



# User Interview Guide

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2021

Product Mindset

# 1 User Interviews

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## User Interviews

What, Why and when

**Summary:** User interviews have become a popular technique for getting user feedback, mainly because they are fast and easy.

### What are user interviews

A user interview is a user research method during which a researcher asks one user questions about a topic of interest (e.g., use of a system, behaviors and habits) with the goal of learning about that topic. Unlike focus groups, which involve multiple users at the same time, user interviews are one-on-one sessions (although occasionally several facilitators may take turns asking questions).

User Interviews tend to be a quick and easy way to collect user data, so they are often used, especially in Lean and Agile environments.

They are closely related to journalistic interviews and to the somewhat narrower and more formal HCI method called the critical incident technique, which was introduced in 1954 by John Flanagan.

Although you may feel that doing a user interview is simple and straightforward, there is more to a good interview than many people realize.

# Why do I need to do customer interviews?

“Whoever understands the customer best will eventually have them as their customers.” -Steli Efti

That’s why we need customer interviews—to become the people who understand the customer best. The people who know and feel the customer’s pain points. The people who see how our product impacts a customer’s day to day life, or how it could. Because those are the people who create products customers are excited to use, keep using, and tell their friends about.

Customer interviews can be the catalyst for making smarter decisions for your business. You can use them to solve a specific usability problem, get a better idea of who your customer base is, or gauge interest in a new product. Though it may seem like a lot to get started with customer interviews, once you’ve got a formula, you can use it again and again. This kind of habitual customer interview process is key if you want to iterate on your product and services rapidly.

## When to conduct a user interview

While user interviews can be helpful during any phase of the product development process, there are three particular times when interviews are especially valuable. These times are:

- At the beginning of a project, before a clear concept has been defined. You interview people to get a better understanding of your potential users and their wants and needs. The information you collect during the interview will help you start thinking of a solution.

- During the early stages of product development. When a product team has an early model of their concept, showing it to users can provide valuable feedback.
- After the product has shipped. Interviews can be conducted in combination with observation. Such interviews are called a contextual inquiry, and are conducted in the context of using a product. These give users an opportunity to show you how they interact with your product.

## **Best Practices for Conducting Individual Interviews**

When you conduct an Individual Interview, consider:

- What you want to learn and then selecting representative participants to talk to
- Writing an interview protocol for the interviewer to follow. The protocol includes questions and probes to use for follow-up
- Hiring a skilled interviewer who knows how to make interviewees feel more comfortable, asks questions in a neutral manner, listens well, and knows when and how to probe for more details
- Getting permission to tape the sessions and have one or more note takers

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## How to conduct a user interview

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## How to conduct a user interview

Three steps in the interview process

There are three steps in the interview process: preparation for the interview, conducting the interview, and analyzing results after the interview. Below, we look at how you should conduct each step of a successful, insightful interview.



### Step 1: Before the interview

Some people believe that conducting an interview is just like having a conversation with other people, and that it doesn't require a lot of preparation. But while interviews obviously share similarities with everyday conversations, a good interview requires significant preparation.

Otherwise, your chances of getting valuable insights are limited.

## **Below are the six things you should prepare before conducting a user interview.**

### **1. Set a clear goal**

It's crucial to start each new interview project with a clear understanding of the purpose of your research. It's vital that you know why you want to conduct the interviews and what you want to get out of them. For example, you might want to learn why 50 percent of users who reached the product checkout phase in your ecommerce app abandon the checkout flow.

The following questions will help you formulate a goal for your interviews.

- What do I need to know about our users to make our app better?
- How will that knowledge inform our design process?

**Tip:** Involve the key stakeholders in the process of defining a purpose for your research. You'll add more weight to this activity by getting buy-in from them.

### **2. Make sure the interview is the right tool for the problem you want to solve**

Interviews are not a universal answer to all design challenges. It's vital to know when an interview will work best and when it's better to use other tools. For example, an interview might not be the best tool for finding what color scheme you should choose for your app. It's much better to use user testing for this purpose.



### 3. Decide who to recruit

Recruitment is a vital part of the interview process. It's essential to recruit a representative sample of your target audience. Start with your user personas and try to find interview participants that match them. Decide whether you want to have only one particular group of users or users from many different groups.

