitant to continue, remain silent for a few seconds (perhaps using eye contact, facial expression, or a nod) to encourage the person to continue. If this fails, use *nudging probes* such as the following:

I see.

Go on.

And then?

Yes?

What happened next?

Uh-huh?

The *clearinghouse probe* is a means of discovering if you have elicited all important or available information. For example:

Did Terri say anything else about the conference?

What have I not asked about that might be of importance?

Have I missed anything that you can think of?

If an answer is *superficial*, use phrases such as the following to begin a secondary question:

Tell me more about . . .

What happened after . . . ?

How did you react to . . . ?

Explain further the point that . . .

If an answer is *vague*, you might reply:

I'm not sure I understand your point.

What did you have in mind when you said . . . ?

Please define "tentative" for me.

What do you mean by "a great deal of money?"

If an answer seems to *suggest* a feeling or attitude, you might ask:

Why do you feel that way?

Why do you think that happened?

What do you mean by "seems?"

How do you feel about that?

An answer might be *irrelevant*, such as in the following exchange:

Interviewer: What are your attitudes toward the new work rules?

Interviewee: A lot of people around here don't like them. They say they're dreamed up by somebody who never saw an assembly line, let alone worked on one.

Interviewer: What are *your* attitudes toward the rules?

The interviewer restates the question and stresses "your" to get the desired response. Other tactics include rephrasing the question, asking a probing question or remaining silent to encourage a more relevant answer—a *silent probe*.

If an answer is *inaccurate* (wrong date or figure, inaccurate quotation, mix-up in words), you might use a *reflective probing* question. The reflective probe reflects the answer in order to clarify or verify it. For example:

You mean 1986, don't you?

Was that net or gross income?

He didn't qualify his intention to leave next month?

Then, you are going to support this proposal?

When using reflective probes, make sure interviewees understand you are merely clarifying answers, not expressing disbelief or trying to trap them. If you are unsure of what interviewees have said or implied, reflective probes can help you resolve uncertainties:

You think, then, that you can meet the new deadline?

Are you defining a "good" raise as 10 percent or above?

You say you were *tricked* into signing the petition?

Am I correct in assuming that you will take this job if offered?

The *mirror* or *summary* question is related to the reflective probe. The mirror question summarizes a series of answers or interchanges to ensure accurate understanding. For example, an employee might ask a mirror question to be certain of instructions from a supervisor:

Okay, Margaret, let me see if I've got this straight. You want me to put three people on the Smith job, four on the Thompson job, and keep two here to repair the equipment? Have I got it right?

A salesperson might ask the following question after determining a customer's desires:

You want a one- or two-year-old van, preferably a mini-van with bucket seats in the middle, that is capable of pulling a large boat, right?

If asked properly, mirror and reflective questions can help you avoid errors caused by faulty assumptions.

An interviewee may not respond to a question. If this happens, restate or rephrase the question, ask tactfully why the person is not answering, or abandon the question and go to your next one. Do not interpret hesitation as no response and jump in with another question. You may have to explain more fully the kind of information desired, why you need it, or how you will use it.

The use of secondary questions separates skilled from unskilled interviewers. The unskilled interviewer tends to think ahead to the next question on the schedule, in a hurry to move on. The skilled interviewer listens carefully

No. 1120
to each response to determine if the answer is adequate. If an answer is inadequate, the interviewer determines the probable cause within a few seconds and phrases an appropriate probing question to elicit more accurate and complete information. Skillful probing questions can heighten an interviewee's motivation because the interviewer is obviously interested and paying attention.

Secondary questions may cause problems when not phrased carefully. Stanley Payne illustrates how the meaning of a simple "why" question can be altered by stressing different words.⁴

- Why do you say that?
- Why *do* you say that?
- Why do *you* say that?
- Why do you *say* that?
- Why do you say *that*?

