

METHOD

INTERVIEW PREPARATION



WHY prepare for an interview

Time with users is precious, we need to make the most of it! While we always must allow room for the spontaneous, blissful serendipity of a user-guided conversation, we should never abdicate our responsibility to prepare for interviews. Especially in following up with users (after testing, etc.), it is imperative to plan your interviews. You may not get to every question you prepare, but you should come in with a plan for engagement.

HOW to prepare for an interview

Brainstorm questions

Write down all of the potential questions your team can generate. Try to build on one another's ideas in order to flesh out meaningful subject areas.

Identify and order themes

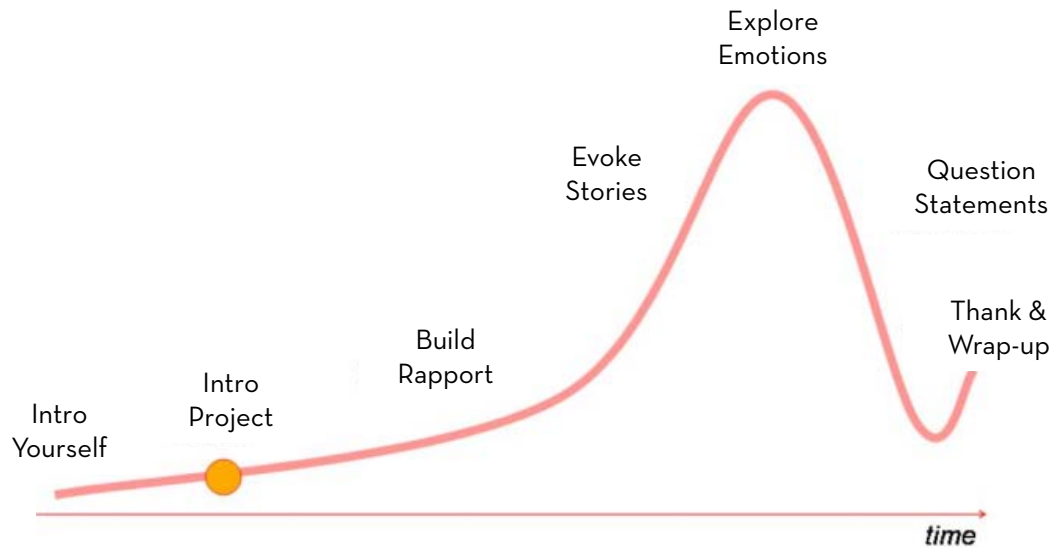
Similar to "grouping" in synthesis, have your team identify themes or subject areas into which most questions fall; once you've identified the themes of your question-pool, determine the order that would allow the conversation to flow most naturally. This will enable you to structure the flow of your interview, decreasing the potential for hosting a seemingly-scattershot interaction with your user.

Refine questions

Once you have all the questions grouped by theme and order, you may find that there are some redundant areas of conversation, or questions that seem strangely out of place. Take a few moments to make sure that you leave room in your planning to ask plenty of "why?" questions, plenty of "tell me about the last time you ___?" questions, and plenty of questions that are directed at how the user FEELS.

METHOD

INTERVIEW FOR EMPATHY



WHY interview

We want to understand a person's thoughts, emotions, and motivations, so that we can determine how to innovate for him or her. By understanding the choices that person makes and the behaviors that person engages in, we can identify their needs and design for those needs.

HOW to interview

Ask why. Even when you think you know the answer, ask people why they do or say things. The answers will sometimes surprise you. A conversation started from one question should go on as long as it needs to.

Never say “usually” when asking a question. Instead, ask about a specific instance or occurrence, such as “tell me about the last time you ____”

Encourage stories. Whether or not the stories people tell are true, they reveal how they think about the world. Ask questions that get people telling stories.

Look for inconsistencies. Sometimes what people say and what they do are different. These inconsistencies often hide interesting insights.

Pay attention to nonverbal cues. Be aware of body language and emotions.

Don't be afraid of silence. Interviewers often feel the need to ask another question when there is a pause. If you allow for silence, a person can reflect on what they've just said and may reveal something deeper.

Don't suggest answers to your questions. Even if they pause before answering, don't help them by suggesting an answer. This can unintentionally get people to say things that agree with your expectations.

Ask questions neutrally. “What do you think about buying gifts for your spouse?” is a better question than “Don't you think shopping is great?” because the first question doesn't imply that there is a right answer.

Don't ask binary questions. Binary questions can be answered in a word; you want to host a conversation built upon stories.

Only ten words to a question. Your user will get lost inside long questions.

Only ask one question at a time, one person at a time. Resist the urge to ambush your user.

Make sure you're prepared to capture. Always interview in pairs. If this is not possible, you should use a voice recorder—it is impossible to engage a user and take detailed notes at the same time.