

Tool 3.4: Tips for Creating Effective Interview Questions

Open Ended vs. Closed-Ended Questions

- Questions that can be answered with a yes or no or one-word answer are closed-ended questions, and should generally be avoided in interviews. This is because they do not encourage an in-depth response nor will they illicit rich stories and experiences that you aim to collect through interviews.
- Examples of closed-ended questions:
 - How long have you lived in your apartment?
 - Do you like your landlord?
 - Have you talked to your neighbors about your landlord?
- In general, open-ended questions that encourage respondents to describe feelings and tell stories make better interview questions.
- Examples of open-ended questions:
 - What are some of your concerns about your apartment?
 - In what ways does your landlord respond to your needs and concerns?
 - How do you feel about your landlord?

Interview Tips

- Use “how” questions vs. “why” questions when you are seeking descriptions and detailed information. Asking “why” questions often leads to justifications rather than descriptions. “Why” questions are useful for organizing purposes and can agitate or provoke. “How” questions tell you more detailed information and are good for your interviews.
- Clarification or Probing questions are useful to use when your respondent is discussing something important that you want more information about, or when you are unsure of what they are saying and need clarification. Examples of clarification questions include:
 - What do you mean by____?
 - Can you be more specific about____?
 - When you said____, what does that look like? Can you give me some examples?

Questions To Avoid

- Leading Questions are questions that lead interviews to a particular response. Instead of responding with their true opinions, interviewees may respond with what they think you want to hear. For example:
 - Don't you think that mold in your walls contributes to health problems like asthma or illness?
- Avoiding Questions with Multiple Elements. Questions that are excessively long and contain multiple elements are confusing and hard to respond to. Interviewees may not know which part of the question to address. For example:
 - How has your landlord responded to tenant's concerns? Have city authorities supported or ignored you? What role should city authorities play in your dealings with your landlord?