

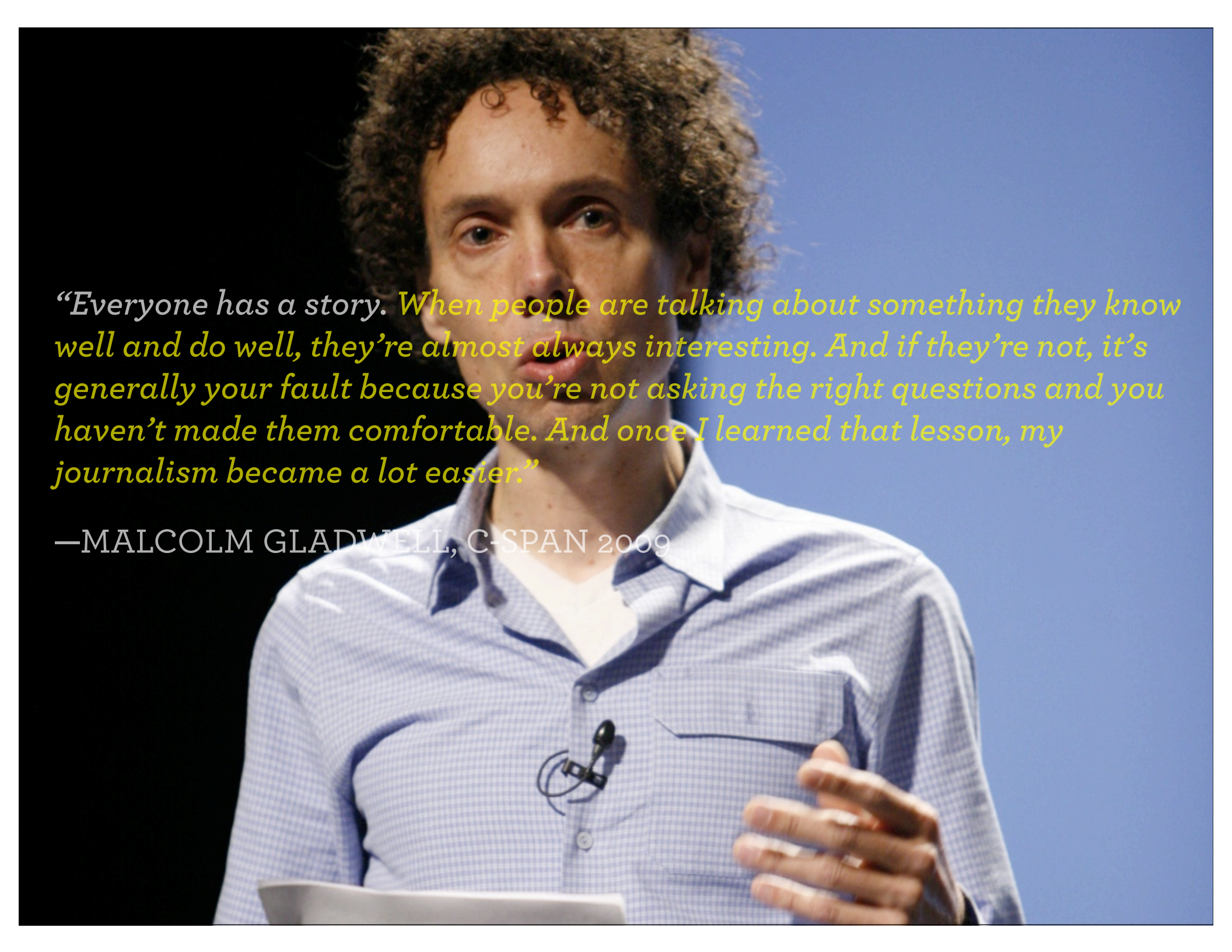
User Interview Techniques

The Art of the Question

UX London
Liz Danzico

“Everyone has a story.”



A photograph of Malcolm Gladwell speaking. He has curly brown hair and is wearing a light blue checkered button-down shirt over a white t-shirt. He is holding a white piece of paper in his left hand and gesturing with his right hand. A small black lapel microphone is clipped to his shirt. The background is a solid blue color.

“Everyone has a story. When people are talking about something they know well and do well, they’re almost always interesting. And if they’re not, it’s generally your fault because you’re not asking the right questions and you haven’t made them comfortable. And once I learned that lesson, my journalism became a lot easier.”

—MALCOLM GLADWELL, C-SPAN 2009

The Tonight Show

1987



MYRTLE YOUNG 1987

TODAY

An Overview

Part 1. The Elements *of* Interview Style

Part II. The Basics *of* Interview Construction

Part III. At the Interview, and a Bit on Debriefs

Part IV. A Checklist

Interviews & Samples

★ Interviewing



What is it?

- A type of qualitative research
- Combination of observation and one-on-one interviewing
- Ethnographic interviewing method used to gain insights about people

What isn't it?

