Figure 3.9. SAMPLE SURVEY DESIGN/EXECUTION: Introduction to Interviewing

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INTRODUCTION TO INTERVIEWING

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BUILDING A GOOD INTERVIEWING RELATIONSHIP

The interview is the key component of any survey. Survey questionnaires are designed with great care to ensure that the data collected meet the objectives of the survey. These questionnaires, however, are only as good as the interviewer's skill in obtaining the respondent's cooperation.

Interviewer/Respondent Inter-relationship

The first step in the interview process is setting up a friendly relationship with the respondents and gaining their cooperation.

This relationship with the interviewer usually is more mportant to the respondents than the content of the questions asked. Most people like to talk to someone who is friendly and supportive, interested in what they say, and who never criticizes or disagrees with them.

An interviewer who projects a positive, professional, yet receptive attitude will create an atmosphere conducive to the collection of accurate, complete and relevant answers. Experience has shown there are several ways you can promote respondent receptiveness:

1. *Overcome barriers in the respondent's mind by being sensitive to their concerns*, including those not verbally expressed. For example, certain respondents might be suspicious that the information requested may be used to their disadvantage. They may be embarassed by what may be perceived to be a "socially incorrect" answer or that they will not know the "right" answer to your questions, or concerned that the interview will take up a lot of time.

   To reassure respondents, you must first identify their concerns. Then address these concerns with a concise and honest explanation of the purpose and nature of the survey, how a respondent is selected, the confidential nature of the interview, the beneficial uses of the research findings, what is expected of the respondent during the interview, and how long the interview will take.
2. *Stimulate the respondent's interest in the survey by explaining why it is important and worthwhile.* They should also realize, that as a selected respondent, they represent many other people and that the information they provide will be meaningful to the survey results.
3. *Make the respondents feel that the time you spend talking with them will be pleasant.* This means the interviewer must show an understanding of the respondent's situation and point of view. Often this factor alone determines whether or not you will obtain an interview.

Introductory Techniques

The foundation of a good relationship begins with the introduction. The first impression you make, whether on the phone or in person, greatly influences the outcome of the interview. To create the best impression, it is vital to project a professional image that reassures a respondent of the seriousness of your intentions. Your tone of voice, your attitude and, in face to face situations, your mode of dress and smile, should invite co-operation. The respondent sees you first as a person, and only second as a representative of Statistics Canada. At the same time, you must also look upon the respondent as an individual, not just another statistic.

The following are points to keep in mind when introducing yourself:

1. *Tell the respondent who you are and who you represent.* Always begin by introducing yourself by name as a representative of Statistics Canada and, when on a personal interview visit, by presenting your Statistics Canada identification card. If you are conducting a personal interview, you may find that the doorstep is not a very convenient place to carry on a conversation, let alone to establish a friendly relationship. For this reason keep the introduction brief and general.

   Avoid questions that invite negative responses. Instead of asking "May I come in?" say, "I'd like to come in and talk to you about this." Once you are invited, go in quickly and, when possible, be seated to conduct the interview. You are then in a better position to convince respondents of the value of their cooperation. It is easier to say "No thank you" on the doorstep than in the living room.

   For both personal and telephone interviews, if the person you are to interview is not available at the time of your call, introduce yourself and briefly explain the purpose of your call. It is important to establish friendly relations with this intermediary, since the attitude of this person can help or hinder your efforts to make contact with the proper respondent. At times you will need to explain why you cannot interview someone other than the prescribed respondent.
2. *Stimulate the respondent's interest.* The respondent's first reaction is likely to be a mixture of curiosity and the desire to be courteous to a stranger. While this amount of interest is not sufficient to conduct the entire interview, it does allow you time to describe the survey.

   The interviewer's manual for the survey will give you background information. Try to have this information clearly in mind, as it must be explained to the respondent in such a way that it will stimulate interest. Also mention that all answers are confidential; the respondent's name, address, phone number and other infor-

(*continued overleaf*)

mation provided will never be released in any identifiable way.

