

# Interviews

## What you will need:

- The interview schedule
- Pen and paper
- Interview comment sheet
- Consent form
- Post interview comment sheet
- Tape recorder (optional)
- Consent form for audio recording if using tape recorder
- If you require any extra support or help please email The People's Panel.  
Peoples.Panel@southampton.gov.uk
- A partner (if you are working in pairs)

## Instruction Guide

- You will be conducting a semi-structured interview.
- The main aims of the interview will meet our objectives of answering the questions:
  1. What explains awareness of and knowledge about recycling in Southampton?
  2. What explains recycling behaviours and how best we can address any barriers (that reduce the rate) within the culture of recycling?
  3. How does Southampton compare with other cities and what can we learn from practices elsewhere?
- Choose a venue to conduct the interviews. Try and make it a public space which is relatively quiet.
- Set up tape recorders and all of the resources you need.
- Be polite and welcoming. Try to put the person you are interviewing at ease.
- Let them know about data protection, the right to withdraw at any time without penalty and make sure they understand what the study is about before consenting. The council will not identify individuals in any printed reports.
- Even if the person knows roughly what the interview is about, give them a bit of detail about the project and the reasoning behind it
- The interview is a platform for the person you are interviewing to give their opinion. Allow them to express it. You are there to direct the conversation, but it should always be geared towards the person being interviewed.
- Ask the questions on the schedule. Try and be as natural as you possibly can be. This is not a question - answer session. It is a conversation. Allow people to elaborate and even go a little off track. Use specific questions or sentences to try and direct them (see the rest of the pack).
- Use probing questions to get the person to elaborate. Don't accept one word answers (unless they are particular relevant. If you ask them their name and they give you just their first name you can let that one go!).
- Note down anything & everything you can. What is said, anything important that isn't, body language, tone, general atmosphere etc.

- At the end of the interview you might want to give them one final opportunity to say anything else on the matter or even constructive criticism on your interview technique (this can be hard to take but very important if you are to improve).
- Thank them for their time and tell them that the information provided by them will help the project.

### **Safety Considerations**

- You should make sure you let someone know where you are, who you are with and roughly how long it will take. If you are interviewing a relative stranger, take a citizen science partner with you.
- Make sure your phone is charged and with you at all times
- Unless you know the person you're interviewing, pre arrange with someone to call you before and after the meeting within a certain amount of time
- If you feel, for any reason, you are unsafe say you have forgotten something and that you need to pop out to call someone. Trust your instincts. If something doesn't feel right, it doesn't matter if you're wrong, trust your instincts. It is important to remain safe.
- Do not give out personal information– you are the researcher.

### **Where do you put your information?**

- You must fill out the Interview transcript. The other templates (post interview and interview comments) are there to help you or for you to highlight key areas you think could be interesting.
- Use the link below to upload any information or documents you have
- Make sure you upload the document and fill in all the boxes
- You will have to upload all of the documents separately, however when you click submit a new page will automatically open.
- If you only have one document just close the new pages that has been opened.

<https://southamptoncitycouncil.researchfeedback.net/wh/s.asp?k=145866414605>

**Interview Comment Sheet with example**

<b><u>Excerpt from interview</u></b>	<b><u>Comments</u></b>
<p>E.g. Interviewer: Tell me about how you feel about recycling as a whole.</p> <p>Interviewee: I think it is good. It is important that we recycle because of the environment. Nothing is going to last forever (laughs). <u>Eventually we will run out of resources and then where will we be?</u>(1) We all need to do our bit. Me and <u>the council</u>. (2)</p>	<p>1. Showed understanding of why recycling is important 2. Mention of the council. Generally said as if they don't do enough (probed further)</p>

<b><u>Excerpt from interview</u></b>	<b><u>Comments</u></b>

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## **Interview Schedule**

Below are two sample interview schedules. One is more structured and might be the schedule you use for the first interviews you conduct. The second is less detailed and allows for a little more flexibility.