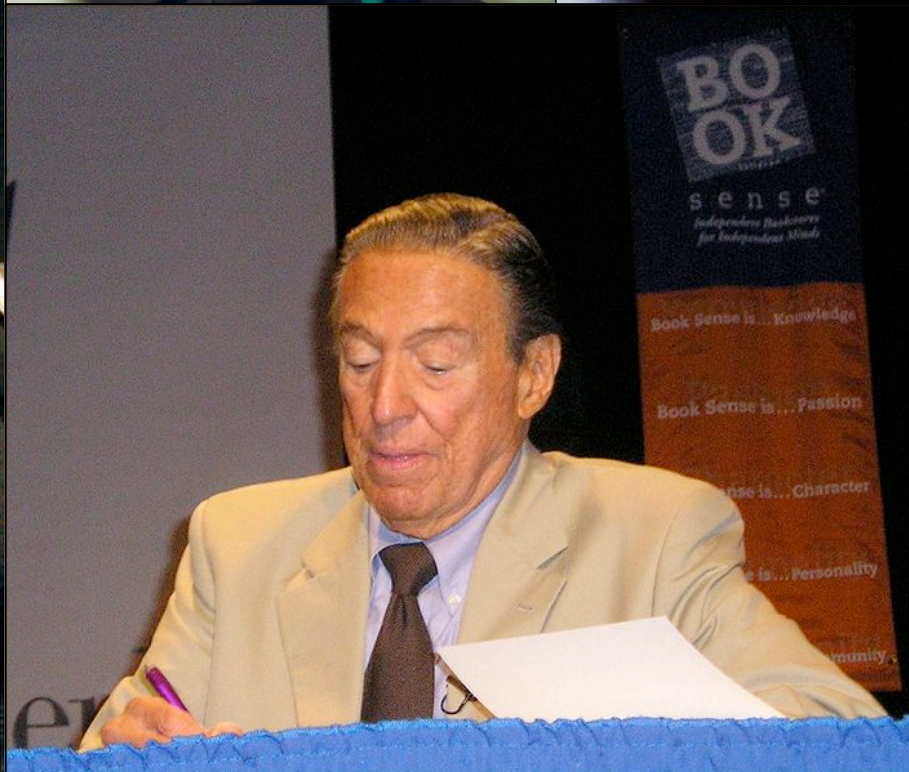
	(FORMAL) USABILITY	INTERVIEWS
Primary purpose	A list of the problems with product/service	Insights on opinions about things or experience using things
When do you interview?	When a product is in progress	At any time, but most often prior
Who do you interview?	Representative users	Representative users
Where do you interview?	Rented facilities, conference rooms	Homes, offices, places where users hang out
Who watches?	Clients and stakeholders	Live, only research team; Video; all
Who identifies the insights?	Person analyzing usability report	Person conducting the interview

Interaction Design IS NOT ABOUT Computing Technology



- Interviewing people in context allows interviewers to question in real time
- Designers need to understand patterns of behavior a product must address
- “*Behavior is our medium*” —Robert Fabricant

“Often real life is boring and problematic. I love the edited version of it.” —TERRY GROSS



Am I qualified?

- 10,000 usability professionals worldwide
- “Amateurs” —Steve Krug
 - Amateurs will do a bad job*
 - Amateurs will do a good job*
- “Everybody” —Jakob Nielsen
- “Professional, if you have the budget” —me

* Steve Krug, *Rocket Surgery Made Easy*

PART I.

The Elements of Interview Style

- Questions
- Silence
- Interruptions
- Etiquette
- Body language

Closed questions

P1: *“So do you cook?”*

P2: *“Yes, yeah.”*

P1: *“And, ah, how often do you cook?”*

P2: *“Maybe three times a week?”*

Audio sample



Ask good questions

- Questions should not lead to a dead end
 - Ask open-ended, not closed questions
 - Questions that cannot be answered with yes or no; short dead-end answers
- Curb the conjunctions
- Kill the trailing ellipsis

Audio sample



P1: *“When you’re cooking, do you like to use fresh ingredients, do you use the microwave a lot, or do you sort of do things in the oven or, um, what kind of different things do you ... cook ...”*

P2: *“Ah, um. Yeah. I don't really use the microwave because I don't have one. ... But if you would have asked if I use the steamer, I do use the steamer every once in a while.”*

Closed question(s)

P1: *“When you're cooking, do you like to use fresh ingredients, or do you use the microwave a lot, or do you sort of do things in the oven or, um, what kind of different things do you ... cook ...”*

P2: *“Ah, um. Yeah. I don't really use the microwave because I don't have one. ... But if you would have asked if I use the steamer, I do use the steamer every once in a while.”*

Conjunction issues

P1: *“When you’re cooking, do you like to use fresh ingredients, **or** do you use the microwave a lot, **or** do you sort of do things in the oven **or**, um, what kind of different things do you ... cook ...”*

P2: *“Ah, um. Yeah. I don't really use the microwave because I don't have one. ... But if you would have asked if I use the steamer, I do use the steamer every once in a while.”*

Question trails off into ellipsis

P1: *“When you’re cooking, do you like to use fresh ingredients, or do you use the microwave a lot, or do you sort of do things in the oven or, um, what kind of different things do you ... cook ...”*

P2: *“Ah, um. Yeah. I don't really use the microwave because I don't have one. ... But if you would have asked if I use the steamer, I do use the steamer every once in a while.”*

P1: *“So I’ve got a few different recipes here.
Would you say this recipe is nicer than this one?”*

P2: *“Well. Yeah. Probably. Yeah.”*

Audio sample 

Leading questions

P1: “So I’ve got a few different recipes here.
Would you say *this recipe is nicer than this one?*”

P2: “*Well. Yeah. Probably. Yeah.*”

Question types

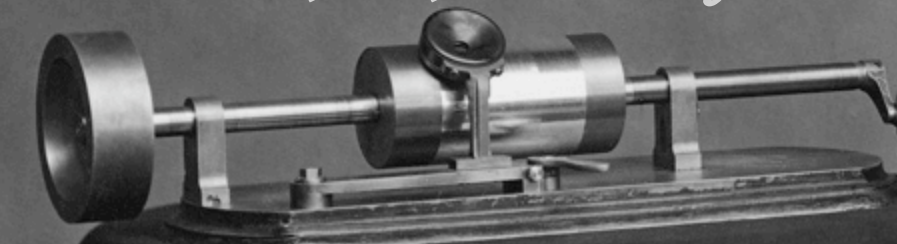
Tasks	Can you show me how you would make a birthday cake?
Participation	Can you show me how I should make a birthday cake?
Demonstration	Show us how to make a birthday cake.
Role-playing	I'll be the customer and you be the baker; show me how they should respond.
Sequence	Walk me through a typical day.
Specific example	What did you make for the last birthday party?

Question types

Peer Comparison	Do the other bakers do it that way?
Project Ahead	What do you think it will be like in 5 years?
Look Back	How are things different than they were last year?
Quantity	How many bakers are like that?
Exhaustive List	What are all the things you use when you make a cake?
Other Viewpoint Comparison	What's your bosses' opinion on the same topic?

SOURCE: **Deep Dive Interviewing Secrets: Making Sure You Don't Leave Key Information Behind**, Jan 2010

“And then to, uh, Bombay.”