Why questions may communicate disapproval, disbelief, and mistrust and put interviewees on the defensive by appearing to demand justifications, explanations, and rationales. A secondary question may alter the meaning of a primary question or bias the reply. Be careful not to misquote an interviewee or put words into anyone's mouth. The respondent may feel you have not listened. Avoid *curious probing* for information you do not need, especially if the information might embarrass the interviewee.

Quiz # 1—Supply the Secondary Question

Supply an appropriate secondary (probing) question for each of the following exchanges. Be sure that each question probes into the answer and is not a primary question introducing a new facet of the topic. Phrase your questions tactfully.

1. **Interviewer:** How did you like your last job?
Interviewee: At first it was quite interesting.
Interviewer:
2. **Interviewer:** What kind of person was your supervisor?
Interviewee: So-so.
Interviewer:
3. **Interviewer:** How do you feel about close detail work?
Interviewee: That depends.
Interviewer:
4. **Interviewer:** Define cooperation for me.
Interviewee: (no response)
Interviewer:
5. **Interviewer:** What do you envision a sales job would be like?
Interviewee: I think the product is important. I like a product worth being sold and with a good application. I want to sell something with a real and definite purpose.
Interviewer:

6. **Interviewer:** Which presidential candidate do you plan to vote for?
Interviewee: Oh, I don't know.
Interviewer:
7. **Interviewer:** How many cups of coffee do you drink each day?
Interviewee: Several.
Interviewer:
8. **Interviewer:** What do you think of my painting?
Interviewee: It's really interesting.
Interviewer:
9. **Interviewer:** How do you feel about this work schedule?
Interviewee: It's . . . not bad.
Interviewer:
10. **Interviewer:** How is John doing on the football team?
Interviewee: He didn't make the starting nine.
Interviewer:

neutral (without direction)
Leading (with direction)

Neutral and Leading Questions

All questions discussed so far in this chapter are neutral questions. The interviewee could decide upon an answer without direction or pressure from the interviewer. In bipolar questions, for instance, the interviewee could choose between two equal choices: yes/no, approve/disapprove, good/bad.

gap Questions in which the interviewer suggests implicitly or explicitly the answer expected or desired are leading questions. As Robert Kahn and Charles Cannell have stated, the leading question "makes it easier or more tempting for the respondent to give one answer than another."⁵ The person merely agrees in the direction the interviewer seems to suggest. Leading questions may be intentional or unintentional, implicit or explicit, verbal or nonverbal.

The varying degrees of direction and the distinction between neutral and leading questions are illustrated in the following questions.

Leading Questions

1. You like close detail work, don't you?
2. You're going with us, aren't you?
3. Do you oppose the union like most workers I've talked to?
4. Wouldn't you rather have a Buick?
5. How do you feel about these asinine government rules?
6. When was the last time you got drunk?

Neutral Questions

1. Do you like close detail work?
2. Are you going with us?
3. What are your attitudes toward the union?
4. How does this Buick compare to other cars in this price range?
5. How do you feel about these government rules?
6. Tell me about your drinking habits.



Leading Questions

7. Have you stopped cheating on your exams?
8. Would you classify yourself as a conservative or a radical?
9. Don't you think tax reform is unfair to farmers?

Neutral Questions

7. Did you cheat on your last exam?
8. Would you classify yourself as a reactionary, conservative, moderate, liberal, radical, or other?
9. How do you feel about tax reform?

All nine leading questions make it easier for the interviewee to respond in a particular way. The potential for interviewer bias is obvious, with the setting (persuasion, reprimand, information getting, counseling, news gathering), the tone (formal or informal, serious or relaxed), and the manner in which each question is asked (smiling, frowning, normal or gruff voice) determining the respondent's ability to ignore the direction provided.