### **Schedule 1**

**A detailed list of questions that can be asked. They aren't necessarily asked in this order and there may be many follow up questions.**

1. Tell me about how you feel about recycling as a whole. (Possible follow up/prompt – is it important? Do you feel there is a responsibility to recycle?)
2. Who usually deals with the recycling in your household? (Possible follow up/prompt – Is there any reason for that?)
3. Why do you recycle/Why don't you recycle? (Possibility for asking a lot of probing questions/prompts here)
4. Over the last year (since around Spring 2015) – do you think the amount you recycling has increased/decreased/stayed the same?
5. Tell me about the sorts of things you recycle?
6. How would you describe yourself as a recycler? (Possible follow up/prompt – give them examples such as could do more etc. Then follow up with why they describe themselves in that way.
7. Do you think it is ever possible to recycle everything you should? Why/why not?
8. What do you think are the barriers for recycling? (Possible follow up/prompt – Which of these reasons is the main barrier?)
9. What would you like to see to help with increasing recycling rates?

### **Schedule 2**

**A rough list of key themes you want to cover**

1. General view of recycling
2. Responsibility for recycling
3. Knowledge/habits of recycling
4. Barriers for recycling
5. Possible solutions to those barriers

**Post interview comment sheet**

Interview Summary

Interview number:	
Date:	
Length of Interview:	

1. In the area below, describe the interviewees' attitude to recycling and the council: happy, confused, angry, frustrated, discourages, apprehensive etc.?

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2. How would you rate the overall quality of the interview?

- Little interesting detail
- Some interesting detail
- Lots of interesting detail

3. Did the interviewee say anything noteworthy or interesting in response to any of your interview questions?

Question number or topic	Notes on what was said

4. Items that came up in this interview that would be worth following up on during the next interview:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. \_\_\_\_\_
- c. \_\_\_\_\_

## Citizen Recycling Research – Interview Transcript

Write your name [researcher] here: .....

Take a fresh answer sheet for each new person. If you are talking to more than one person, make sure you get everyone to answer the questions individually.

**This is interview number :**.....

Read this out first:

Hello, I am a researcher working on behalf of Southampton University and Southampton City Council, and advised by the University of Southampton. We are conducting research on how people understand recycling and how we can improve it within the city. The information we collect will be used as part of a study of information on recycling within the city and will also be used by the council to make changes to the way recycling currently runs. The project is designed to raise awareness of recycling and the problems associated with it in Southampton and help people who are not specialists to get easy access to accurate figures and facts on recycling and the changes that may occur.

If you agree, the answers that people give us will be used anonymously – we will not use your name and you will not be able to be identified. I will check this again at the end of the questions and you will have the chance to withdraw without penalty and we will not use your information. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not wish to. The interview should take around 10 minutes of your time. We can do the interview now, or at a different time if that is better for you.

Are you still happy to take part? (If they are ask them to tick the box below showing that they consent for you to continue).

I have read and understood the information provided and consent to be interviewed and for the answers I provide to be used only for the purposes of this research sheet.

Tell them:

You may withdraw your reply at any time. If you decide to do so at a later date please email [peoples.panel@southampton.gov.uk](mailto:peoples.panel@southampton.gov.uk)

**IF YOU DO NOT KNOW THEM**

Can I ask your name? This should only be done so you can address them properly during the interview. Assure them their name will not be used. If they do not want to give it then that is not a problem.

DO NOT WRITE IT DOWN.

Ask them question 1:

- 1) How do you feel about recycling as a whole?
  - Possible follow up questions/prompts:
    - Is it important?
    - Why is it important/not important?
    - Do you feel a responsibility to recycle?

[Write answer here](#)

- 2) Who usually deals with the recycling in your household?
  - Possible follow up questions/prompts:
    - Is there any reason for that?

[Write answer here](#)

3) Why do you recycle/Why don't you recycle (this question very much depends on what has happened earlier in the interview?)

- Possible follow up questions/prompts:
  - The follow up questions you ask here will very much depend on the responses given. You are looking for anything that you think is interesting and you can probe further. Don't be afraid to ask extra questions at this point.

[Write answer here](#)

[Ask them the next question, and circle the answer](#)

4) Over the last year (since around Spring 2015) – do you think the amount you recycling has increased/decreased/stayed the same?

Increasing

Decreasing

Or staying at about the same level?

[Unless they prefer not to answer, ask them](#)

- Possible follow up questions/prompts:

- What makes you say that?