When it comes to the number of people you should interview, there are no hard and fast rules. You can apply the principle established by Jakob Nielsen for usability testing, and start out by interviewing five participants. If you notice that by participant number five you've stopped getting any new insights, you probably don't need to recruit any more participants.

### 4. Design your interview questions

If you want just one piece of advice for your interview, this is it: don't start an interview without a prepared discussion guide. A discussion guide is a document in which you formulate the questions you want to ask your participants. Your discussion guide should be closely tied to the purpose of your research, and the questions should be selected according to your learning goal.

*"If you want just one piece of advice for your interview, this is it: don't start an interview without a prepared discussion guide."*

At the same time, just because you have a discussion guide doesn't mean you need to ask all of the questions in it during the interview. Think of it more like a reference document, a "skeleton" for your discussion, rather than a script. During the interviews, the guide should serve as a reminder of the questions you want to ask or topics you want to cover.

Discussion guides typically consist of two types of questions—general and product-specific. General questions are questions you ask during the introduction part. These might include:

- Could you tell me about your habits?
- What apps/websites do you use on a regular basis?

Product-specific questions are focused on getting specific details about user behavior. These questions might include:

- What's the hardest part of [the task]?
- What can we do to make [the task] easier?

Keep the following tips in mind when preparing a question script:

- **Keep the script reasonably short.** Write down all your questions and read them out loud. If it takes more than ten minutes to read through them, your script is too long, and you need to cut it down.
- **Write clear questions.** Don't use terms in your questions that might be unfamiliar to the user.
- **Avoid long questions.** The questions you ask should be relatively brief and easy to understand. People can't retain a lot of information in their short-term memory, so avoid long sentences with a lot of details.
- **Don't ask questions about the future.** When you ask questions like, "When we release [product] on the market, will you purchase it?", people are likely to say yes just to make you feel good. In reality, they simply don't have any idea.
- **Test your discussion guide.** Conduct a trial run for your interview with one of your peers, and ask them the questions from your guide. This will help you understand whether or not you can get valuable insights based on the answers you get.
- **Iterate your discussion guide.** Refine the guide based on results of real interview sessions.

## 5. Create a good environment

When it comes to in-person interviews, the physical space you choose to use for the interview will have a direct impact on the results of your interview session. People often behave according to their environment.

Just imagine an empty room with white walls, two chairs, a table, and a mirrored wall which shields the observers on the other side. Such a room looks more like a place for interrogations rather than a place for discussions. It will be hard for an interviewee to relax in such an environment.

## 6. Don't conduct the interview alone

It's best to conduct an interview with a partner. There are three significant benefits of having two people facilitating the interview together:

- **Distribute responsibilities.** One person can ask questions while the other takes notes.
- **Support each other in real time.** The person who takes notes can also think about any questions that the first person forgot to ask, and remind them about it.
- **Gain even more valuable insights.** When two people conduct an interview together, they can share and discuss their thoughts and impressions after the interview.



## Step 2: During the interview

Once you've prepared, the next step is to ensure that the actual user interview goes according to plan. Below are 14 steps to take to ensure that you get the valuable insights you're looking for.

### 1. Put yourself in a positive mood

Before you step into the meeting room, take a deep breath and smile. It's a proven fact that smiling creates a more positive attitude, and since positive attitudes are contagious, your interviewee will likely feel better, too.

### 2. Stick to the semi-structured interview format

When it comes to selecting a format for interviewing people, there are two extremes:

- **Completely structured interviews.** This is an interview where all questions are prescribed. Such interviews look very much like a survey.
- **Completely unstructured interviews.** This is an open dialog between people, and which rarely brings valuable insights. As Steve Portigal, author of the book *Interviewing Users* says, "To learn something new requires interviewing, not just chatting."

*To learn something new requires interviewing, not just chatting.*

Semi-structured interviews lie between the two extremes. They're a type of interview where you prepare a set of topics you want to cover (recorded in your discussion guide), but where you can change the order of questions depending on how the conversation evolves.

The semi-structured interview approach has two significant advantages:

- **It feels natural to people.** Unlike a scripted interview, the semi-structured interview doesn't create the feeling of a police interview.
- **Flexibility for topic flow.** It gives the interviewer an opportunity to explore topics that they had not previously thought relevant. It's possible to gain additional valuable insights by elaborating on answers and asking follow-up questions.