Edison with his phonograph, 1877
Bob Garfield, *On The Media*, 2007

Let there be silence

- We make a mistake in speech once every 4.4 seconds; 1 out of every 10 words is a mistake
- 40% of the time, we use verbal pauses (uhs, ahs)
- Don't rush to ask the next question
- “Let people speak in paragraphs”
—Steve Portigal



Avoid interruptions

- Acknowledgements can actually be interruptions
- Confirmations can lead participants
- When editing, “ums” and “ahs” become difficult

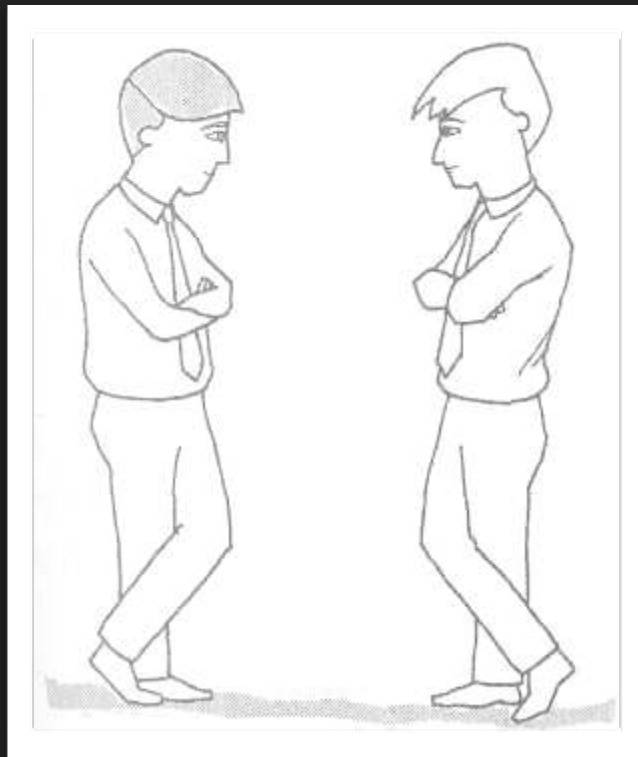
Audio sample



Remember etiquette

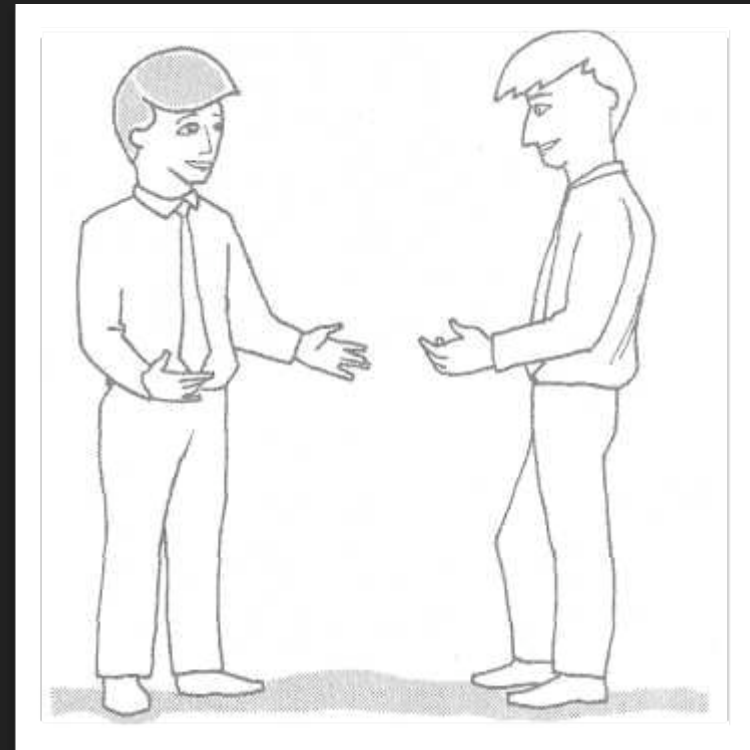
- Find the right amount of small talk
- You're there to gain information, not establish friendships
- Avoid talking about yourself, even when you want to join the conversation!

“Listen” to signals



CLOSED

Uncertain about each other



OPEN

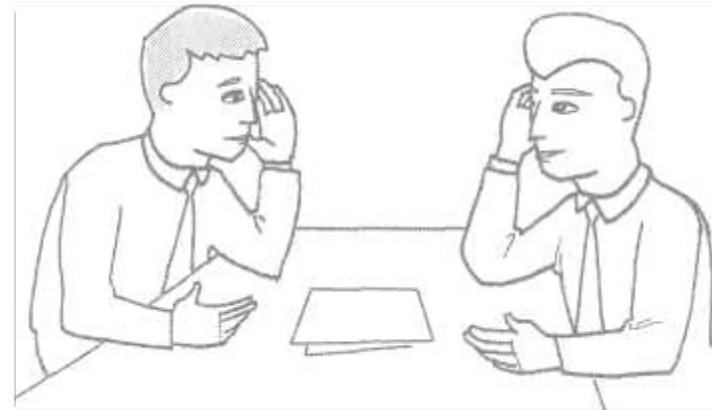
Openness and acceptance

SOURCE: *The Book of Body Language*, http://westsidetoastmasters.com/resources/book_of_body_language/



