

Conducting a semi-structured interview
Lesson 2: The heart of the interview

Model Answer - Exercise 2

Formulating questions

REMINDER OF THE INSTRUCTIONS

Working from examples of poorly worded questions: identify the weaknesses of the questions, then formulate an open-ended question that resolves these weaknesses.

MODEL ANSWER:

Situation n° 1

This question has 4 major weakness in its wording - what are they?

"Do you think your activity has a **negative impact** on the **conservation** of **biodiversity**?"

Gradual correction working from diverse wording:

Wording	Weaknesses
Do you think that your activity has a negative impact on the biodiversity of the Natura 2000 site?	Closed question: the response will be a yes or no and will incite a follow-up question (why? how? do you...?)
In your opinion, what is the impact of your activities on the biodiversity of the Natura 2000 site?	The word "impact" has a negative connotation : environmental impact studies examine in particular negative impacts
In your opinion, how do your activities maintain biodiversity of the Natura 2000 site?	The question suggests elements of a response : the maintenance of biodiversity
What relationship do you see between your activities and biodiversity ?	The question is too broad: what biodiversity ?
In your opinion, what is the relationship between your activity and the biodiversity of the Natura 2000 site?	Acceptable question; no major weakness

Situation n°2

In the framework of a survey on how people living in a village near a source of air pollution perceive air quality, formulate a broad, opening question aiming to collect the opinion of the interviewee on the pollution of the air that he or she breathes.

Wording	Weaknesses
Don't you think that « Name of the polluting factory » has an important impact on air quality?	This is the worst wording: An interrogative-negative question, with an invitation to directly accuse a local actor.
Do you find the air you breathe is: - relatively clean - slightly polluted - polluted - very polluted - depends on the day	A closed, multiple-choice question which traps the interviewee into a predefined mode of reasoning seeking to quantify the pollution level.
In your opinion, what is the major source of pollution in your neighborhood?	A question inviting an accusatory discourse from the interviewee, and one that assumes that the interviewee can hierarchize the impacts of "major" sources of pollution
Could you talk to us about the pollution of the air in your surrounding environment?	A question that induces a response with the word « pollution ». The person may not perceive pollution in the air that she breathes, or not give it much importance.
How do you perceive the quality of the air?	Overly general question: what air?
How would you evaluate the quality of the air that you breathe?	Does the interviewee have elements to evaluate air quality?
What do you think of the quality of the air that you breathe?	Acceptable question; no major weakness