### 3. Build rapport with interviewee

The quality of the interview will suffer if you aren't able to put the interviewee at ease and earn their confidence. That's why your goal at the beginning of an interview is to make the interviewee feel comfortable. It's not that hard to achieve this goal. Here's what you need to do:

- **Make them feel welcome.** Greet your interviewee by name, offer them a drink, and initiate friendly small talk before moving to the main topic of discussion.
- **Learn a little bit about the interviewee.** Ask questions like, "Can you tell me about yourself," and let them freely talk about their background, lifestyle, or technology habits. Such questions are both ice-breakers and a great way to get some context about your interviewees. The information you get might be helpful for the future analysis.
- **Use positive body language.** Use non-verbal cues to make them feel comfortable, such as maintaining eye contact and smiling. Watch your body language for negative cues, such as fidgeting or crossing your arms.
- **Explain the purpose of the interview.** Describe what you are trying to achieve and explain how you plan to use the results. The point of this is to give the interviewee more context about why you want to speak to them, and what sort of questions they might be asked so they don't feel confused during the interview.
- **Keep it about the product.** Make sure the interviewee doesn't feel like they're being tested in any way. If you plan to test a prototype of a product during the interview, make it clear to the interviewee that you're testing the prototype, not them.

#### **4. Resist the urge to judge or educate your interviewee**

The foundation for conducting a good interview is to keep an open mind and be truly curious about the participant's perspective. Your interviewees are there to teach you something, not the other way around! It's counterproductive to judge your interviewee or try to educate them during the interview. You have a limited amount of time for the session (usually, no more than one hour) and your goal is to use it effectively. Elicit as much information as you can during this time.

#### **5. Ask permission before audio or video recording**

While the most common form of data collection during interviews is note taking, audio or video recording can also be an excellent way to collect information. Of course, any time you want to record your participants you need to ensure that they are okay with that. Always ask for permission before starting the recording, and be ready to abandon it at any point during your interview if your interviewee feels uncomfortable.

#### **6. Start off with the easy questions**

Start each interview session with simple questions. These might be three to five lightweight questions from the general section of your discussion guide that you ask before moving to the main topics you want to cover.

Such questions are intended to act as a warm-up for the interviewee, and make it easier for the interviewer to create a connection. But make sure that the questions are relevant to the broader theme of the session.



## 7. Prioritize open-ended questions

Open-ended questions allow the interviewee to respond in their own words and allow them to share richer, qualitative details. Closed-ended questions can be answered with a simple “yes” or “no.” It’s hard to imagine any great discussion that only consists of closed-ended questions. You’ll have a better chance of getting valuable insights by asking open-ended questions. Such questions start with who, what, when, where, why, and how. Here are a couple of examples to help get you started:

- What was your experience with [product]?
- Where did you get stuck?
- How would [product] fit into your workflow?
- Who did you turn to when you needed help? Why?

## 8. Ask follow-up questions

Don’t settle for the first answer you get. Always try to dig deeper to understand the interviewee’s point of view. Try to ask follow-up questions when users describe a particular case or problem.

**Tip:** Use the “Five Whys” technique. This technique is called “Five Whys” because you literally ask “why” five times to understand the interviewee’s intention or point of view. For example, imagine you ask a question like, “Why do you like this ecommerce app?”. Your interviewee may respond, “Because it offers the products I need.”

You can stop here and mention product range as a primary reason for using a product, but you won’t have the whole story. In fact, without asking “why” again, your ideas about the interviewee’s motivation might be completely incorrect. Maybe a user likes a specific type of product that she can find only in this particular app, or perhaps she loves the price on products. The only way to know the right answer is by asking another “why?”



## **9. Use the critical incident method**

It's a well-known fact that people are really bad at recalling situations that happened in the past. Human memory is fallible, and people are notorious for adding details to make the story more compelling. But when you need to collect accurate information about user experience, the critical incident method can help.

The critical incident method is to ask users to recall a specific situation from the past in which they faced a terrible or excellent experience. Unlike general situations from the past that the user might easily forget, the extreme cases are often more vivid in users' minds, meaning they can remember some specifics that will be valuable for you. This is why the critical incident method is especially great for exploratory interviews.

## **10. Avoid leading questions**

Leading questions are questions that frame the interviewee's mind around a particular answer. It's essential to avoid or at least minimize the number of leading questions you ask, otherwise the results of your interview sessions will be too biased and you'll hear only what you want to hear.