Write answer here

5) Tell me about the sorts of things you recycle.

Use the card provided to help provide possible choices.

Write the answers here (either what was said or what was circled)

6) How would you describe yourself as a recycler?

- Possible follow up questions/prompts to help people if they are struggling to describe themselves:
  - Do you recycle often?
  - Do you try to recycle as much as possible?
  - Do you encourage others to recycle?
  - Do you see it as something necessary that everyone should be doing?
  - Is it something you worry about?
  - Are you thorough when it comes to recycling?

Write down their answer

7) Do you think it is ever possible to recycle everything you should? Pause and allow them to answer the question before asking why/why not?

Circle their answer

Yes

No

Write down their reasons behind this

8) What do you think are the main barriers or reasons you don't recycle as much as you possibly could?

- Possible follow up questions/prompts:
  - If the person being interviewed gives a long list of reasons follow up by asking which of these they believe if the main reason.

Write down here

9) What would you like to happen to help recycling rates to increase?

[Write down here](#)

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I just need to get some basic details from you:

What is your postcode? [\[get street name but not house number if they don't know\]](#)

Would you be interested in getting a copy of the results? [\[if yes\]](#)

could we email them to you? [\[write down email address, or postal address if not – ON SEPARATE SHEET FOR CONFIDENTIALITY\].](#)

And finally, we are recruiting other people to be volunteer researchers, would you be interested in finding out more? [\[if yes – take email or phone number on SEPARATE SHEET AGAIN\].](#)

[Read this out:](#)

Thank you for helping us with our research. So, that's it. Now we have finished, can I ask if you are still happy for your answers to be part of our project? You can ask us to delete your answers now if you wish.

Write answer here:

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**End of interview**

**Citizen Recycling researchers - what now?**

If possible, upload the answers to this

<https://southamptoncitycouncil.researchfeedback.net/wh/s.asp?k=145866414605>

If you have any questions or concerns please email [Peoples.Panel@southampton.gov.uk](mailto:Peoples.Panel@southampton.gov.uk)

## **Citizen Science Recycling Interviews**

### **What is an Interview?**

The easiest way to get information is almost always to ask people questions. Interviewing as a whole is broadly described as the meeting of people (usually face to face), especially for consultation. Now almost everyone will have gone through an interview at some point in their life. Whether that was at school, university, for a job or possibly even in a medical environment. Most of us would also have seen or read interviews with others, usually on television or in newspapers/magazines. It is likely that most people are more familiar with the role of the interviewee, but some of us may have had the chance to undertake interviews. In the broadest context all of us have “interviewed” those around us when asking questions about a particular topic or issue and then listening to responses. Interviews can differ widely, from the subject matter, location, type of interviews, tone, medium and many other areas. The point of this pack is to help you move from the everyday experience you have had of interviewing (in a broad context) to using qualitative interviewing as a research tool on a particular subject (in this case, recycling and the barriers that are being faced).

### **What is a qualitative interview?**

The purpose of these research interviews is to try and understand views that people have on certain matters, in this case recycling. By exploring their experiences and motivations we can come to a deeper level of understanding, one that we may not have been able to get to using a survey (see Silverman 2000). We aren't simply looking at testing someone's knowledge or scratching at the surface. We need to gather detailed insights, testimony and ideas, which may not be possible to gather, other than using an interview.

When we work with qualitative data we are measuring the quality of something rather than the quantity. With interviews there are three main types, two of which are more geared towards qualitative data. Structured, semi-structured or unstructured interviews (Bryman 2001, May 1997).

The structured interview is at the more quantitative end of the spectrum and is used more to inform a survey. Structured interviews tend to be a sequence of questions (often with a closed set of choices for answer) asked in a particular order and always the same way. This gives very little flexibility for the researcher and the responding interviewee. The approach is most often used to gain comparable information from a large number of respondents.

Semi-structured and unstructured interviews are practiced by qualitative researchers. They provide a greater level of flexibility and are less structured. Key phrases often attached to these types of interview are; in-depth, informal, non-directed, open-ended, conversational, ethnographic as well as many more (Rosalind and Holland, 2013).

Though subject matter, style and tradition may all be varied, Mason argues that there are three core features that all qualitative interviews have in common.

