**EPISODIC INTERVIEWS**

**by Simon Moss**

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| **Introduction** |

 In many studies, researchers need to interview participants. Yet, researchers can utilize a range of methods to interview these informants. These methods can often be subdivided into three main constellations

* structured interviews, in which researchers plan the questions in advance and hardly deviate from this plan
* semi-structured interviews, in which researchers plan the questions in advance, but might deviate from this plan—such as insert prompts, probes, or other changes—depending on how the interview unfolds
* unstructured interviews, in which researchers do not plan the questions in advance

**Semi-structured interviews**

In qualitative research, semi-structured interviews are the most prevalent. The following table outlines some of the main variants of semi-structured interviews. This document primarily discusses one kind of interview, called episodic interviews.

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| Kind of interview | Key feature | Circumstances when useful | Benefits | Limitations |
| Episodic | Questions revolve around how the research topic, such as technology and stress, relates to the everyday life of participants | To clarify everyday knowledge and interpretations of some event or circumstance |  |  |
| Narrative  | The questions encourage individuals to recount their history or the history of some other entity  | To understand the overall biography of some person or entity |  | * These interviews are often long, generating masses of data
* Sometimes, participants deviate from the narrative
 |
| Focussed | Questions revolve around a specific stimulus, such as a book or activity | To evaluate some object or event |  |  |
| Critical incident technique | Questions revolve around one or more special or significant incidents rather than everyday experiences | To compare and characteristics specific problems | * Uncovers the key features of a specific kind of problem—and thus enables researchers to address these problems effectively
 | * During analysis, tends to extract the key features of problems and therefore tends to disregard the effect of specific context and circumstances
* Focuses more on problems than satisfying situations
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**Episodic interviews**

Episodic interviewing is a technique that is designed to ascertain the perceptions of individuals towards some topic, such as the association between social media and stress. In essence, the researcher prompts the participant to recall particular situations or events in their past, called episodes, that are relevant to this topic (Flick, 2000, 2009; for examples, see Flick et al., 2017; Flick & Röhnsch, 2014; Prokopiou et al., 2012; Walter et al., 2010). The researcher then asks participants to contemplate these episodes—such as how the events affected their lives. The questions tend to be open-ended, designed to inspire extended answers.

Questions that elicit thoughts about particular situations or events activate episodic memories—vivid memories of specific events. Further questions about these episodes then evoke semantic memories—knowledge or facts that are dissociated from specific events or experiences.

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| **Phases of episodic interviews** |

 To conduct episodic interviews, researchers often implement nine phases or activities (Flick, 2000; for examples, see Bates, 2004). The following table outlines and illustrates these phases. These illustrations assume the research topic revolves around how social media might affect stress.

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| Phase | Some details or illustrations |
| Prepare the interview guide | * Familiarize yourself with the topic first—from personal experience, past literature, and pilot questions
* Test the guide by asking the questions to three or more contacts first, such as peers.
* The guide should be flexible enough to pursue unexpected answers or issues
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| Introduce the purpose of this interview—and the principle you will follow  | * An example is “During this interview, I will ask you repeatedly to recount or describe situations in which you experienced how social media affects emotions” (Flick, 2000)
 |
| To introduce the topic, ask questions around how the interviewer defines the research topic in their life | Examples include* How do you define “social media”?
* What do you associate with “social media”
* How do you know when you feel stressed?
* What was your first experience with social media?
* What is the most stressful circumstance you can remember?

Questions about their first experience or most important experience about some topic elicit memories about a specific context—the cornerstone of episodic interviews.  |
| Ask questions around how this research topic, such as social media, affected specific facets of life, such as their day yesterday or their family life | * How was your day yesterday, and how did social media affect your day?
* Can you tell me about a situation in which social media affected your life more than previously?
* Can you tell me about a time in which social media affected your work life?
* Can you tell me about a time in which social media affected your family life?
* Can you tell me about a time in which social media affected your hobbies or recreation?
 |
| Focus on more specific and relevant examples of the research topic | * Which social media platforms do you utilise?
* How does Facebook affect your friendships?
* How does LinkedIn facilitate your work?
* When was the first time you used Twitter? Can you describe this situation?
* How do you decide when you will use Twitter?
* How do you decide when you will avoid Twitter? Can you describe a time in which you decided to avoid Twitter?

Continue to probe with questions that explore these experiences in more detail |
| Relate the topic to broader implications, such as future possibilities  | * How do you think social media might change in the future?
* What do you feel will be the effects of these changes?
* Do you think some person or organizations should regulate social media? If so, who or what?
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| Evaluate the interview | * Would you like to provide more information about your experiences with social media?
* Was anything missing from the interview that would have enabled you to present your experiences more extensively?
* Did anything bother you about the interview?

A period of casual conversation can be helpful at this time, enabling the person to discuss relevant experiences outside the boundaries of this interview |
| Document experiences that transpired during the interview | Record contextual and demographic information, such as * the date, place, and duration of interview
* the gender, age, profession, nationality, and children of interviewees
* peculiarities of the interview
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| Analyse the data | * Many techniques can be applied, such as grounded theory
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**For excellent information, see**

https://methods.sagepub.com/book/qualitative-researching-with-text-image-and-sound/n5.xml