“How often do you watch Netflix?” is an example of a leading question. By asking such a question, you assume as fact that your interviewee is an active Netflix user. It's much better to ask questions in a neutral manner.

So, if you want to know about user preferences regarding video streaming services, you can start with asking a question like, “Do you have any experience with any video streaming services?”

## **11. Clarify interviewee responses in real time**

When you're not quite sure what an interviewee is talking about, ask them for a clarification. Don't leave clarification questions to the end of the user interview session, because it'll be hard to recreate the original context. Don't be afraid to ask interviewees to elaborate on their responses. This pairs well with asking follow up questions.

## **12. Minimize note-taking**

Written notes are one of the common artifacts we get from an interview session, and they are extremely valuable in analyzing the results of an interview. So it might sound strange to suggest minimizing your note taking. But there's a good reason for it—it's almost impossible to pay full attention to your interviewee and take notes at the same time.

If you ask questions and take notes at the same time, there's a good chance that you'll have a hard time managing the interview. Also, when you focus too much on note taking, such behavior creates a strong sense of an authority interview, not a regular conversation. Try to note only the most important information or questions you want to ask for further analysis. This is why it's a great idea to have an interview partner taking notes and managing any recording devices while the other person is conducting the interview.

## **13. Don't be afraid of silence**

When you conduct an interview, try not to fear silent pauses in the conversation. It's natural for people to fill the silence with words, but don't fall into the trap of trying to fill the pauses yourself. Instead, give the interviewee the opportunity to provide additional information.

## **14. Finish with a wrap-up summary**

At the end of the interview, you should give your respondent a sense of closure. Don't just stop the conversation abruptly when you reach the last question in your interview guide. Instead, give an interviewee an opportunity to ask questions. After that, thank your interviewees for taking their time.

## **Step 3: After the interview**

Once you've completed your interview, it's time to analyze your responses. This is when the insights from your interviewees will become especially clear. Below are three steps you need to take.

### **1. Conduct a retrospective**

Ideally, after each interview you conduct, try to reflect on how well you managed it and what you can do to improve the quality of your interviews in the future.

### **2. Structure the information**

The next step is to analyze what your users have told you. You'll probably have a massive amount of data—dozens of notes, video recordings, and personal impressions. Most of this data will be qualitative rather than quantitative. As a result, it might feel overwhelming.

Hopefully, two common tools can help you structure the data:

- **A report with specific sections.** The goals you stated at the beginning of your user interview project and the discussion guide you prepared can be good foundations for your reports—they will help you filter through the key data.
- **Mind maps.** This type of diagram can help you structure and present your data in a visual and easily accessible format. It can help you to quickly identify links between topics and spot connections that may not have been obvious before.

### 3. Combine interviews with other techniques

After analyzing the interview results, you might feel like you have a pretty good understanding of what you need to do with your product, and it might be tempting to start implementing your insights right away. But it's better to resist this temptation, because it's essential to first validate your results.

The great thing about user interviews is that they can be combined with other research methods, such as usability testing or user surveys. By combining interviews with other techniques, you'll be able to either validate or disprove your hypothesis while also gaining additional insights about your objective



# 3 Tips for user interviewing

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## Tips for user interviewing

### Don't ask leading or directed questions

Leading questions can take a few different forms – all bad. The most obvious form is a leading question designed to elicit a specific response.



If you are asking those kinds of leading questions, you aren't ready for user interviewing or you are not open to honest feedback. But a lot of other leading questions are because people almost get nervous with asking stark, non-leading, open-ended questions.

Instead of just asking the question, people will ask the question and then suggest a possible answer or two. A common, benign example would be, “Got plans for the weekend? Maybe watching some football?”

What happens is that you have prejudiced the answer by priming thoughts in a person’s mind. You want answers to be as expansive as possible. This means don’t provide users with possible answers.

But in this example, we have now primed a person to think about football. They will spend a noticeable amount of time thinking about whether or not they are actually going to watch football, and if so, they’ll tell you about it.

People do this all the time. It’s almost a nervous tick, like they can’t just ask a stark question. Embrace asking stark questions. This is a user interview, not a chat with a friend.

## **Don’t ask people what they want**

Users don’t know what they want. Don’t ask them for suggested features or solutions. They’re not professional designers.

Focus on trying to find out users’ problems and what they are trying to do.

Your questions should not be, “what would you like us to do?” Rather they should be, “what are you trying to do?”