The first four questions are mild in direction. Each appears to be bipolar, to ask for a yes or no response. However, the phrasing of each guides the interviewee toward one pole, so they are actually unipolar questions. Unintentional leading questions can result by accidentally phrasing bipolar questions in a leading manner, so you may avoid many leading questions by limiting the use of bipolar questions. Respondents could ignore the direction of question 1 if their being hired did not seem to depend on a yes answer or if they did not need the job. Question 3 uses a bandwagon (follow-the-crowd) technique; and

the respondent's answer would depend upon attitudes toward the union, feelings toward other workers, and past experiences. A respondent with no strong feelings might just go along with the answer the interviewer seems to desire.

The last five questions provide strong direction, virtual dictation of the proper answer, and are called *loaded* questions. Questions 5 and 9 are loaded because of *emotionally charged words* and *name calling*. Questions 6, 7, and 8 provide degrees of *entrapment*. Question 6 assumes the respondent has been drunk at least once. Question 7 charges the person with cheating in the past; either a yes or a no will keep the respondent in hot water. Question 8 does not offer two polar opposites (reactionary is the opposite of radical), so the respondent is likely to choose the least onerous answer (conservative).

Since leading questions have potential for interviewer bias, avoid them *unless you know what you are doing*. Introductory phrases such as "According to the law," "As you know," "As studies have shown," and "According to leading authorities" lead interviewees to give "acceptable" responses rather than true feelings. Remember, you can turn a neutral question into a leading question by the *manner* in which you ask it.

Leading questions have valuable uses. Employment and appraisal interviewers may want to see how interviewees will respond under stress. Persuasive interviewers use leading questions to obtain agreement: "I'm sure you can see the benefit of a good education." Reporters ask leading questions to provoke unguarded replies or to prod reluctant interviewees. Social workers have discovered that questions such as "When was the last time you got drunk?" show that a whole range of answers is acceptable and will not shock the interviewer.

Do not confuse neutral mirror questions and reflective probing questions with leading questions. Mirrors and reflectives appear to direct respondents toward particular answers, but their purposes are clarification or verification, not leading or direction.

Figure 4.2 compares types of questions available to interviewers and interviewees.

Quiz # 2—Identification of Questions

Identify each of the following questions in four ways: (1) open or closed, (2) primary or secondary, (3) neutral or leading, and (4) whether it is a special question: bipolar, nudging probe, clearinghouse probe, reflective probe, mirror, or loaded.

1. By middle school, then, you mean grades fifth to eighth?
2. What is your favorite sport?
3. Let me get this straight. We will leave at 7:30 in the morning and arrive in Salt Lake City at 9:45. The first session will begin at 10:00 and end at 12:00 noon. Is that correct?
4. Do you think we should continue our overly generous support of the United Nations?

Figure 4.2 Types of questions

	Neutral		Leading	
	Open	Closed	Open	Closed
Primary	How do you feel about the new labor contract?	Do you approve or disapprove of the new labor contract?	Most highly skilled workers favor the new labor contract; how do you feel about it?	Do you favor the new labor contract like most skilled workers I have talked to?
Secondary	Why do you feel that way?	Is your approval moderate or strong?	If you favor the contract, why did you speak against it?	Do you favor the new contract, then, merely because other skilled workers favor it?

5. How can you explain that?
6. Tell me about your previous working experiences.
7. Is your income tax accurate and honest?
8. Go on.
9. Did you vote in the last primary election?
10. Is there anything else I should know before the staff meeting?

Phrasing Questions

Careful wording of questions can motivate the respondent to answer freely, accurately, and thoroughly. Phrasing questions is not a simple task, so develop each with five factors in mind: (1) language, (2) relevance, (3) information level, (4) complexity, and (5) accessibility.

Language

Kahn and Cannell suggest that interviewers use "language that communicates successfully to the least sophisticated respondents and at the same time avoids the appearance of oversimplification."⁶ They do not mean to mimic respondents' jargon or slang, but to use common words: "going to college" instead of "matriculating," "drunk" instead of "inebriated," "interviewing" instead of "dyad," and "liar" instead of "prevaricator."