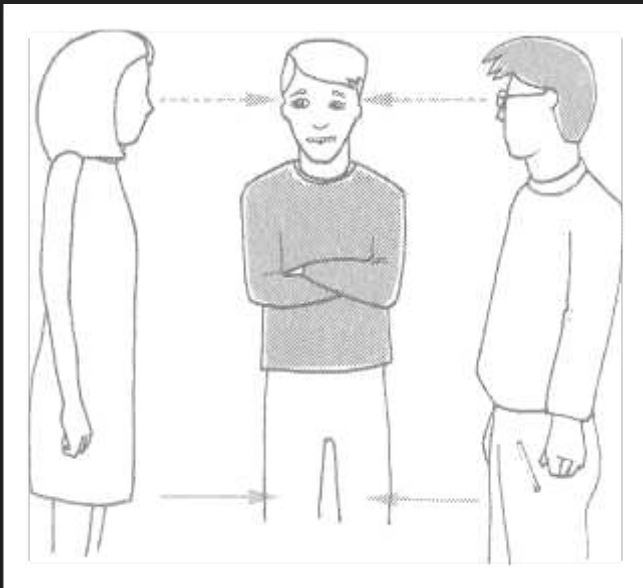
CLOSED

A boss would perceive a subordinate's mirroring behavior as arrogance



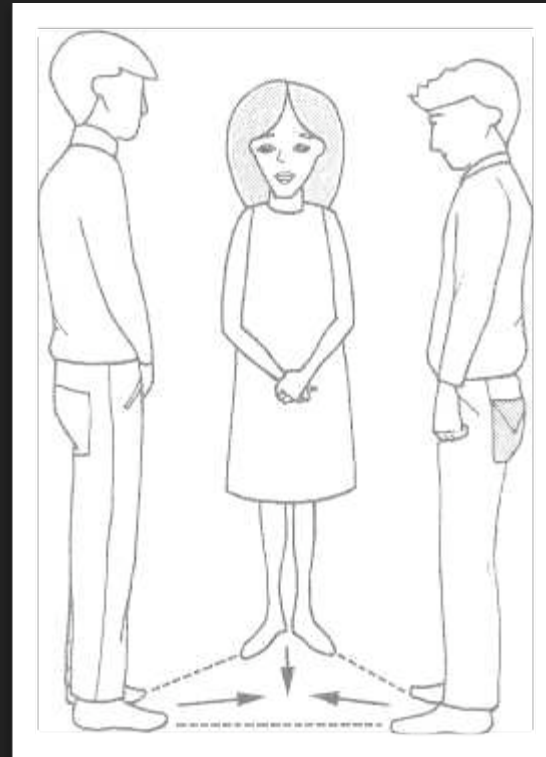
OPEN

Mirroring the other person's body language to gain acceptance



CLOSED

Time to leave: the new person is not accepted by the others



OPEN

Open triangular position encouraging the entry of a third person



HSLU Service Design Workshop
flickr @apolaine

Triage

IF THIS	THEN SAY THIS
The interviewee makes a comment, and you're not sure when he or she means.	“Was there something that make you think that?”
The interviewee is concerned he or she is not being helpful.	“You're giving us exactly what we need!”
The interviewee asks you to explain how something works.	“How do you think it works?”
The interviewee has gotten entirely off question.	“Let's change gears a bit.”

REVIEW PART I.

The Elements of Interview Style

- Trust the **question**
- Let there be **silence**
- Acknowledgements can be **interruptions**
- Don't forget your **social graces**
- Listen to **signals**

PART II.

The Basics of Interview Construction

- Who
- Where
- What
- How

“Unglamorous!”

—JAKOB NIELSEN

Representatives of target audience or actual audience?

2/day rule, schedule in the morning



Create screener

- Demographics: Age, gender, household income
- Status: Employment, research work, marital
- Probes: Preferences, ratings
- Logistics (have ready)
- **Test**

1. We're looking for people who are between the ages of 21 and 39. Would that be you?

Yes

No END

Refused END

2. What is your age?

Under 21 END

Between 21-34

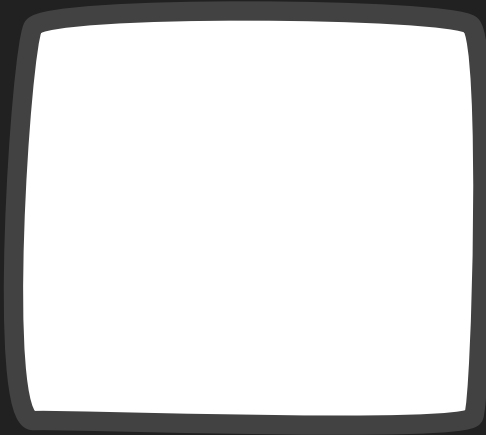
Between 35-39 HOLD

Over 40 END

Whither recruiting?

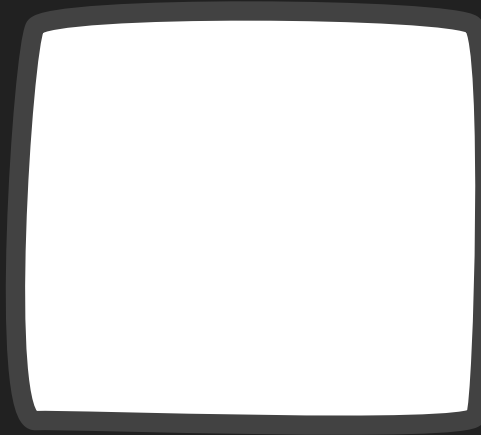
- Recruiter or do it yourself?
- Where do they congregate?
- Can you put a link on a homepage or other site?
- Can you conduct remote interviews?

Email
(FAFN)



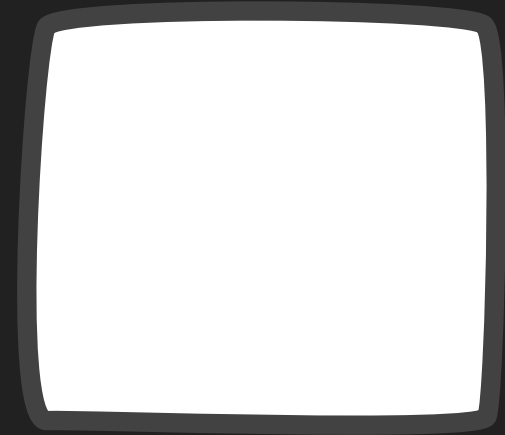
*Lowest cost;
mid-range selective*

Craigslist
(General)



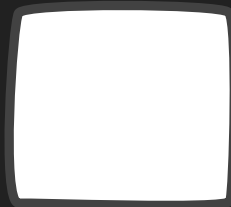
*High cost time;
least selective*

Recruiting firm
(Specialized)