3. *Don't ask a question that can be answered "No."* Many interviewers find this difficult to do because they have been raised from childhood to politely ask permission. Once you become aware that this method sets you up for refusals, however, you will find it easier to replace your questions with positive statements. For example, instead of asking:

   "May I talk with you now?" or "Is this a convenient time to do the interview?"

   Try saying:

   "I'm hoping I can talk with you now," or "I'd like to do the interview with you now."

4. *Approach each interview as though it will take place right then.* Never assume that the respondent is too busy. Make arrangements to call at a more convenient time only if the respondent suggests this.

   When it is necessary to make an appointment, don't ask when would be a convenient time. Begin by suggesting alternate days and times (preferably times when you work):

   "I could call on Thursday evening."

   After setting the appointment, a nice final touch is to say:

   "I'm looking forward to talking to you."

5. *When respondents are expressing reluctance or hesitation listen closely closely to what they say.* A good technique in active listening is to rephrase what the respondent has said and reflect it back. Everyone appreciates being listened to and if, by chance, there has been a misunderstanding, it can usually be corrected. For example, in a telephone survey, if the respondent says:

   "I don't know about giving information over the phone."

   You may answer:

   "Many people are reluctant to give information over the phone because you can't really be sure you know who you're talking to. So why don't you take down our number? You can check it out with your local operator and you can call us collect just to reassure yourself"

   The respondent may follow your advice or feel reassured enough by the offer to continue, or may indicate that the problem is somewhat different by saying:

   "Well, I think you're probably legitimate but I don't like giving out personal information. I don't know who will use it ..."

   The interviewer should now realize that confidentiality, not the Statistics Canada identity, is the problem and focus on this particular concern.

6. *Answer the respondent's questions.* It is important, however, to listen to the respondent's questions and answer only what he has asked. Unsolicited information may bore the respondent, may be misunderstood, or may even be interpreted as "justifying" your request. Some of the questions respondents ask are:

   "How did you happen to pick me?"

   "Who gave you my name?"

   "I don't know anything about this. Why don't you call someone else?"

   "Why are you doing this survey?"

   "Why is someone from Statistics Canada in Toronto calling me in Huntsville?"

   You should have ready and convincing answers to questions like these. Your training, your survey manual and your supervisor will provide you with the information to answer these questions.

7. Above all, let respondents know you hear them. Too often in the rush to secure an interview, we don't really listen to what is being said. If active listening could be reduced to a single formula, it might be:

   "I understand ...(your concern) ... but ... (I think this is how we can solve it) ...".

Special Telephone Techniques

Over the past few years, the telephone has become an increasingly popular interviewing medium among social and market researchers. Two major trends have had an impact on the growing popularity of the telephone survey: 1) the ever-increasing cost of door-to-door interviewing and 2) the fact that most Canadian households now have telephones.

Field work and sampling costs for telephone surveys are dramatically less than those of surveys with personal interviews. What makes them especially appealing is that data collected by telephone seems, in general, to be of the same quality as data collected from personal interviews.

There are other factors which have influenced the move towards telephone surveying. More households and businesses can be reached in less time. This more rapid completion of field work is often vital to the researcher. As well, repeated call-backs can be made, decreasing the "not at home" element of the non-response rate. A telephone survey (when it is conducted from a centralized interviewing facility) also allows for a closer monitoring of the interviewing process. Problems with questionnaire completion or the response rate can then be identified and corrected early in the survey.

Though the advantages of telephone interviewing are impressive, it also demands special skills. When interviewing by telephone, you must realize that, to the respondent, you are a faceless stranger. Respondents may mistake you for a bill collector, telephone sales-person, or even a burglar "casing" the home for a robbery.

Because the introductory process is hindered by the lack of the usual field aids (physical presence, identification, brochures or letters of introduction, etc.) your voice and your words must convey credibility. You should sound serious, pleasant and confident. Begin by saying: "Hello, my name is ..., and I am calling from ... for Statistics Canada. 'We are doing a survey on ... and I would appreciate your assistance."

