



GSOC.RM4 Interviews: Structured, Unstructured and Group

AQA 8192 · Calculators not allowed · about 75 minutes

Total Marks

--

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Answer ALL questions. Use sociological vocabulary and name sociologists where you can.

- 1** An interview where the interviewer follows a fixed list of questions, asked in the same order to every respondent, is called a...
- ☐ A) unstructured interview
 - ☐ B) structured interview
 - ☐ C) group interview
 - ☐ D) pilot interview

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

-
- 2** Define what sociologists mean by 'rapport' in interview-based research.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

-
- 3** Structured and unstructured interviews differ in several ways.

- (a)** State one difference between a structured interview and an unstructured interview. (2)

- (b)** State one similarity between a structured interview and a questionnaire. (2)

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

4 The interviewer's own presence can sometimes affect the answers a respondent gives.

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

5 Unstructured interviews are sometimes preferred over structured interviews.

(Total for Question 5 is 4 marks)

6 Group interviews, or focus groups, bring several respondents together at once.

(Total for Question 6 is 4 marks)

7 State one practical advantage of structured interviews over unstructured interviews for a researcher with a large sample and limited time.

(Total for Question 7 is 2 marks)

8 State one criticism, made by feminist sociologists such as Ann Oakley, of the traditional structured-interview model.

(Total for Question 8 is 2 marks)

9 Ann Oakley's research on women's experiences of motherhood is best known for criticising the traditional model of the...

- ☐ A) questionnaire
- ☐ B) structured interview
- ☐ C) covert observation
- ☐ D) official statistic

(Total for Question 9 is 1 mark)

10 Ann Oakley argued that interviewers researching sensitive topics should adopt a different style from the traditional model.

(Total for Question 10 is 2 marks)

11 Not every sociologist agrees that Oakley's more informal, reciprocal interviewing style is always the best approach.

(Total for Question 11 is 2 marks)

12 A researcher is investigating experiences of bullying among a group of 14-year-olds. She first tries a structured interview, reading out a fixed list of ten questions to each pupil in turn, and finds pupils give very short, guarded 'yes/no' answers. She then switches to a more informal, conversational approach with the remaining pupils, letting them talk in their own words and asking follow-up questions when something interesting comes up, and finds these pupils give longer, more detailed accounts, including some new information she had not asked about directly. [This is a hypothetical scenario, written for this exercise.]

Using your knowledge of structured and unstructured interviews, explain what is happening in this scenario.

(Total for Question 12 is 6 marks)

13 Sociologists disagree about whether unstructured interviews produce better data than structured interviews.

Evaluate the view that unstructured interviews produce more valid data than structured interviews. In your answer you should refer to sociologists' views and consider more than one point of view.

(Total for Question 13 is 12 marks)

14 Some interview methods are easier for another researcher to repeat exactly than others.

(Total for Question 14 is 2 marks)

15 State one reason structured interviews tend to be considered more reliable than unstructured interviews.

(Total for Question 15 is 2 marks)

- 16** A researcher carries out 20 unstructured interviews on the same topic as 20 structured interviews, which each covered a fixed set of 3 themes. For each unstructured interview, she records the number of distinct themes mentioned by the respondent: 2, 3, 3, 4, 5, 3, 4, 2, 3, 5, 4, 3, 3, 4, 2, 5, 3, 4, 3, 4

Calculate the mean number of distinct themes mentioned per unstructured interview, and use this to comment on the richness of data produced by the unstructured interviews compared with the structured interviews.

(Total for Question 16 is 4 marks)

- 17** State one reason the researcher in Q16 should be cautious about directly comparing the 'number of themes' figures between the two interview types.

(Total for Question 17 is 2 marks)

Mark scheme · GSOC.RM4 Interviews: Structured, Unstructured and Group

Question 1

- **B1** B (structured interview)
- **Answer:** B

Question 2

- **B1** identifies rapport as a relationship of trust and mutual understanding between interviewer and interviewee (oe)
- **B1** development, e.g. it can encourage the interviewee to answer more openly and honestly, and is more easily built in unstructured interviews
- **Answer:** Rapport is a relationship of trust and mutual understanding between interviewer and interviewee, which can encourage the interviewee to answer more openly and honestly, and is more easily built in unstructured interviews.