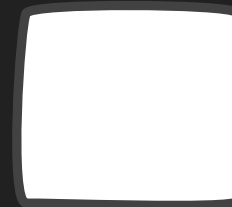
*Highest cost;
most selective*

Website
(Specialized)



*Low cost;
self-selective*

Email list
(Specialized)



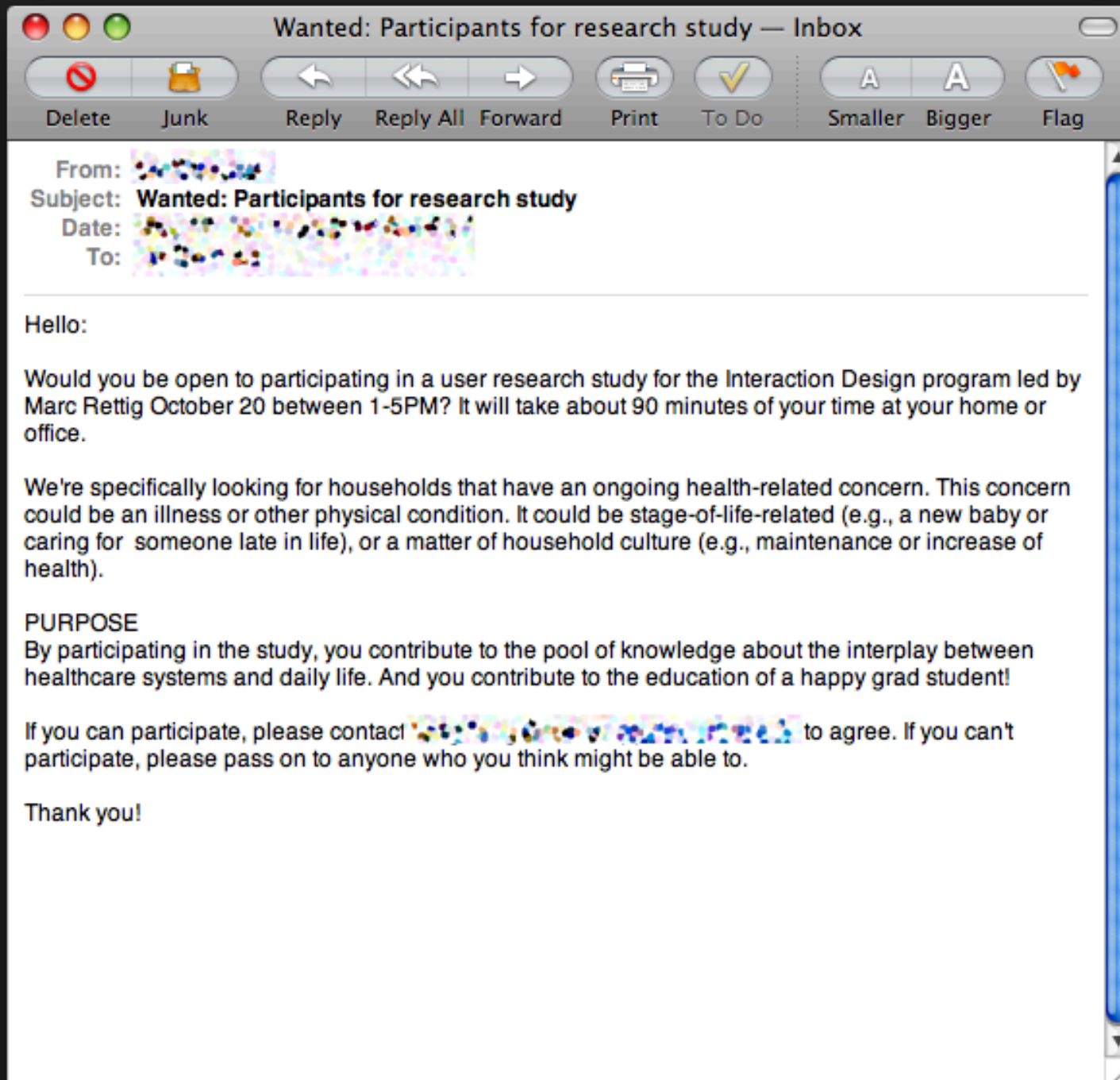
*Low cost;
mid-range selective*

Recruiting fees

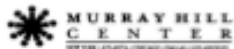
- Recruitment: \$100-250 US/head +/- 10%
- Incentives: Average \$175 US/head-middle management titles+

Incentives

- How much can you afford to give?
- Gift certificates
- Food
- Donations to charity
- In-kind gifts, merchandise, your product!



Screenener results



MURRAY HILL CENTER EAST
BOBULATE
#3738

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 14
8:00AM-10:00PM

RECRUIT 6
1 HOUR
\$175/HEAD

IDs
FINANCIAL SOFTWARE

2B. JOB	2. GENDER/AGE	TITLE/COMPANY/ INDUSTRY	5. # OF SERVERS	5A. INFRASTRUCTURE SYSTEM	8. BUSINESS APPLICATIONS COSTS	9. IT DEPARTMENT RATING
Name	Female/47	Acquisitions/MTV Networks/Media Television Broadcasting	300-500	Yes	Yes	3, 3, 5, 5, 5 = 23
Name	Male/58 yrs	Director Publishing Technology/simon & Schuster/Book Publishing	175	Yes	Yes	4, 4, 3, 5, 5 = 21
Name	Female/43	Sr. Director IT/Pfizer/Pharmac eutical	500+	Yes	No	3, 2, 4, 4, 5 = 18

What is your interview style?

- Topics
- Freestyle (“improv”)
- List of questions

1 min

5 minute madness

“If you had 5 minutes with a user of your product or service, what would you ask?”

Item

Item

Item

Item

Item

Topic list

- Comfort with mobile devices
- Time spent at gym
- Diet habits/vices
- Routines with friends



Gary Hustwit, film director *Helvetica*, *Objectified*

Freestyle

- Conduct a “Listening Lab” approach ala Mark Hurst
- Build each interview question on the one before; no pre-defined script, but controlled by context

Field guide

- What do you want in the field?
- What photos would you like?
- Are there stage directions you need to follow?
- Put this in a field guide.