1. Interactional (mutual) exchange of dialogue.
2. Topic centred approach where the interviewer has certain themes they wish to cover but are not bound by them. This allows a flexible structure.
3. A perspective that regards knowledge as contextual. The work is essentially co-productive involving construction of knowledge. (Mason 2002:62).

Although unstructured interviews don't reflect any preconceived ideas and can be performed with little organisation (such as just asking open ended questions) (Kay 1991), they can be time consuming. They are also dependent on the level of awareness and interaction of the person being interviewed. Someone who is slightly closed off to the subject would not necessarily give any meaningful answers to your initial question. Alongside all of this, if you have not conducted interviews before, being this free with the method can be daunting. Little guidance is given and this can cause the entire exercise to be unfeasible. Unstructured interviews are often used when the subject area is not well understood or is incredibly complex (Gill et al 2008).

Semi-structured interviews are a middle ground between the two other types of interview. There is a basic structure and several key questions are defined beforehand. Sufficient time should be given to allow explanations of questions, but the interviewer/interviewee should be allowed to diverge from the order to understand something in more detail (or explore interesting points) (Britten, 1999). Being allowed to elaborate is an important facet of interviews and particularly this type. The flexibility with this method, combined with the idea of having general themes makes this method extremely useful when considering choices, preferences and people's experiences (Gill et al 2008).

### **What makes an interview effective?**

- Qualitative interviews are useful as we are looking to ascertain the meanings behind certain actions and to help shed light on an area which isn't well understood. They can also be used to identify areas of improvement and even help to unpick complicated events or habits.
- A good qualitative interview builds a dialogue. The interviewer is simply providing a forum and some structure whilst the interviewee should be doing most of the talking. Alongside this it is important that an interviewer knows when to elaborate, when to be brief and to know where it is acceptable to move on or change the subject.
- Remember that this is a research tool and therefore is different to a normal conversation. You should place a greater importance on listening leads, and active listening. As we are using the information gathered to affect change, you must try to get full and detailed responses that will have a focus on our agenda (discover recycling habits and identify the main barriers to recycling).

Adapted from Bates et al 2008.

**When looking at Qualitative interviews the main criteria that should be adhered to as much as possible are:**

- Asymmetrical structure – the interviewer says less than the person being interviewed.
- Interviewer initiates the questions and then poses probes to get more information depending on the interviewee's response.
- Questions may be re-ordered during the interview. Allow for the possibility of flexibility and free flowing conversation.
- The complexity of language that you use should be tailored for each interview. You will have to make this judgement at the beginning of the interview.
- You should be ready to answer questions that are asked of you, or if you are asked to clarify the question you are asking then you should do so.
- You may decide to change the interview question order, adapt questions or even remove them completely if the answer has already been given before. The same goes for probing questions.

Adapted from Berg, 2004.

**To be as effective as possible you should:**

- Ask clear, short, open-ended questions (e.g. How, what, why questions)
- Avoid leading questions
- Use probes to gain more information or clarification on a comment given.
- Listen carefully.
- Try to gather detailed responses to questions that require it.
- Let the interviewee lead

**Some generic probing statements are given below.**

- You mentioned \_\_\_\_\_, tell me more about that.
- You mentioned \_\_\_\_\_, what was that like for you?
- You talked about \_\_\_\_\_, can you describe that experience in as much detail as possible?
- What else happened?
- How did you feel about that?
- It sounds like you're saying....

Probing for information is vital. Often people will say either the bare minimum or elaborate greatly (sometimes with information that is not entirely relevant). These statements are used to mine more information out of people and direct it at the same time. They show you have listened to their statement and you want to know more. Probing questions and statements can sometimes be as important to the question you asked, as they are the means by which the original question will actually be answered.

**Some generic listening leads are given below.**

- From your point of view...
- In your experience...
- From where you stand...
- It seems you...

- I hear your saying that...

Although it is important to let the interviewee lead, sometimes they will need to be directed. These are common ways to try and do that. These statements are also important as they show you have been listening to what the person has been saying.

Adapted from Bates et al 2008.

### **Some sentence starters to try and clarify people's responses are below**

- I wonder if...
- Is it possible that...
- Do you feel a little...?
- Could it be that...?
- I get the impression that...Is that correct?
- It seems that you...
- I'm not sure if I'm with you, do you mean...?