Question 3

- (a) **B1** identifies the structured interview as using fixed questions asked in a fixed order, like a questionnaire read aloud
- (a) **B1** identifies the unstructured interview as informal and conversational, with few or no pre-set questions, following the interviewee's responses
- (a) **Answer:** A structured interview uses fixed questions asked in a fixed order, like a questionnaire read aloud, while an unstructured interview is informal and conversational, with few or no pre-set questions, following the interviewee's own responses.
- (b) **B1** identifies that both use standardised, pre-set questions asked in the same way of every respondent
- (b) **B1** development, e.g. interviewer/researcher effect is minimised in both compared with unstructured methods
- (b) **Answer:** Both a structured interview and a questionnaire use standardised, pre-set questions asked in the same way of every respondent, minimising the interviewer effect compared with unstructured methods.

Question 4

- **B1** identifies interviewer bias as the interviewer's presence, tone, appearance or reactions unintentionally influencing the answers a respondent gives
- **B1** development, e.g. a respondent gives the answer they think the interviewer wants to hear (social desirability)
- **B1** further point, e.g. this is more likely in unstructured, face-to-face interviews where more interaction occurs
- **B1** further point, e.g. it can reduce validity if the respondent is not giving their genuine view
- **Answer:** Interviewer bias is when the interviewer's presence, tone, appearance or reactions unintentionally influence the answers a respondent gives, for example a respondent giving the answer they think the interviewer wants to hear. This is more likely in unstructured, face-to-face interviews with more interaction, and can reduce validity if the respondent is not giving their genuine view.

Question 5

- **B1** identifies a first strength, e.g. flexibility to follow up interesting answers and probe deeper
- **B1** development, e.g. generating richer, more valid data than a fixed set of questions
- **B1** identifies a second strength, e.g. better able to build rapport and trust with the interviewee
- **B1** development, e.g. useful when researching sensitive topics
- **Answer:** Unstructured interviews offer the flexibility to follow up interesting answers and probe deeper, generating richer, more valid data than a fixed set of questions. They are also better able to build rapport and trust with the interviewee, which is especially useful when researching sensitive topics.

Question 6

- **B1** identifies that the group dynamic means participants respond to and build on each other's answers, generating discussion not possible one-to-one
- **B1** development, e.g. interactions can reveal shared norms or generate a wider range of viewpoints
- **B1** identifies a limitation: some participants may be reluctant to disagree or speak openly in a group (a conformity effect)
- **B1** further point, e.g. dominant members can dominate the discussion, silencing others
- **Answer: In a group interview, participants respond to and build on each other's answers, generating discussion not possible in a one-to-one interview and revealing shared norms or a wider range of viewpoints. However, some participants may be reluctant to disagree or speak openly in a group, and dominant members can silence others.**

Question 7

- **B1** identifies a genuine advantage, e.g. they are quicker to administer, with less need to train interviewers, and quicker to analyse
- **B1** brief development
- **Answer: Structured interviews are quicker to administer, with less need to train interviewers, and quicker to analyse, since responses are standardised, making them practical for a large sample and limited time.**

Question 8

- **B1** identifies that the traditional model expects the interviewer to remain detached and neutral, not answering the interviewee's own questions
- **B1** development, e.g. Oakley argued this failed to build the trust needed for honest, meaningful answers, especially in research with women
- **Answer: The traditional structured-interview model expects the interviewer to stay detached and neutral, not answering the interviewee's own questions; Ann Oakley argued this failed to build the trust needed for honest, meaningful answers, especially in research with women.**

Question 9

- **B1** B (structured interview)
- **Answer: B**

Question 10

- **B1** identifies a more reciprocal style as the interviewer being willing to answer the interviewee's questions and share something of themselves, rather than remaining a detached, neutral questioner
- **B1** development, e.g. Oakley argued this built the trust and rapport needed for women to talk openly about sensitive experiences such as childbirth
- **Answer: A more reciprocal interviewing style involves the interviewer being willing to answer the interviewee's own questions and share something of themselves, rather than remaining a detached, neutral questioner. Oakley argued this built the trust and rapport needed for women to talk openly about sensitive experiences such as childbirth.**

Question 11

- **B1** identifies a genuine criticism, e.g. the closer relationship it creates between interviewer and interviewee can reduce objectivity
- **B1** development, e.g. it can also make it harder to ask the same questions in a standardised way across interviews, reducing reliability
- **Answer: Critics argue the closer relationship a reciprocal interviewing style creates between interviewer and interviewee can reduce objectivity, and can make it harder to ask questions in a standardised way across interviews, reducing reliability.**