Field guide

	Professional	Behaviors
	List the job titles you've held in the last five years.	How many years have you been working in your industry?
		Have you bought a digital book, report, or whitepaper in the past two years? (<i>Digital screener</i>)
PRINT		
Name		
Name		

	Professional	Behaviors	Demo
	List the job titles you've held in the last five years.	How many years have you been working in your industry?	Have you bought a digital book, report, or whitepaper in the past two years? (<i>Digital screener</i>)
		How many books do you buy for professional purposes each year?	What was the last book you purchased?
		In the last three months, how many professional books have you referred to?	Have you participated in research studies (as a participant) in the last six months?
PRINT			
Name			Gender
Name			
Name			
Name			
Name			
Name			

Field guide

Planning

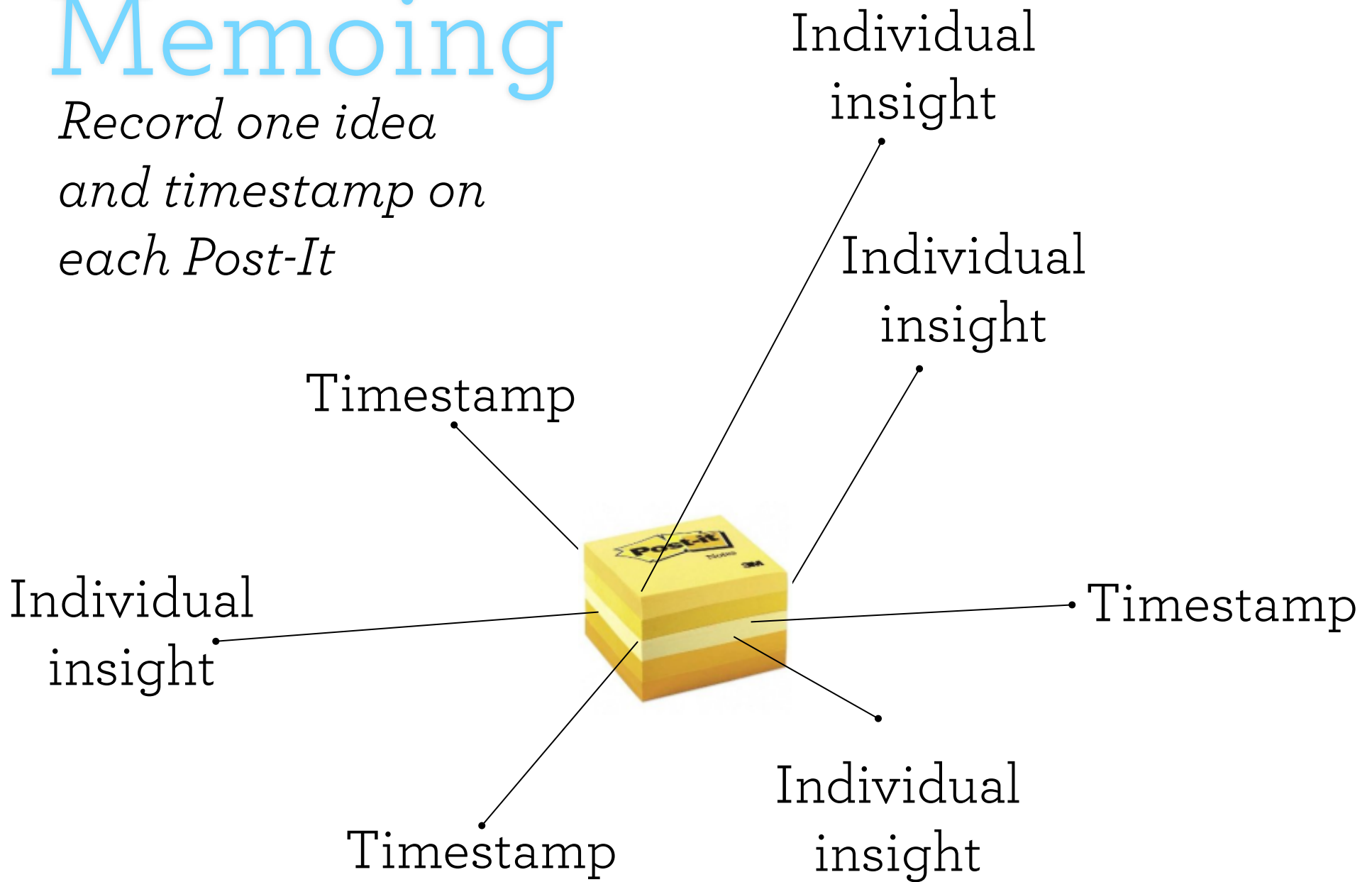
- Tell me about where you're going on your upcoming trip? Have you been there before?
- And how do you decide on [PLACE NAME]?
- Who are you traveling with? [IF CHILDREN] What are their ages?
- What portions of your trip do you tend to plan before you leave?
- How long have you been planning? How typical is this for you?
- How "planned" should your trip be before you leave? In other words, do you plan each segment of the trip, or do you tend to "wing it" more?
- What do you know about what you're going to do? What don't you know?
- Describe some of the things you've been using to plan your itinerary.

Research

- *[Give the participant a blank sheet of paper.]*
Now, I'd like you to draw a timeline of your trip from the time you began planning it to the time you arrive.
- *[Turn the participants' attention to the books, guides, or other tools they have.]*
Tell me something you still don't know about your trip (e.g., how you'll get there).
Now I'd like you to use [NAME OF TOOL] to research a segment of your trip that you still need to plan. As you do, please think aloud at each step, letting me know what you're doing as you're doing it.

Memoing

*Record one idea
and timestamp on
each Post-It*



Other tips

- Prepare your introduction; practice it
- Prepare and/or bring consent forms: online/print
- Consider recording permissions
- Notetaking, Memoing
- Prepare post-test questionnaires
- Give them a pen!

Participant Name: _____

ID #: _____

Date of interview: _____

If testing product/service, keep it out of sight until permission is granted.