Think of this possibly apocryphal example from Henry Ford:

“If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses.”

Proper user interviewing would have discovered that people may have wanted faster forms of transportation or more reliable ones or ones that don't require so much feeding and upkeep. They may have also needed ways to move bigger and heavier things.

Users aren't designers. They can't conceive of the unbuilt. Our job as designers is to find out what people's problems are, and then build the future.

## **Ask open-ended questions**

Open-ended questions, especially when you are doing foundational user research, are a key to finding out what people are trying to do and what their problems are.

Avoid yes/no questions, which I detail more below. You want to ask open-ended questions because they yield expansive responses.

Also avoid vague words. Vague words are open to interpretation, which might lead you to be misled by someone's response. For example, asking a user "is this a useful feature?" could give you bad data.

What makes for a useful feature? Many people will answer that question from the lens that, "I'm sure someone will find this feature useful, therefore it is a useful feature." But that's not what you were trying to find out. You want to know if this particular user finds this feature useful.

Instead, ask something like "is this feature valuable to the work you do right now?"



## **Don't ask yes/no questions**

Occasionally, you may need to ask a yes/no follow-up question for clarification, but in general, user interviewing is specifically to get expansive responses. Asking yes/no questions will rarely yield good, detailed, expansive responses.

You may not even be intending to ask a yes/no question, but if you give people the opportunity to respond with one word, they often will.

For example, you may ask, “do you send text messages,” thinking that the person will respond that they do and then detail what kinds of text messages they send and to whom. But it's actually very likely they'll just respond with “yes.”

Instead, if what you are trying to figure out is what kinds of messages they send and to whom, you need to be direct. “What kinds of text messages do you send?”

If the person sends text messages, they'll detail what they send and why. If the answer is that they do not send text messages, they'll tell you that, and there is a good chance that they'll explain why they don't send text messages.

## **Don't make assumptions. Ask the stupid questions.**

You can miss a lot of key information if you don't ask basic questions. This often happens because you assume you already know the answer.

Also, basic questions are a great way to ease a person into an interview. I tend to start every user interview with basic questions that a user doesn't have to think much about. This will get them talking and comfortable. And, hey, maybe I'll learn something I didn't know before.

For instance, we start user interviews with a question like, “What does your organization do and how does your role fit in there?”

I largely know the answers to these two questions, but I’ll often learn additional details and nuance that I didn’t already know. This may come in handy for follow-up questions or when I’m putting together the user scenario. It’s also an easy question for anyone to answer, helping to make them more comfortable.

## **Have a set of questions you use every time**

For your user interviews to be methodologically valid, you need to use the same base set of questions every time. Do not wing it and just ask random stuff when you interview people.

Coming up with a good set of user interview questions can take time. It sometimes takes me hours, and I have a ton of old user interview scripts to look to for inspiration. I may also test a script out on a few users and refine it before taking it out to a large set of users.

Our user interview scripts range from about 15 questions to upwards of 40. This will depend on how complex the product is, or if we are doing an interview about the entire product or just part of the product.

Previously I mentioned that user interviews are more valuable earlier on in the user-centered design process. I find that when people don’t have a good set of questions and are kind of just asking generic stuff it’s because they are using it later on in the product development process, just trying to see if they can get people to say that they think a prototype is interesting.

Ideally, you want to test a prototype with an actual task list to verify that users can do what they need to do with your product. You will follow up that usability study with an interview and survey, but user interviewing cannot take the place of testing. An interview alone is not an appropriate way to get feedback on a prototype.

## **Ask the same question from multiple angles**

A lot of people need to be deep in a user interview before they can really get to the core of what they think. I have found that asking the same general question from multiple angles can yield a lot more useful data than just asking it once.

The key to doing this is to spread these questions throughout your user interview script. Putting them back to back to back will not go well. Rather you want to ask the question once, ask a bunch more questions to get the person thinking deeper and then ask a similar question from another angle to see if you can get deeper information. You may repeat this one or two more times.

I only do this with a question or two that gets at the heart of what we are trying to discover with this user research.

## **Never mention other users**

This is another way to prejudice answers from users. Never mention how other users find using your product.

Here is an example: “A lot of people say it’s easy to use this search engine. Do you agree?”

You've just told them that a lot of people find this easy to use. Basically, you are asking, "are you smart like these other people or are you dumb and unable to figure this out?" Of course a person is going to respond that they agree!

