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|  | Discussion guide template  Use the template to create a discussion guide for use in research interviews. The questions are guide/prompt only, not a strict script. |

## Acknowledgment

This template is adapted from the [Digital.NSW research activity resource](https://www.digital.nsw.gov.au/delivery/digital-service-toolkit/activities-and-templates/discussion-guide-template). We’ve made tweaks to tailor it to the course.

## Document guide

Running a user interview is much easier with a discussion guide to refer to. They provide the interviewer with a reminder of the key questions, and a structure to make sure nothing is missed during the interview.

This template will help save time drafting a discussion guide specific to your team and project.

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| **What’s it for** | **What you’ll get** | **When to do it** |
| Efficiently producing a structured discussion guide for research interviews (instead of starting from scratch). | A simple discussion guide template you can adapt and re-use for all your research interviews. | This template can help you prepare before your discovery research sessions. |

## 

## ▐ Table of Contents

[Acknowledgment 1](#_Toc209110264)

[Document guide 1](#_Toc209110265)

[▐ Table of Contents 2](#_Toc209110266)

[How it works 4](#_Toc209110267)

[Before you start 4](#_Toc209110268)

[Timing 5](#_Toc209110269)

[What’s next? 5](#_Toc209110270)

[▐ Overview for facilitators 6](#_Toc209110271)

[Focus question 6](#_Toc209110272)

[Key points 6](#_Toc209110273)

[Interview structure 6](#_Toc209110274)

[▐ Introduction script 6](#_Toc209110275)

[Section 1: Introducing the session 7](#_Toc209110276)

[Our purpose 7](#_Toc209110277)

[Introducing yourself 7](#_Toc209110278)

[Introducing other people on the call 8](#_Toc209110279)

[Consent check 8](#_Toc209110280)

[Questions 9](#_Toc209110281)

[Starting the recording 9](#_Toc209110282)

[▐ Discussion guide 9](#_Toc209110283)

[Understand current state experiences (time) 10](#_Toc209110284)

[The last section: Thank you and end 11](#_Toc209110285)

[Questions and check-in 11](#_Toc209110286)

[▐ Interviewing tips 12](#_Toc209110287)

## How it works

### Before you start

* decide on your research questions or identify your objective in running research interview sessions
* have your list of key research questions and assumptions
* set a time limit for each session that your interview needs to stay within (Generally between 60 and 90 minutes).

**Step 1*:* List out and order the main topics of your interview**

Group your questions by topics or themes that will make sense to your interview participants.

List them out in a logical order, ideally that will make the interview flow.

**Step 2: Insert your questions for each topic**

For each topic:

* start with a question to introduce or open discussion about the topic
* add and follow-up / more specific questions to learn more
* following the same structure, add the rest of the questions
* repeat the above for each topic
* if you have multiple interview leads, you may wish to add a note to the facilitator which explains the intent of the main questions

**Step 3: Write questions that invite reflection**

Reflective questions invite participants to reflect on the broad range of things covered in the interview and provide more considered answers.

**Step 4: Test your guide with a colleague in a ‘mock interview’**

This will help you to work out if any questions aren’t clear. You’ll also be able to re-order your questions if the interview doesn’t flow well.

**Step 5: Write a brief introduction script for the interview to give your participants a clear understanding of:**

* the purpose of the interview
* how their information will be collected
* how you will be recording and using what they tell you in the interview.

**Step 6: Check your verbal introduction against the consent form**

Send a written consent form a few days ahead of the session to allow people time to read and decide if they want to take part. Check your script matches the consent form.

Example consent forms:

* [PDF version of a consent form](https://www.apsacademy.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-01/Example%20research%20consent%20form.pdf)
* If you have a GovTEAMS account, ‘duplicate’ an [online form](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ShareFormPage.aspx?id=QiCd6ePBE02mDiDTuzkXfHsDhe9ysl5IlUx40xTLNQdUMFE5RjlFWjEyS0RRVFc1UDZDVjFNN1FDRC4u&sharetoken=vUX0hEPWb78SC4IR6svG)

### Timing

Allocate a timing for each section in your Discussion guide. Work backwards from the time you’ve allocated for the session and ensure you can allocate enough time to your most important questions or activities. You don’t want to participant to feel rushed.

### What’s next?

Once your discussion guide is ready:

* Run your interviews
* Check in with your team after the first 1-2 interviews and fix any critical issues you’ve noticed in your discussion guide

## ▐ Overview for facilitators

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| **Overview** |  |
| Purpose | Prompts to remind research lead the purpose of the interviews, to help guide the interview. |

### Focus question

For example:

* How might we understand the experiences of APS staff who have taken a temporary opportunity?

### Key points

For example:

* How do APS employees currently find temporary opportunities?
* What information are they asked for?
* What are their perceptions of temporary opportunities?

### Interview structure

For example:

* Introduction
* Understand current state experiences
* Understand pain points

## ▐ Introduction script

|  |  |
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| **Overview** |  |
| Purpose | Starting the research session with a written script means you cover important points like confirming participants consent and informing them of their right to end the interview if they need to.  The written script also ensures that you provide context about who is in the interview, where you work and why you are asking them questions.  You can say these in your own way but make sure cover the key topics. |

### Section 1: Introducing the session

**Time**: 5 minutes

### Our purpose

We are part of a team at **[Insert agency name]** working to **[Insert purpose of team]**.