Vocal expression, through the use of language, grammar, voice quality, rate of speech and effective enunciation, is the key to creating a positive image over the telephone. Keep these points in mind:

- CLARITY
  Avoid talking with anything (cigarette, chewing gum, pencil) in your mouth. Speak directly into the mouthpiece with your mouth about one inch away.
- ENUNCIATION
  The English language is full of phonetic similarities –- T and D, P and B, M and N. Clear enunciation will help avoid misunderstandings and the need to repeat yourself.
- RATE OF SPEECH
  The basic rate of speech is 120 words per minute. If you speak too rapidly, people start listening to your rate of speech rather than to what you are saying. Speaking too slowly also irritates listeners – it keeps them hanging on to every word. When this happens, respondents tend to anticipate what they think you are about to say. Use pauses for emphasis and for regulating the pace of the interview.
- PITCH
  Speech experts say low pitch is desirable because it projects and carries better. It is also more pleasing to the ear. Try lowering your head, since this technique helps to lower the pitch of your voice. Don't raise your voice to high pitches. This results in an irritating sing-song delivery.
- INFLECTION
  Don't talk in a monotone. Use the full range of your voice to make the interview interesting. Rising inflection toward the end of a sentence is very helpful.

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Figure 3.9. SAMPLE SURVEY DESIGN/EXECUTION: Introduction to Interv... (continued 1)

Maintaining Good Public Relations

We must never lose sight of our most important resource – the respondent. With the increase in the number of surveys, not only from Statistics Canada, but also from other statistical agencies, businesses, universities and community organizations, a heavy burden is being placed on respondents. At Statistics Canada we recognize that our present survival and our future growth depend upon respondent goodwill. There is no better way to obtain respondent cooperation and thus maintain our high response rates than through skilled interviewers who are able to build good interviewing relationships.

A good interviewing relationship depends on a well presented introduction and on an understanding of the respondent's concerns and point of view. Rapport is maintained when you show interest in respondents as people rather than solely as a source of information.

For the sake of good public relations, it is equally important that the interview end on a positive note. Respondents should feel that their time was well-spent. Any questions or doubts they have should be cleared up prior to the conclusion of the interview. Show appreciation for their time and cooperation.

Remember... your self-confidence, your ability to make known the importance of the survey and your belief in your role are all subconsciously sensed by the respondent and serve to influence your control of the interview.

Finally, you must remember that you are not alone. Behind you stands the reputation of Statistics Canada. Many countries around the world strive to match our record of consistent performance.

CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

Once the introduction has been successfully handled, you are ready to begin the interview. Your goal is to collect accurate information by using the survey questionnaire according to proven interviewing practices.

Using the Questionnaire

The questionnaire is the basic tool we use to collect survey data. The wording of the questions and the logical question order are important factors in the design of the questionnaire. Because researchers need to combine the data collected from all interviews, it must be collected in a uniform manner. This means that all the people in the sample must be asked the same questions in the same way.

1. *Ask questions exactly as worded on the questionnaire.* Research has shown that even inadvertent or very slight word changes can change the response obtained. If questions are rephrased or response categories are altered by some interviewers, the responses cannot be accurately combined with the responses obtained by interviewers who adhered strictly to the question wording.
2. *Ask questions in the order presented on the questionnaire.* Question sequence is planned for continuity. The sequence is also arranged so that early questions will not adversely affect the respondent's answers to later questions. For these reasons, the interviewer must adhere to the paths directed on the questionnaire.
3. *Ask every question specified on the questionnaire.* Sometimes the respondent, in answering one question, also answers another question appearing later in the interview. However, it is important that every question be asked. To ease this situation, you might say, "You've already told me something about this, but this next section asks ....?" In so doing, you are indicating an awareness of the earlier response, and are asking for the respondent's cooperation in answering again.
4. *Ask questions in a positive manner.* Some interviewers feel uncomfortable when asking certain types of questions and adopt an apologetic attitude reflected by the use of statements such as:

   "You might not want to answer this question, but ..."