Clarification is very important when noting down or listening to responses. If you are unsure do not assume anything. Ask the interviewee to clarify. This can also be used to collect further information which may be more detailed or deeper. These are also a good way to bring the interview back on track if it veers off slightly.

### **Collecting information in your interviews – best practices.**

- Write down notes during the interview itself.
- Consider a post-interview comment sheet.
- Make an interview summary.
- Make a recording that can be listened to later – You need express permission for a recording **by law!!**

It is important that regardless of whether you are recording the interview or not, you write down notes during the interview itself. This will mean that if there is a problem with the recording or particular emphasis was given to a certain answer using body language, which won't come across in the recording, it has been noted. Recordings can be great to help you to add detailed notes, but shouldn't take over from the jottings you make during the interview itself. It is a good idea to interview in pairs so one interviewer can concentrate on questions and the other on notes. When you come out of the interview, it is easy to forget emphasis, reactions, tone and many other factors that are harder to remember whilst listening to a recording. Alongside this having a comment sheet or an area for you to write a summary can also be useful. This is because it can allow you reflection time and give you a chance to formulate better or more effective questions to ask in later interviews (Bates et al 2008).

### **Make sure you are adhering to the ethical standards.**

- Be honest about the intended use of the research.
- Avoid any deception.
- Obtain the interviewee's consent (and further consent if you are recording the interview).

- Protect their right to privacy.
- Make sure the interviewee does not suffer or you force them answer questions they don't want.

## **Advantages and Disadvantages of Interviewing**

### **Advantages**

- Interviews are particularly good at producing detailed information with real depth. As you are able to probe further with questions asked, you shouldn't be willing to accept a simple answer they can produce a wealth of information to be interpreted.
- The resources required are quite light compared to other methodologies.
- Although interviews can be difficult, most of the people who use them already have the conversational skills that are needed (and they only need to be refined).
- Interviews are flexible. Whilst an interview is going on you can adjust questions, language or theme throughout. This means you can develop new discoveries and lines of enquiry.
- When conducting interviews they are often arranged beforehand (although not always) and this means you should roughly know how much data you should collect throughout the project. With surveys for example you are never sure how many people will respond.
- Information gathered can easily be checked for accuracy, relevance and validity because you can probe the interviewee further and check what they say at a later date.
- Using interviews you can get a real sense of priorities. As you are talking about opinions and ideas and you can offer the interviewee time to explain/expand their ideas you can find out what their priorities are.

### **Disadvantages**

- Interviews by their very nature take time. This is both in the preparation and the interview itself. The actual interview, writing up a transcript and then (possibly) analysis of the data all take time.
- Analysing the data can be difficult. Unlike a good survey or questionnaire every question is essentially open ended. There are no standard responses and this make it difficult to analyse the data that you get back.
- They can be seen as invasive. Although the topic we are looking at isn't particularly sensitive, you are asking about people's day to day lives and habits. This in itself is personal and therefore some people are unwilling to answer certain questions.
- The fact that there is someone sitting in front of them, noting down much of what they say and do, interviews can sometimes cause people not to be honest or not completely open. Bias is also an area which has to be considered.
- Reliability can be affected if the interviewer does not consistently note down what has been said and makes a conclusion based on a summary. The job of an interviewer is to simply give a platform (in this case a question) for the interviewee to build upon.

(Adapted from Denscombe, 1998)

### **Interview Schedule examples:**

Below are two sample interview schedules. One is more structured and might be the schedule you use for the first interviews you conduct. The second is less detailed and allows for a little more flexibility.

#### **Schedule 1**

**A detailed list of questions that can be asked. They aren't necessarily asked in this order and there may be many follow up questions.**

10. Tell me about how you feel about recycling as a whole. (Possible follow up/prompt – is it important? Do you feel there is a responsibility to recycle?)
11. Who usually deals with the recycling in your household? (Possible follow up/prompt – Is there any reason for that?)
12. Why do you recycle/Why don't you recycle? (Possibility for asking a lot of probing questions/prompts here)
13. Over the last year (since around Spring 2015) – do you think the amount you recycling has increased/decreased/stayed the same?
14. Tell me about the sorts of things you recycle?
15. How would you describe yourself as a recycler? (Possible follow up/prompt – give them examples such as could do more etc. Then follow up with why they describe themselves in that way.
16. Do you think it is ever possible to recycle everything you should? Why/why not?
17. What do you think are the barriers to recycling? (Possible follow up/prompt – Which of these reasons is the main barrier?)
18. What would you like to see to help with increasing recycling rates?