Instead, ask a simple, stark question like this: "Describe your experience with this search engine."

Notice how this question is also open ended and can go in a lot of different directions. The version that mentions other users is a closed question that is basically a yes/no question.

## **Ask follow up questions**

While you should ask the same set of base questions with every user, you should also ask follow up questions if they can help clarify what a user has said and if they can give you additional insight.

If it makes a lot of sense to immediately ask a follow-up question, I will. Other times, a user will say something that makes me think of another question I want to ask, but I don't want to interrupt the user interview script.

I'll write down what I want to ask and then ask it later on when it makes more sense.

## **Make note of the questions that don't work**

Some questions are duds. They may not elicit much information. Other questions just confuse people. Occasionally you may have a questions that causes people to react negatively.

Even if you commit to not swapping out a user interview question during a round of user interviewing, you should make note of which of your questions don't work so that you can make sure not to use them in future user research.

## **Embrace silence**

One of the reason that I insist on always taking notes or filling out empathy maps while I interview people is to force myself to slow down. Even if I am with a dedicated note taker, I also take my own notes. This is critical.

The reason is that if an interviewer has nothing else to do besides ask questions, she will move too quickly and often not let a person fully think through an answer.

Embrace awkward silences. Do not fill them. Never make small talk during this.

Most of the time, the person being interviewed will fill the awkward silence with more info. I often find the best information comes out during these silences.

Find something to do while you interview people that forces you to slow down and process information.

## **Don't be afraid of the truth**

When you look at the questions a lot of people ask of their users, it's clear they are afraid of the truth. User interview questions should cause users to think and reflect and that may mean they have some rather negative things to say about your product.

If you find that your user interviewing is not yielding a lot of good data, it may be because you are afraid of the truth, and you are asking a lot of softball questions.

Don't be afraid to ask really direct questions, such as, "what do you like least about this product?" Or, perhaps even scarier if your product has a subscription component, "if you were to leave us, what would be the number one reason?"

You want to know the truth. Ask the uncomfortable questions.

## **Be neutral**

If you can't, user research isn't for you.

If you are doing user research as a consultant on someone else's product, it's pretty easy to be neutral, but many people struggle to be neutral when it is their own company or product.

This is one reason a lot of product managers don't make for good interviewers. They are too invested in their own work and will often look to conduct research to validate what they have already done – instead of doing user research to find out the truth.

Part of being neutral is not defending your product or company when someone says something during an interview. Your job during a user interview is to be a psychologist intently listening to someone's problems and not a PR person looking to spin everything.

## **Ask a user to show you**

If a user mentions something interesting that you could actually see, have the user show it to you. I was recently doing some user interviewing about the reporting capabilities in one of our products, and a user mentioned that they take the data from our product and have a designer create a custom report, instead of using the built-in reports.

Seeking to better understand why this is, I asked the user to send us the report they have their designer create and also the report with the same data as it comes out of our system.

The data in both versions of the report was the same. But the user wanted a very stripped down, layperson friendly version that we didn't offer. Seeing both versions side by side as we talked through it was invaluable.

This is also why interviewing people in person is superior to remote. When you go in person, a user interview can begin to morph into a kind of light contextual inquiry.

## **One at a time if possible**

Focus groups are fairly worthless. Try to prevent your user interviews from devolving into focus groups.

Ideally, you are interviewing one person at a time. Sometimes a company will want you to talk to a few people at a time, and you may not be able to talk them out of this. Group dynamics will take over, and you won't get an accurate picture of everyone's true feelings, but you should at least get an accurate picture of at least one person at that company's true feelings.

Interviewing 2-3 people at a time from one company isn't that bad. It will, however, make transcription incredibly difficult. You will also need more note takers and more people to help out with empathy maps and user scenarios.

One key tip is to encourage everyone in the room to answer the question. Don't let one person speak for the whole room.

## **Record the interview if possible**

Not everyone will agree to be recorded, but you should always ask and try. Audio recordings at a minimum. Video is even better.

Video is particularly valuable if there is a chance that this interview turns into light contextual inquiry where a person starts showing you how they use your product (or similar products).

Recording interviews means that people who didn't attend the interview can see and hear for themselves.

## **Take detailed notes**

Recording or not, I always take very detailed notes, filled with direct quotes. I don't reference the recordings regularly. I record interviews mostly for other people to listen or watch. Recordings are also needed if you want to transcribe the interview.