   "This question probably won't make much sense to you ..."

   Such statements negatively affect the flow of the interview and have a tendency to change the respondent's answers.

   If you have any questions pertaining to the importance or objectives of any question, check your manual or ask your supervisor for further explanation.
5. *Explain delays between questions when interviewing by telephone.* Some answers will take longer to record than others. Explain to the respondent by saying, "Please excuse the delay, I'm writing down the information you gave me."
6. *Repeat and clarify questions which are misunderstood or misinterpreted.* Questions are phrased to be understood by respondents all over the country, and most of the people you interview will indeed understand them. Occasionally, however, a respondent may misunderstand or misinterpret what is asked. When this happens, repeat the question just as it is written on the questionnaire.

   If you still do not get an appropriate response, you may have to probe.

Probing

Answers must satisfy the questions' objectives as described in the survey instruction manual. However, even the best questionnaire and a willing respondent may occasionally elicit inadequate responses. At times, respondents may not know the answer to the question. They may misunderstand or misinterpret the question and as a result the answer may be incomplete, unclear, or inconsistent with other information. When this happens, interviewers have to probe.

When repeating the question has not produced an adequate response, probe further by asking neutral questions. This technique is meant to obtain fuller and clearer responses. The key word here is "*neutral*." Questions must be asked with care so as not to bias the answer; probing questions must never suggest answers. Examples of neutral questions are:

"I don't understand what you mean."

"Which figure would you say comes closest?"

"Anything else?"

Such questions indicate your interest in obtaining the most complete answers possible. This technique is dependable and fruitful when used correctly.

It is sometimes a good technique for you to appear slightly bewildered by the respondent's answer. Imply in your probe that it might be you who failed to understand. For example, you could say, "I'm not sure what you mean by that – could you tell me a little more?"

This technique arouses the respondent's desire to cooperate with someone who is conscientiously trying to do a good job. But, do not overplay this technique. The respondent should not get the feeling that you don't know when a question is properly answered.

Probing is an art. It must be accomplished in such a way that respondents do not feel their judgement is being questioned. They must not get the impression that the interview is a quiz or a cross-examination.

Respondents also tend to answer in ways they feel will be socially acceptable to the interviewer. If interviewers allow their own values and attitudes to enter the interview, the respondents' answers could well reflect these rather than their own, thus introducing a bias into the survey results.

Respondents must not feel some answers are more "*acceptable*" than others. In general, let nothing in your words or manner imply criti-

(*continued overleaf*)

cism, surprise, approval or disapproval, agreement or disagreement with an answer.

Keys to Good Listening

A good interviewer does more than ask questions. Good listening skills must also be developed. (This is particularly important in telephone interviewing.)

1. *Wait for the respondent to stop speaking before you stop listening.* (This is more difficult during a telephone interview because you cannot see the respondent's facial expressions or gestures which could indicate a pause to collect thoughts.)

   A short pause after each question has the effect of ensuring that the respondent has finished speaking. Pauses in the interview also communicate a mood. A lack of pauses indicates the interviewer is anxious and insecure which tends to make the respondent feel the same.
2. *Indicate that you are listening.* An occasional "Yes, I see", shows that you are still with the respondent and are interested in what is said.
3. *Ask questions if you don't understand something or feel you have missed a point.* Neglecting to do so could cause confusion later in the interview and lead the respondent to feel that you are not really listening.
4. *Don't make assumptions about what the respondents are going to say, or mentally try to finish the sentence for them.* Don't record an entry until the respondent has given you a complete answer.

Recording and Editing the Information

The final step of the interview process is to ensure all the necessary information is legibly recorded. At the end of each interview, check over the questionnaire thoroughly. Scan entries for completion and perform all necessary edits. The basic tasks of the interviewer include communicating the questions to the respondent, maximizing the respondent's ability and willingness to answer the questions, listening actively to determine what is relevant and probing to increase the validity, clarity and completeness of the responses.

