

TELEPHONE INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUES

Part I: Introduction To Telephone Interviewing

I. Limitations and Benefits of a Telephone Interview

A. Advantages

1. Cost and time effective
2. Subject's responses are not prepared in advance
3. Subject may agree to answer questions over the phone but not in person.

B. Disadvantages

1. Restricted control over subject and environment
2. Inability to evaluate nonverbal behavior

II Goals of the Telephone Interview

A. Elicit Information

1. Investigative information
 - a. Basic events, people, dates, and times
 - b. Alibi, motivations, propensity
 - c. Develop additional leads
 - d. Obtain subject's version of events
2. Behavioral information
 - a. Evaluating the subject's probable truthfulness
 - b. Verbal behaviors
 - c. Paralinguistic behaviors
 - d. Response content

III. Interrogating Over the Telephone

A. Do not engage in accusatory interrogation

1. The likelihood of a confession in an uncontrolled environment is remote.
2. Once a subject is confronted, it is unlikely that he will agree to a face-to-face interview.

3. If the subject would confess, there is not witness to the confession.
- B. Techniques to persuade a subject to agree to a face-to-face interview.

1. Present meeting in a positive light

Incorrect: "John, the only way I'm going to be able to eliminate you from suspicion in this is by meeting with you in person."

Correct: "John, it would really help me out if we could meet somewhere to go over a few things."

2. Pretenses for the face-to-face interview

- e. to view photographs
- f. to review documents
- g. to obtain a handwriting exemplar

IV. Making Assessments of the Subject

V. Appropriate and Inappropriate Use of Telephone Interviews

A. Inappropriate Use

1. A victim or suspect who has an emotional connection to the crime.
2. Possible exceptions:
 - a. Insurance death investigation
 - b. Victim interviewed out-of-state
3. A prime suspect or key witness

B. Appropriate Use

1. Screening multiple witnesses
2. Screening multiple suspects
3. Any subject from whom additional information is needed

VI. Where and When to Call

A. Environmental considerations

1. Privacy is the most important consideration

2. If environment does not sound private, offer to call back at another time.

B. Timing considerations

1. A subject with a limited time to talk to the investigator may rush answers or sound preoccupied.
2. Do not contact subject at mealtimes or just before leaving to or from work.
3. Try to call when it is most likely the subject will be alone (kids at school, spouse at work, etc.).

VII. Starting the Interview

A. Avoid use of titles or position.

Incorrect: "This is Investigator Johnson from the Landon Insurance Company."

Correct: "My name is Peter Johnson from the Landon Insurance Company."

B. Do not use descriptive or legal terminology in describing the purpose for the interview.

Incorrect: "We are investigating the fraudulent use of a stolen credit card."

Correct: "There have been some charges made on a credit card that I am looking into."

C. Avoid using the word "investigation."

Incorrect: "I am conducting an investigation concerning your workers compensation claim."

Correct: "There are some issues concerning your workers compensation claim that I would like to discuss with you."

D. Avoid telling the subject that you will be asking him or her questions.

Incorrect: "John, I'd like to ask you some questions about that if you don't mind."

Correct: "John, I need your help to clarify a few things concerning this, do you have a few minutes?"

E. Use of altruistic phrases to secure assistance and cooperation

"I would appreciate your help..."

"I need some assistance..."

"It would really help me out to review a few points."

"I need some assistance to clarify an incident."

VIII. Establishing Rapport with the Subject

A. Start interview by "verifying" background information

NOTE: The examples throughout the course elicit background information from the subject, e.g., "John what is your present address?" If a subject appears reluctant to provide personal information, turn the question around, e.g., "John, I have your address listed as 657 Kings Drive in Muskego, is that current?"

B. Goals of establishing rapport

1. Identify emotionally with the subject
2. Show sincere interest in the subject, unrelated to issue under investigation.
3. A well-timed and sincere compliment.

C. Rapport is established when subject volunteers personal information

D. Do not begin interview with a negative expectation.

1. I realize that this is stressful for you but...
2. I understand you may not know much about this but...
3. I know you may have forgotten a lot since then but...

IX. Procedural Considerations During a Telephone Interview

A. Leaving messages on answering machine or voice mail

1. Leave message only after several unsuccessful attempts.
 2. Do not identify the purpose for the call.
- B. Subject who wants to call the investigator back to verify identification
1. Express the urgency for needing the information
 2. Offer the subject an alternative of meeting personally with an investigator at their home or business.
- C. Electronically recording a telephone interview
1. Benefits
 - a. A permanent document for evidence
 - b. A permanent record for writing a detailed report
 - c. The ability to play back responses for behavior analysis purposes
 2. Considerations
 - a. Some subjects may be guarded because of the electronic recording and limit the amount or type of information they offer.
 - b. It may set a precedent that must be met in all cases.
 - c. Not advisable for sensitive issues that are not discussed as part of an official investigation.
 - d. Not advisable when subject initiates the call.
 - e. If conversation is electronically recorded, seek subject's permission in a low-key manner.

X. Personality Traits of a Successful Interviewer

A. Goal-oriented

1. Knowledge of what questions need to be answered, and how much detail is needed and reasonable to expect within those areas.

B. Patience and persistence

1. An excellent listener is receptive to the subject's behavior at all levels of communication.
2. Allows the subject to provide information at a comfortable pace without forcing responses.

3. Tactfully pursues areas in which the subject has offered evasive responses and is able to overcome the subject's objections to avoid answering particular questions.

C. Confidence

1. Is not intimidated by subject's efforts to make investigator feel uncomfortable or threatened.
2. Does not use threats, authority or intimidation to elicit information.

D. Personable and congenial.

1. Ability to express sympathy, compassion, and understanding through tone of voice or well-timed phrases.