Many words and names have a variety of meanings. For instance, if you are "raising a tent," are you putting it up or taking it down? If you are "moved by a gesture," do you mean physically or emotionally? By "politicians," do

you mean all government officials or just currently elected officials, and what about persons running for office or serving on campaign, office, or party staffs? Frames of reference often determine the meanings applied to words. For example, when twenty students wrote down the first thing that came to mind when they heard the word "game," their responses included Monopoly, football, basketball, tennis, bridge, baseball, deer, pheasant, sport, fun, cards, wild animal, and "willingness to try something."

Common words often have vague meanings: much, many, most, average, fair, hot, cold, a lot, large, small, excellent, and superior. Does the statement "Most supervisors come up the ladder from assembly line jobs" mean 51 percent, 65 percent, 75 percent, or more? A "hot" day for one person may be "just right" for a second and "a bit cool" for a third. Key words in the following questions are so vague that yes or no answers would be meaningless. In the fourth question, for instance, is the interviewer asking about the respondent's smoking habits or weight?

Do you watch television much?

Do you obey the speed limit most of the time?

Are you familiar with the new program?

Are you a heavy smoker?

People often carelessly toss words such as *could*, *should*, *ought*, and *would* into questions, assuming they are synonymous. How might you respond to each of the following?

1. What rights *could* a woman have in deciding on an abortion?
2. What rights *should* a woman have in deciding on an abortion?
3. What rights *ought* a woman to have in deciding on an abortion?
4. What rights *would* a woman have in deciding on an abortion?
5. What rights *does* a woman have in deciding on an abortion?
6. What rights *will* a woman have in deciding on an abortion?

Similar sounding words may cause confusion: very and fairly, steal and steel, bull and bowl, cereal and serial, weather and whether. Provide context, transitions, or a preview to alleviate misunderstandings. Listen to answers for hints that the interviewee has "heard" the wrong word.

Be on guard against phrasing that may alter results from one interview to the next. In a survey on television programming, an interviewer first asked parents if they "controlled" their children's television viewing. A large majority said no, but when asked later if they "allowed children to watch any program they wanted to," a large majority also said no. Which is accurate? In a recent survey, one set of respondents was asked, "Is it okay to smoke while praying?" and another set was asked, "Is it okay to pray while smoking?" An overwhelming number said no to the first question and yes to the second. Although the questions were essentially the same, respondents saw them as different because of the wording.

Relevance

Respondents must be able to see the relevance of each question in order to communicate freely and accurately. If a question or series of questions may appear irrelevant, explain the rationale for each and phrase them carefully to avoid obtrusive language. The placing of questions may also affect relevancy. For example, ask for demographic data such as age, salary, education level, and religious preference at the beginning or end of an interview, not somewhere in the middle. The end of the interview is best for such data because by then, hopefully, mutual trust has been established. If, during a political survey, your first question is "How old are you?" the interviewee may wonder what that has to do with politics.

Information Level

Respondents must have a store of knowledge that enables them to respond intelligently. Questions above the respondent's information level may cause embarrassment or resentment, either of which decreases motivation to respond. Ask for information in common categories or frames of reference, such as pounds of sugar instead of ounces, electric costs in dollars instead of kilowatts, or number of hours of television viewing per day instead of per year. Interviewees may fake answers rather than admit ignorance. A few years ago a student asked several people what they thought about a news report that Avis Candy Company was a communist front. (Both the news report and the company were fictitious.) Some respondents said they doubted the truth of the report; some said they were surprised when they heard the report; some said they had not heard the report; and one person replied, "It's funny you ask that. They contacted me just last week."

Questions beneath a respondent's information level may insult his or her intelligence. This occurs when an interviewer uses overly simple words, requests elementary information from an expert, or provides too much explanation. Determine if the respondent is a lay person, a novice, or an expert on the subject, and whether public opinion or authoritative knowledge is needed. For instance, the following question would be acceptable for the general public but not for a communications professional: "What do you think of the FCC's (Federal Communication Commission) ban on X-rated films on cable television?"