We are conducting some research because **[insert high-level objective of research].**

### Introducing yourself

I work for a team called **[insert name of team].**

The **[Insert agency name]** wants to **[Insert mission of agency / team as it relates to interview participant]**.

### Introducing other people on the call

**[Introduce other people by their first names]**

I’m the facilitator and will be asking questions and keeping time.

Our note-taker will be taking notes, they might turn their camera off so you can’t see their furiously typing face ☺ But they might ask a few questions at the end.

**[If you have an observer present]** will be our backup note taker.

### Consent check

Have you taken part in research before?

It will be pretty casual, we’ll have a chat and ask you a few questions and we’ll allow a bit of time at the end if you have any questions.

We’re conducting research as part of a training program on human centered design, we’re doing research on **[insert topic / purpose of the research]**. We’re trying to understand current experiences and pain points around **[insert topic]**.

Think you had a read of the consent form already and thanks for sending it back to us, we’ll just whip through it and double check everything.

If at any point throughout the interview you need to pass on a question, take a break or need to finish early just let us know.

You won’t be identified personally to anyone outside of the team. Your name won’t be connected to any of your comments.

Thanks for agreeing to the recording, on this project we’re only using the recording for notes and will delete the recording after the project finishes.

If anything you want to share with us is sensitive, you are welcome to use pseudonyms.

There are no right or wrong answers, we’re interested to hear your thoughts. Your experiences will provide us with the most valuable insights.

If you can explain your thinking to us and the reasons behind things, that would be really helpful.

### Questions

Have any questions? If you have any questions during the session let us know, otherwise we have some time at the end for questions.

### Starting the recording

Okay, I’ll fire up the recording machine and away we go.

## ▐ Discussion guide

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Overview** |  |
| Purpose | Following a discussion guide will ensure your research participants have a consistent experience. It also helps the research stay on track during the interview. |

### Understand current state experiences (time)

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| --- | --- |
| **Interview Questions** | **Prompts (if needed)** |
| **Warm up (time)** | |
| Can you tell me a bit about yourself? | * Can you tell us a little about what you do for work? |
| **Experience of temporary opportunities (time)** | |
| Can you tell me about your experience with temporary opportunities? | * How did it come about? * How did you feel about it? * Can you tell me about your expectations going in? * What challenges did you face during this time? |
| Can you talk about what happened in the lead up to going on the opportunity? | * Can you talk me through the steps you went through? * Where did you get information? * What messaging did you receive? * Can you dig out any of the communications and talk us through them? |
| How would you describe the experience of taking a temporary opportunity to a friend? | * If they were considering a temporary opportunity, what advice would you give them? |
| Reflective questions (time) | |
| We’re coming to the end of the interview now, and I just want to take a moment to reflect on the things we’ve discussed. | **[Insert questions that invite participant to reframe, prioritise or further explain the key points raised in the interview]** |

### The last section: Thank you and end

**Time**: 5 minutes

We’re nearly out of time.

Is there anything that we discussed today that you’d like to talk about more?

Thank you, this has been informative, thank you for your time.

Your insights into [think of a topic they provided insights into] will be really helpful in [Insert objective of research].

### Questions and check-in

At the end of the session you should re-check they’re still comfortable and if needed, go into more detail about the research topic.

“Now that we’re all finished, did you have any questions?”

“Are you still happy with the consent form we discussed at the start?”

## ▐ Interviewing tips

|  |  |
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| **Overview** |  |
| Purpose | Good research interview facilitation is a skill that you’ll develop over time.  These tips are good to keep in mind. |

During the interview:

* Take time to adjust to their conversation pace and style
* Think about your discussion guide and get participants talking with open, neutral questions like:
  + how do you…?
  + what are the different ways you…?
  + what do you think about…?
* Encourage them to give more detail with simple follow-up questions like:
  + you said… when/why was that?
  + can you tell me more about…?
  + in what way…?

And more generally, try to:

* focus on stories and real examples - avoid generalities and talking about how things ‘should’ happen
* make sure you really listen - show the participant you’re interested in what they’re saying
* don’t be distracted by devices or notes
* make sure you understand what the participant has said - ask follow-up questions if you’re not sure
* don’t change the flow of the interview abruptly - if a participant goes off topic, wait for a natural break and gently bring them back to what you want to talk about
* try to stay quiet - the more you talk, the less your participant will
* don’t stick to your discussion guide rigidly - let the conversation develop naturally and be prepared to dig into any new and interesting issues that come up
* Stay neutral – nodding your head vigorously is something you might do to show people you’re listening, but in a research setting it can ‘lead’ people though – as it can be interpreted as agreement
* Show your listening – try leaning in slightly, it’s a subtle signal you’re engaged and listening without showing agreement
* Respect the generosity of your interviewee – they’re sharing the gift of their lived experience with you – this can involve vulnerability and courage, be grateful!