



General Interviewing Techniques

Don't be afraid of silence. Often, a person will remember and share important details or a new story when given the space that silence provides. Tell the narrator upfront that you will allow for 3-5 seconds of silence before asking a follow-up or new question.

“Interviewing isn’t asking questions, interviewing is listening.” Listen deeply to learn what the narrator might be interested in talking about. Open-ended questions that can’t be answered in a few words usually lead to more engaging stories. Follow-up questions often lead to rich details, too!

Encourage your narrator to describe things as vividly as possible. Tapping into sensory details make for rich and engaging stories. Focus on questions that will prompt stories, not a list of facts.

Minimize audible cues as you are listening — like “uh huh,” “ok,” “yeah,” etc. Even laughing out loud can distract from your narrator. Focus on maintaining eye contact, and expressing yourself with body language (nodding, facial expressions, laughing silently but visibly).

Avoid talking over your narrator for any reason. Responding to a narrator and their stories is usually appropriate, but *interruptions* and *cross-talk* are not. If you accidentally start talking at the same time, encourage them to finish their thought.

Treat your narrators with respect and humility. Be cognizant of what you ask and how you ask it. The interview isn’t about you showcasing your knowledge; it’s about creating a space for the narrator to share *their* expertise and perspective. Show your interest in their story through body language, eye contact, and tone. Avoid making assumptions!

Be aware of the narrator’s body language and tone of voice. Similarly, pay attention to your narrator’s body language and what it is communicating. When they light up or get excited about a certain question, stay with that energy through follow-up questions. If they seem to have a flood of emotions or close down after a specific question or story, give them the opportunity to do what they need in that moment, whether it is moving onto a different topic, taking a moment to gather themselves (on or off tape), or ending the interview for the day. **See page 18 for more about Trauma Informed Care.**

Turn to page 38 for a sample metadata introduction script.
Turn to page 39 for a sample interview guide.