Do not assume respondents will have the information you want. Large numbers of people cannot name their senators, congressional representatives, or governors. Many do not know the population of their cities, their annual incomes, or their wedding dates. Current trends, world events, new books, and unemployment figures are known by surprisingly few people. Abbreviations can cause problems; for example, an interviewee may be familiar with the TVA but not know that it stands for Tennessee Valley Authority.

Complexity

Questions should contain a simple, clear request for a limited amount of information. Avoid complex questions that defy a person to answer them. If you must ask a complicated question such as the following, use sample answers to explain the scale, or provide a small card containing the scale and a sample or two.

Now, I would like your opinion on some leading brands of detergent. I would like you to rate these brands by using the numbers from plus five to minus five. If you like the brand, give it a number from plus one to plus five. The more you like it, the bigger the plus number you should give. If you dislike the brand, give it a number from minus one to minus five. The more you dislike it, the bigger the minus number you should give it. If you neither like nor dislike the brand, give it a zero.

Some questions are complex because of poor wording. This question was used in a research project on marriage relationships:

Pick the most appropriate response. You feel that you understand each other, but you have never told them this.

1. You have never felt this way, or you have felt this way and told them this.
2. You occasionally have felt this way, but you have never told them this.
3. You frequently have felt this way, but you have never told them this.

The multiple or *double-barrelled* question contains two or more questions and is a common error made by novice interviewers. For example:

Why weren't you happy with your last position? It didn't live up to your expectations, provide the experiences you wanted, or what?

Ask one question at a time, because neither you nor the interviewee is likely to remember a bundle of questions. The respondent must decide which to answer and is likely to answer the last one.

Accessibility

Accessibility refers to the respondent's ability to answer questions because of social, psychological, or situational constraints.⁷ As you grow up, you learn to be humble, so that if an interviewer suggests you are beautiful, intelligent, creative, or generous, you are likely to pose an "Aw shucks, it was nothing" attitude. Some topics are traditionally "off limits" in polite society. When interviewers pose questions in taboo areas—sex, personal income, religious convictions—they are asking for answers not easily accessible to respondents. If, as a health care professional, for example, you must investigate such topics, understand your relationship with the interviewee and pay attention to situational variables such as privacy, seating arrangement, and location. A person may be psychologically unable to relate true feelings toward a supervisor, teacher, friend, or parent; or to recall details and feelings about an accident,

illness, or traumatic happening. Design such questions to lessen social and psychological constraints and avoid offending the respondent. If possible, delay "inaccessible" questions until you have established a good relationship with the respondent.

Quiz # 3—What's Wrong with These Questions?

After reviewing the five factors of question phrasing—language, relevance, information level, complexity, and accessibility—identify the problem or problems with each question below and then rewrite it to make it a good question.

1. (First question in an interview on the Equal Rights Amendment) Were you familiar with the proposals of the ERA?
2. (Asked midway through an interview on lowering the drinking age to eighteen) Are you a registered voter?
3. What effects do you believe euthanasia would have on various age groups and religious groups, and what influence do you believe these two groups would have on the legalization of euthanasia?
4. What are your reactions to the gang-rape case going on in Boston?
5. Would you say that the president is doing a good job or that he could do better?
6. Do you obey the speed limit personally (a) most of the time, (b) when convenient, or (c) seldom?
7. How do you feel physically and mentally after watching an X-rated movie?
8. (First two questions on arms control) Do you agree or disagree with détente? What do you consider détente to be ?
9. High taxes affect whom the most? (a) upper class, (b) middle class, (c) lower class
10. Please place yourself into one of the following classes: I drink very little, some, quite a lot, a lot.