Good, detailed notes complete with direct quotes and tagging of key themes will make synthesizing the data later on much quicker.

We also make empathy maps and user scenarios of every user interview we conduct. We try to do these live during the interview, if possible, but having detailed notes to immediately refer to after the interview makes this process much easier and faster.

## **Synthesize findings and make recommendations**

The synthesis of your findings and the recommendations you provide are more valuable than the raw materials you have created. Most people are not interested in reading your notes or listening to a recording.



What people are ultimately paying you for is strong synthesis of all of the data you collected and actionable recommendations. This synthesis should come with actionable recommendations. This is the first step to converting user research to change.

It used to be that people made 100-page reports of findings. No one wants to read those. Don't make one.

What I have found that works the best is a deck of findings that has a lot of bullets and annotated screenshots/photos. I may also provide a written executive summary memo of my findings for people who want to read over something relatively quickly and get the lay of the land.

We also create synthesized empathy maps and user scenarios from all of our rounds of user research. These are another high-level, digestible artifact that non-user research experts can understand and utilize.

# 4

## User Interview Questions

# 4

## User Interview Questions

The following is a list of questions that you can use throughout the customer and product development process. Asking open-ended questions is critical to keeping the conversation going and creating an opportunity for the person to tell you stories about their lives that could lead you to critical insights and ideas.



### A few tips to keep in mind:

- Don't try to ask all of these, prioritize based on your research goals.
- For each answer, be sure to ask “why” or “why not” to dig deeper.

## Customer Intro Questions

These questions are aimed to fill in any gaps about the person's day to day that may not have been answered in the participant questionnaire, screener, or survey.

- What does your typical weekday look like?
- When do you normally first use the Internet in a typical day?
- What are some of the apps and websites you use the most?
- Tell me about your role at your company?
- Any lifestyle questions that are related to your topic/product.

## Topic Specific Questions

These questions are aimed to help you understand and learn about the problems that people have with the topic / problem that your product aims to solve.

- What's your relationship like with [topic ... e.g. money, fitness, etc]
- How do you currently go about [problem / task]?
- How much time do you typically spend on [problem / task]?
- Tell me about the last time you tried to [problem / task]?
- What do you like about how you currently [problem / task]?
- What is the biggest pain point related to [problem / task]?

- Why do you keep doing [problem / task] ... why is it important to you?
- What type of work arounds have you created to help you with this?
- What's the hardest part about [problem / task]?
- What are you currently doing to make this [problem / task] easier?
- How does this [problem / task] impact other areas of your life / work?
- What other products or tools have you tried out?
- Have you paid for any of these other products or tools?
- How did you hear about these other products or tools?
- What do you like or dislike about these other products or tools?
- Are you looking for a solution or alternative for [problem / task]?

## **Product Opportunity Questions**

These questions are meant to be used if you plan to show someone a demo, feature, or prototype and get their feedback and reaction. The goal of these questions is to help validate your solution.

- What do you think of this product? (meant to be asked at the homepage to gauge initial reaction)

- Why do you keep doing [problem / task] ... why is it important to you?
- What type of work arounds have you created to help you with this?
- What's the hardest part about [problem / task]?
- What are you currently doing to make this [problem / task] easier?
- How does this [problem / task] impact other areas of your life / work?
- What other products or tools have you tried out?
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- Are you looking for a solution or alternative for [problem / task]?

## **Product Opportunity Questions**

These questions are meant to be used if you plan to show someone a demo, feature, or prototype and get their feedback and reaction. The goal of these questions is to help validate your solution.

- What do you think of this product? (meant to be asked at the homepage to gauge initial reaction)

- Why do you think someone would use this product?
- Can you see yourself ever using this product?
- Why do you think you can trust this product?
- How do you think this product is going to help you?
- Would you use this product today?
- What might keep people from using this product?
- What's the most you would be willing to pay for this product?
- Does this remind of you any other products?

## **Product Reaction Questions**

These questions are meant to help identify suggestions or ideas that the person has. Ideally these are asked after the person has used the product or you've walked them through doing a few tasks.

- What's most appealing about this product?
  - What's the hardest part about using this product?
  - Was there anything surprising or unexpected about this product?
  - What could be done to improve this product?
  - Was there anything missing from this product that you expected?
  - Would you keep using this product after what you saw today?
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Thank  
You