#### **Schedule 2**

**A rough list of key themes you want to cover**

6. General view of recycling
7. Responsibility for recycling
8. Knowledge/habits around recycling
9. Barriers for recycling
10. Possible solutions to those barriers

### **In Summary**

Interviews can provide researchers with a wealth of qualitative data which would be hard to come by through other methods. They are not easy to design, record or carry out, but are incredibly useful. Be honest with the person you are interviewing and don't be afraid to get it wrong. If something happens that is unexpected or there is a problem, use it as a learning tool

for the next time you are interviewing. The more you practice the better you will get at the whole process. An interview is only as good as the interviewer, so practice, practice, practice.

## **Dos and Don'ts of Interviewing**

### **Where do I start?**

Much of what is covered here is also talked about in the 10 commandments of interviews. Use this to get a starting point and make your interview as effective as you can.

- **Do:** Build a rapport with the person you are interviewing. Polite conversation will put people at ease. However try to keep the conversation neutral. How long have you lived in the area? Do you often get involved local matters?
- **Do:** Give a short introduction of who you are and what you are doing. Try to include the purpose of the interview, the fact it is confidential and how long the interview will take (however this can vary)
- **Don't** just jump right in and expect people to be receptive.

### **Once the interview is underway**

- **Do:** Listen and observe. Remember what your question is and what sort of information you are looking for. If you don't get the sort of information you need, ask it again in a different way or use probing follow ups (see below)
- **Do:** Listen out for sweeping statements and probe these to find out more information. Questions like "Can you tell me a bit more about why you think/say that?"
- **Do:** Allow people to talk, but try to judge when you need to rein them back in. This is a difficult skill and takes time to learn.
- **Do:** Stress that you are independent. You don't work for the council and you are here to be neutral.
- **Do:** Reassure people who are nervous and tell them there is no right or wrong answer. If people don't want to answer a question then assure them that is not a problem.
- **Don't** influence the answers given. When you use probing questions don't give support, advice or your own opinion. When prompting for answers, don't give examples. This then allows the interviewee to simply agree, which may not be their true opinion.
- **Don't** fill in the blanks. Let the interviewee do that. Pauses are not necessarily a bad thing.
- If the person makes a statement you know isn't true, **don't** challenge it or give your opinion. Find out why they have this view and note it down. **Don't** influence.
- **Don't** worry if you have to repeat the question.

### **After/during the interview (noting down what people are saying)**

- **Do:** Note down the words they use as best you can

- **Do:** Note down when you had to prompt, whether they laughed, hesitated or were annoyed. Emotions can be as important as what they have said.
- **Do:** At the end make sure you note down whether it went well and any improvements you can make. Did it flow well? Were there long pauses? Do you have to constantly prompt? Was it easy or difficult to get information?

For more guidance please see the 10 commandments of Interviews

### **Snowball sampling**

With snowball sampling, the sample itself comes from a process of one person referring the next. The research begins with a few people (and in this case, most likely either the citizen scientists themselves or family and friends). Each can then be asked to nominate another two people who would be able to provide their opinion on the research. These people are then contacted and hopefully are included in the sample. They go on to do the same. The sample grows in size as each person will nominate two more people and so on. This is known as snowball sampling.

This technique can be effective when trying to build a reasonable-sized sample, especially when used in a small-scale research project (such as citizen science). The fact that each person recommends a further two means there should be a relatively fast build-up of numbers. It can also open up new avenues of approach from the researchers as people who have been involved thus far can suggest other people that would be able to provide information or opinions. Alongside this, the fact that someone they know has volunteered them gives the researcher credibility and makes the initial contact easier and more personal. Snowball sampling can be extremely useful when trying to build a large sample size, which can often be an issue linked to research.

(Adapted from Denscombe 1998).

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