

## Interviewing Tips

**Interviewing is a skill, which can be improved by specific training and regular practice.**

- Plan for your interview. Talk with your team about what you are looking for, what key information the person may have, what you have been told by others or seen in other evidence that you would like to corroborate.
- Think about the order in which you interview people. The closest involved are your highest value witnesses. However, information that comes from those less involved may be crucial in planning your interview with the closely involved. Some investigations may benefit from an “outside in” approach, where you start with witnesses more distant from the scene, to maximise the value from those more closely involved later.
- Interview one person at a time.

**Many companies use two interviewers.** One person leads the interview and asks the majority of questions. The second interviewer can take notes, and supplement further questions when asked by the lead interviewer.

- Avoid overloading with interviewers – any more than two and the interviewee is likely to feel like they are being grilled by a panel.
- In some organisational or national/regional cultures, there may be great deference shown to senior people which can limit an interviewee’s openness. Senior management figures should not be tasked with interviewing junior staff; similarly, avoid having line managers interview their own staff.
- Be open-minded about what the interviewee will tell you. You may have theories, but often new and important information will come from an interviewee that you did not anticipate.
- Set the interviewee at ease. Greet the interviewee. Remember they may be nervous, or even have witnessed upsetting scenes. A calm, at ease interviewee is more likely to be able to remember helpful detail.
- Introduce yourselves and describe how you’ll go about the interviewing process. Be clear that you are there to help them remember as much as possible, to stop things like this happening.

**Avoid any mention of discipline or blame or accountability, even if you are trying to reassure.**

- There may be a time for this after the investigation, but your task is to maintain an open and collaborative relationship with the interviewee – they have the information you need to do your job.
- If pushed on the question of whether there will be discipline at a later stage, emphasise that the purpose is only to understand the circumstances of the incident, to prevent anyone else getting into the same situation.

**Get them to tell you about themselves, and their experience**

- Where possible use a method of interviewing that helps interviewees to recall as much detail as possible on the circumstances, environment, and events leading up to the incident, even if you think that detail may not be immediately useful. With HF this sort of detail could be very useful. For instance, an operator might mention a weak signal, or poor sleep the night before.
- Use an open question at the beginning, to help interviewees give an account in their own words, before exploring further. For example:
  - ***Tell us about everything you remember from the time you woke up to the incident;***
  - ***Tell us about your role in the job from when you first got involved with it;***
- Avoid guiding the interviewee to answers which match your expectations (for instance, based on what you might know from other interviews or evidence). Keep questions open, don't complete their sentences, and don't offer your own opinion of what happened.
- You may prepare a list of specific questions that you are interested in, but remember that these can actually change what the interviewee remembers about the situation. Try and use them only after the interviewee has given their account and response to open questions.
- Thank your interviewee and tell them you may come back with more questions, and if they remember anything more they can contact you.

**The use of recording devices needs careful thought.**

- They can provide a highly accurate record of an interview. However, they can also make people feel uncomfortable and limit their openness, defeating the purpose of the interview. Simple notes may be enough.
- When taking notes, tell the interviewee what you're doing and offer them a chance to review the notes. This all helps to place the interviewee at ease which will aid their recall.

**Where possible, avoid having interviews with multiple companies in the room.**

When multiple companies are involved:

- Agree who will be conducting the interviews, who will assist with note-taking, and how the resulting information will be shared amongst companies
- Where multiple company representatives are required to be in the interview, keep them to the back of the room, introduce them to the interviewee, and ask observers to save their questions until the interviewer turns to them to ask for their input.

**Multiple language interviews may be challenging.**

If you have to rely on a translator to ask your questions and interpret answers, spend some time with your translator to explain what you are trying to do in investigating the event.

- Ask them to translate the detail of questions and answers as closely as possible, even if a witness's response seems to have unnecessary detail, or things which don't make sense.
- Encourage them to ask for clarification from you if a question is not clear or open to a different understanding in the other language.
- Ask them to advise on any concepts which do not translate well, or have a different cultural meaning in the other language.

**Your goal is to help interviewees recall events as accurately as possible.**

- You are not trying to set them up for failure or get them to admit guilt. The vast majority of interviewees are honest and will help you explain the incident.
- On rare occasions that you suspect somebody is not being truthful, don't be confrontational. Instead, take that person's account and cross-check with other accounts and evidence. If you have convincing evidence, approach the interviewees and ask them for help to explain the difference. They may offer a convincing explanation that you had not considered, or they may change their account.
- Either way confrontation is best avoided, as it can lead to interviewees "clamping up", which may impede your efforts to learn valuable details about an incident.

**Source:** [IOGP 621 Demystifying Human Factors: Building Confidence in Human Factors Investigation](#)