Hi, _____. My name is _____, and I'm going to be asking you some questions today.

Before we get started, there are a few things to review.

We're asking people to answer questions regarding _____ to inform some of the work the team will be doing.

We're here to ask questions about **you**; that's why we chose you. You may be tempted to answer questions based on what your friends or family do. But we're really interested in your opinions and experiences.

Therefore, there's nothing you can say that is wrong. All answers are welcome, and will help us consider our work!

If you have other answers or thoughts as we move along, please feel free to express them. We may not be able to spend much time on them, but we will try to hear as much of what you have to say as possible.

You see I have some colleagues here with me. They're interested in what you have to say as well, so they'll be taking notes and observing. But they may not be joining the conversation.

To that end, you'll see there is a video camera here. With your permission we'd like to record the session for research purposes only. Your feedback will be kept anonymous—only used by the research team—unless you give approval otherwise.

If you don't have any questions, I'm going to ask if you sign the permission form. Take your time reviewing it.

Give the person a pen along with the consent form.

OK. Do you have any questions?

Memorize this;
practice!

Philip Johnson Glass House Consent Form

Project Title: Philip Johnson Glass House: Continuing the Conversation

Student Researchers: Derek Chan, Kristin Graefe, Clint Beharry

Student Contact: Clint Beharry

Supervised By: Program Chair, Liz Danzico, Faculty Member, Jason Santa Maria

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by the School of Visual Arts Interaction Design program.

I understand that the purpose of the study is to gather information in advance of a website for the Glass House Conversations. I understand I am one of approximately 10 people being interviewed.

My participation in this interview is voluntary. I understand that information will be recorded and documented for research purposes only, and this information will not be shared outside the context of the research. You may ask for a copy of the transcript for your records.

Confidentiality will be maintained, and any direct material from your participation will only be shared in a public forum with your explicit signoff.

I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered, and agree to participate in the study.

* Required

My Signature *

Print name

Date *

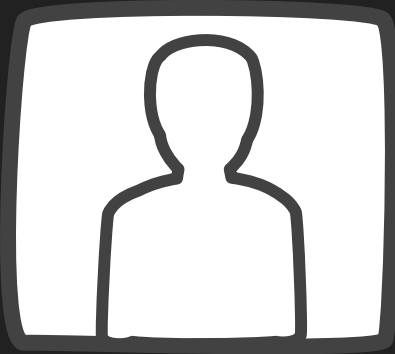
Submit

Powered by [Google Docs](#)

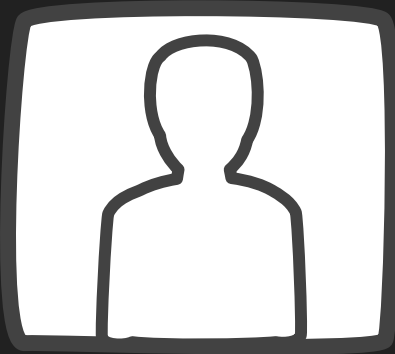
[Report Abuse](#) - [Terms of Service](#) - [Additional Terms](#)

Obtain digital
signatures

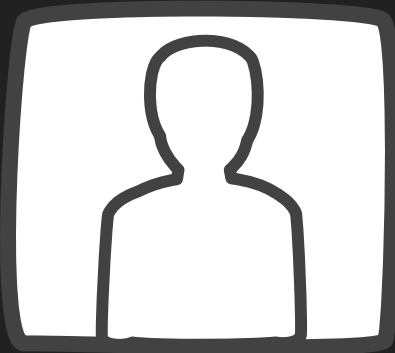
Notetaking types



Descriptive: See something; write it down



Inferential: Use inference to describe observation (e.g., “she was frustrated with XX”)



Evaluative: Makes a judgment from inference and behavior (e.g., “humans do not have a positive relationship with XX”)

The Basics of Interview Construction

- **Who** do you want to talk with?
- **How** many should you talk with?
- **Where** do you look for them?
- **How** do you compensate them?

PART III.

At the Interview, and a Bit on Debriefs

- Greetings
- Neutrality
- Tag-teaming
- Endings

Greetings

- Arrive earlier than you think you should.
- Turn off your phone.
- Do not bring coffee.
- Be on the lookout for the smallest details.

A wrong foot

- People are not who you thought they'd be
- You're allergic to their cat/dog/bird
- You're caught in the middle of a dispute
- Don't be afraid to call off interview and leave

Stay neutral

- Your job is much like a **therapist**
- Avoid making the person a **designer**
- Even if you think it, don't say, "*me too!*"
- You can't:
 - Tell people the right answers to questions
 - Express your own opinions
 - Give up your poker face

Colleagues

- Seeing is believing, yet try to keep the numbers small. 1-3 people is ideal.
- Record all interviews in audio or video format
- Ensure you get proper consent for recording

Tag-teaming

- Assign each person to:
 - Ask questions only
 - Observe only
 - Note-take only
- If a fourth person:
 - Listen only

It's not over when it's over

- Team up after each interview to recap what you saw and heard
- Don't lose first-impression insights before moving on to next interview

After each interview, list three memorable insights you heard. Discuss before moving to next one, or with the rest of your day even if recording.

Participant Name: _____

Date of interview: _____

Most memorable:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Follow up

- Follow up immediately with lightweight feedback: email, Word document, phone
- Transcribe notes immediately
- **Chromolume Transcription:**
<http://www.crtranscription.com/> (\$1.50-2.50 US/min, timestamps free!)
- **CastingWords Audio, Video:**
<http://castingwords.com/> (\$0.75-\$2.50 US/min, timestamps \$0.10/min)

Participant Name: _____

ID #: _____

Date of interview: _____

Most memorable:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Participant Name: _____

ID #: _____

Date of interview: _____

Most memorable:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Participant Name: _____

ID #: _____

Date of interview: _____

Most memorable:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Participant Name: _____

ID #: _____

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To that end, you'll see there is a video camera here. With your permission we'd like to record the session for research purposes only. Your feedback will be kept anonymous—only used by the research team—unless you give approval otherwise.