Question Sequences

Questions are often interconnected (primary with primary questions and primary with secondary questions) and may form a sequence for an entire interview or within a topic. Common sequences are the funnel, inverted funnel, quintamimensional design, and tunnel.

Funnel Sequence

A funnel sequence begins with a broad, open-ended question and proceeds with ever more restricted questions, such as the following:

1. What are your reactions to the employee retraining program?
2. What kinds of retraining are most workers likely to take part in?
3. Which one is likely to be most helpful?
4. What is the cost per employee?
5. Is the program worth it?

The funnel sequence is appropriate when respondents know the topic, feel free to talk about it, and want to express their feelings. Since open questions are easier to answer, pose less threat to interviewees, and get interviewees talking, the funnel sequence is a good way to begin interviews. Also, the funnel sequence avoids possible conditioning or biasing of later responses. For instance, if you begin an interview with a closed question such as "Do you think amnesty should be given to all strikers?" you may place the respondent in a positive or negative state of mind and produce a defensive attitude for the remainder of the interview. An open question such as "What are your feelings about granting amnesty to all strikers?" may avoid polarization, and enable you to ask closed questions later.

Inverted Funnel Sequence

The inverted funnel sequence begins with a closed question and gradually proceeds toward open questions, such as the following:

1. Is your employee retraining program worth the cost?
2. What is the program's cost per employee?
3. Which type of retraining is likely to be most effective?
4. What kinds of retraining are included?
5. What are your reactions to the retraining program?

2/p The inverted funnel sequence is useful when you need to motivate interviewees to respond. Respondents may not want to talk about an unpleasant event or may feel they do not know the answers. A respondent's memory may need a bit of assistance, and an initial closed question can serve as a warm-up. For example, when an interviewer asked a person to respond to an open question about mudslinging in political campaigns, the person replied: "I don't know much about politics; you ought to try someone else." The interviewer then asked a few closed questions, and within minutes the reluctant interviewee was giving sophisticated views on political campaigning and mudslinging. Closed questions worked when open ones did not. A series of closed questions can progress toward a final clearinghouse question such as, "Is there anything else you would like to add?"

Quintamimensional Design Sequence

The quintamimensional design sequence was developed by George Gallup to determine the intensity of opinions and attitudes.⁸ This five-step approach proceeds from an interviewee's awareness of the issue to attitudes uninfluenced by the interviewer, specific attitudes, reasons for those attitudes, and intensity of feeling. For example:

1. *Awareness*: "Tell me what you know about the south bridge proposal."
2. *Uninfluenced attitudes*: "How, if at all, might this bridge help the traffic problems in the downtown area?"
3. *Specific attitude*: "Do you approve or disapprove of the bridge proposal?"
4. *Reason why*: "Why do you feel this way?"
5. *Intensity of attitude*: "How strongly do you feel about this—strongly, very strongly, not something you will ever change your mind on?"

Tunnel Sequence

The tunnel or "string of beads" sequence is a series of similar questions, either open or closed, which may allow for little probing. This sequence is common in interviews designed to get reactions or attitudes toward a variety of people, places, things, and issues, and when the interviewer wants to quantify the data. The tunnel sequence is unlikely to get in-depth information on a single topic and may be a series of bipolar questions. The following is a tunnel sequence:

1. Do you approve or disapprove of the new bridge?
2. Do you think it will be effective in limiting traffic through the downtown area?
3. Are you personally involved in this issue?
4. Do you prefer a different location of the bridge or no bridge at all?
5. Do most of your friends approve or disapprove of the proposal?

Quiz # 4—Question Sequences

Which question sequence or combination of sequences would you employ in each of the situations described below? Why would you use this sequence or combination?

1. You are conducting a market survey for your company to assess the effect of a recent advertising campaign.
2. You are a claims adjuster for an insurance company and must interview a family only hours after their home has been totally destroyed by fire.
3. You are conducting a preelection attitude and opinion survey for a newspaper chain.