Interviewing, then, is not a simple matter of asking questions and recording the answers. There are specific concepts, techniques and principles that must be learned. Be assured that time and experience will help you to develop the skills to conduct excellent interviews.

NON-RESPONSE AND CALL-BACK STRATEGY

In statistical surveys, each selected dwelling, household, person or business in the sample represents several others. One of the principal factors which affects the accuracy and "representativeness" of the survey results is the response rate. If a significant portion of the selected sample does not respond, one can never be sure how their answers might have affected the final results.

Call and Call-Back Strategy

Initial call and call-back procedures greatly affect survey response rates and costs. Use the following suggestions as a guide.

1. Plan your visits/calls so as not to inconvenience respondents (*i.e.*, too early in the morning, mealtime, or too late at night). Be flexible. If you have obviously reached a business or a household at a bad time, arrange to call back at a more convenient time.
2. For visits to the respondent, organize your materials and plan your route carefully. Through efficient organizing and planning, no contacts, call-backs and travelling time can be kept to a minimum.
3. Notice who will be the specified respondent and plan to call when the respondent is most likely to be available.

   For example, if you are to interview a member of the household who is working, try to make your first call in the late afternoon, early evening, or on the weekend when the respondent is most likely to be at home. Similarly, if you are to interview a comptroller for a business survey, try to call in the morning between 9:30 and 12:00 or in the afternoon from 1:00 to 4:00.
4. When unable to contact a respondent, try calling on a different day and at a different hour. For personal interviews, try asking a neighbour about the best time to find someone at the selected dwelling after you have called twice and still can't locate the respondent.

Minimizing Refusals

Although some cases of non-response result from circumstances beyond the interviewer's control (*e.g.*, the selected respondent may be away for the duration of the survey period or may be too ill to be interviewed), in many other cases you should make every effort to secure an interview. Chief among these cases are those concerning respondents who at first refuse to be interviewed. The following are points to keep in mind in your attempts to avoid refusals:

1. When respondents refuse to participate in the survey, it is usually because: 1) they do not have enough information about the survey or our organization, or 2) the timing of the call is wrong. The well-prepared interviewer usually succeeds in obtaining the respondent's cooperation. Be sensitive to the respondent's situation when the timing of a call is not good. Rather than risk a refusal, apologize for the bad timing, and suggest a call-back time.
2. In some cases, the respondent will not be explicit in a refusal (*e.g.*, respondents who insist they are just not interested). When this happens, pick an issue (time, confidentiality, purpose or importance of the survey) and begin to discuss it. This usually has the effect of forcing the respondent to express a more specific concern, one with which you can deal directly.
3. In cases where one or more persons in the household are selected to respond, explain that you must speak to the respondent(s) directly to explain the survey. You should not accept someone else's statement that the selected person is unwilling to participate.

   When all else fails, and you are faced with an adamant and vocal refusal, withdraw politely. Above all, do not allow a tough interview to influence your next call. Remember, you are speaking to a different person each time you interview; it is important to maintain a positive attitude for that next call.

1 Describe concisely the main *statistical* issue that underlies the provision of the information in this Figure3.9.
- Which sentence in this Figure 3.9 do you consider best describes this issue?

2 Discuss critically, from a *statistical* perspective, the opening sentence in the first column (on the first side, page 3.57, of this Figure 3.9): *The interview is the key component of any survey.*.
- Suggest a plausible reason why this statement was included in the information package.

3 Describe brfly the *statistical* issue(s) underlying each of following statements made in this Figure 3.9:
- ..... *as a selected respondent, they represent many other people* ..... [column 2, second paragraph];
- ..... *you will need to explain why you cannot interview someone other than the prescribed respondent* [column 2, third-last paragraph].

(*continued on the fourth side, page 3.56, of Figure 3.8*)