Question 12

- **B1** identifies the first stage as a structured interview (fixed questions, same order for every pupil)
- **B1** identifies its result: short, guarded answers, suggesting lower validity on this sensitive topic
- **B1** identifies the second stage as an unstructured interview (informal, conversational, with follow-up questions)
- **B1** identifies its result: longer, more detailed accounts, including unexpected new information
- **B1** explains why: the flexible, rapport-building nature of unstructured interviews can generate richer, more valid data on a sensitive topic like bullying
- **B1** accurate use of terminology throughout (structured/unstructured interview, validity, rapport)
- **Answer: The first stage is a structured interview, which produces short, guarded answers, suggesting lower validity on this sensitive topic. The second stage is an unstructured interview, which produces longer, more detailed accounts, including unexpected new information, because its flexible, rapport-building nature generates richer, more valid data on a sensitive topic like bullying.**

Question 13

- **Level 4** (10-12): A detailed, well-balanced evaluation that accurately explains BOTH the case for unstructured interviews' validity AND the case for structured interviews' reliability, supported by accurate reference to Ann Oakley's work. Strengths and weaknesses of each are analysed, and a reasoned, supported judgement is reached. Sociological terminology is used accurately and consistently throughout.
- **Level 3** (7-9): A clear evaluation that explains both the unstructured-interview case and the structured-interview case, with some accurate detail. Some analysis of strengths/weaknesses. An attempt at a conclusion, which may be only partly supported.
- **Level 2** (4-6): Some relevant explanation of interview types, with limited development or accuracy. Little clear evaluation or comparison of views.
- **Level 1** (1-3): One or two isolated, undeveloped points about interviews, with little or no sociological terminology or accurate detail.
- **Level 0** (0): No relevant content.
- **Indicative content:**
 - Case for unstructured interviews: their flexibility allows follow-up questions and probing, generating richer, more valid data, especially on sensitive topics.
 - Case continued: Ann Oakley argued a more reciprocal, rapport-building style, as opposed to the detached traditional model, produces more honest, meaningful answers, particularly researching women's experiences.
 - Case for structured interviews: standardised questions asked in the same way and order make results reliable, comparable and repeatable, favoured by the positivist tradition.
 - Case continued: structured interviews are quicker to administer and analyse across a large sample, and reduce interviewer bias compared with a more free-flowing conversation.
 - Evaluation of unstructured interviews: critics argue the closer, less standardised approach reduces objectivity and makes it harder to compare answers across interviews, reducing reliability.
 - Evaluation of structured interviews: critics argue fixed questions cannot capture unexpected information or the true depth of an interviewee's meaning, reducing validity, particularly on sensitive topics.
 - A balanced conclusion should weigh unstructured interviews' strength in validity and depth against structured interviews' strength in reliability and scale, noting the choice often depends on the sensitivity of the topic and the researcher's theoretical approach.

Question 14

- **B1** identifies reliability as the extent to which a research method, if repeated by another researcher in the same way, would produce the same or consistent results
- **B1** development, e.g. this tends to be higher for structured interviews than for unstructured interviews
- **Answer: Reliability is the extent to which a research method, if repeated by another researcher in the same way, would produce the same or consistent results; this tends to be higher for structured interviews than for unstructured interviews.**

Question 15

- **B1** identifies that every respondent is asked identical, standardised questions in the same order and way
- **B1** development, e.g. as the interview can be repeated exactly and results can be checked or compared

Question 16

- **B1** sums the 20 values correctly: total = 69
- **B1** calculates the mean = $69 / 20 = 3.45$ (awrt 3.5) themes per interview
- **B1** compares this to the structured interviews' fixed 3 themes, identifying the unstructured interviews generated on average more distinct themes (3.45 vs 3)
- **B1** links this to validity: unstructured interviews, by letting respondents raise topics not asked about directly, can produce richer, more valid data
- **Answer: Total = 69, mean = $69 / 20 = 3.45$ themes per unstructured interview, slightly more than the fixed 3 themes covered in each structured interview. This suggests the unstructured format let respondents raise additional issues, producing richer, more valid data.**

Question 17

- **B1** identifies a genuine reason, e.g. the unstructured interviews were likely much longer, giving more time and opportunity for extra themes to come up
- **B1** brief development, e.g. so the difference may partly reflect interview length rather than the structured/unstructured format alone
- **Answer: The unstructured interviews were likely much longer than the structured ones, giving more time and opportunity for extra themes to come up, so the difference may partly reflect interview length rather than the structured/unstructured format alone.**