If you don't have any questions, I'm going to ask if you sign the permission form. Take your time reviewing it.

Give the person a pen along with the consent form.

OK. Do you have any questions?

Study Name: _____

ID #: _____

Include questions as well as stage directions.

Question: _____

Question: _____

Question: _____

Question: _____

Question: _____

Question: _____

Question: _____

Question: _____

Question: _____

PART IV.

The Checklist

Checklist

Three to four weeks before

- Figure out what you're going to be asking
- Figure out who you want to visit in the field
- Develop your screener
- Test the screener (with one another)
- Announce need for participants
- Consider right interview style

Checklist

Two weeks before

- Discuss what you expect in field with team
- Talk about what you want in field (photos, answers, etc.)
- Screen participants and schedule them (leave time for lunch!)
- Confirm with participants via email
- Prepare consent forms, NDAs

Checklist

One week before

- Print directions to all locations
- Confirm with participants (date, time, any relevant numbers) via email
- Confirm incentives
- Check all technology and devices

Checklist

One day before

- Do a dry run of the questions
- Print directions to all locations
- Print out copies of consent forms
- Pack incentives
- Pack all technology and devices

Checklist

That day

- Prepare to have forgotten something on the checklist

REVIEW

An Overview

Part 1. The Elements *of* Interview Style

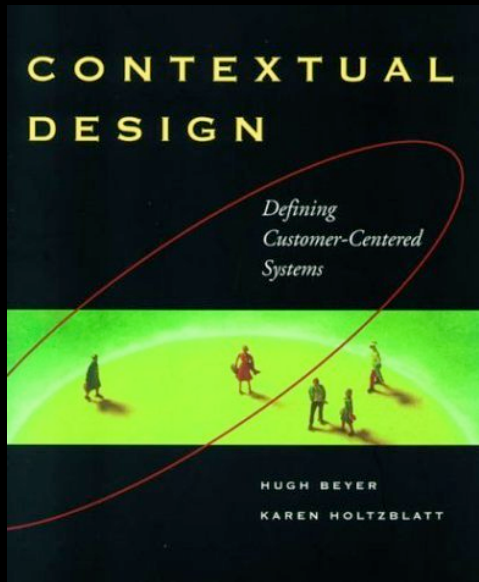
Part II. The Basics *of* Interview Construction

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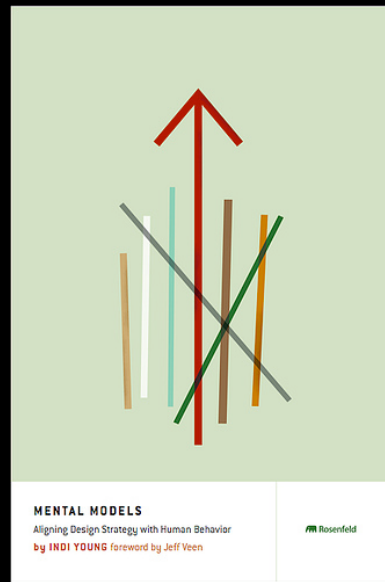
Part IV. A Checklist

Interviews & Samples

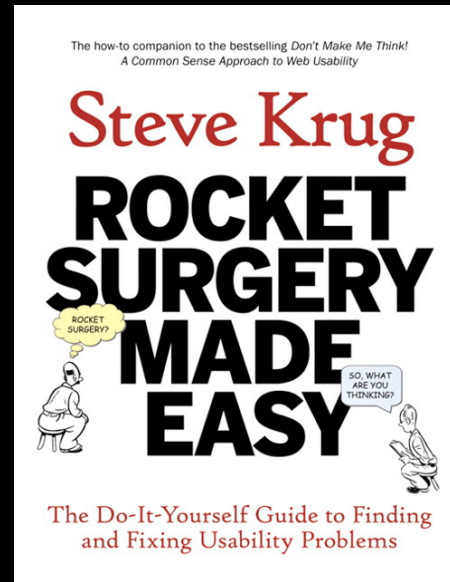
dis.bobulate.com/etc/interviewing



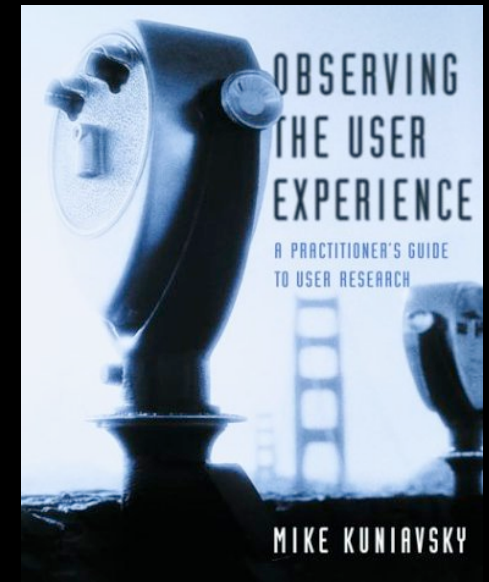
Contextual Design,
Karen Holtzblatt



Mental Models,
Indi Young



Rocket Surgery Made Easy,
Steve Krug



Observing the User Experience,
Mike Kuniavsky

Thanks to sources

Andy & Karin Polaine, who recorded all interview questions:

<http://www.polaine.com/>

Myrtle Young, *The Tonight Show*:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EY3Lw_-bj5U

Deep Dive Interviewing Secrets: Making Sure You Don't Leave Key Information Behind, Steve Portigal

http://www.uie.com/events/virtual_seminars/questions/

Q&A with Malcolm Gladwell

<http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/290341-1>

Thanks!

dis.bobulate.com/uxl/interviewing-handout.pdf

@bobulate



Wrap-up

Post-test Questionnaire

On a scale of 1-10 (10 being highest), rate the importance of each of the following values when it comes to purchasing professional books.

Accuracy of information

1 2 3 4 Not sure

Timeliness of subject matter

1 2 3 4 Not sure

Design of book

1 2 3 4 Not sure

Author credibility

1 2 3 4 Not sure

Publisher credibility