Interviewing for Usability

I214
Spring, 2010
Prof. Van House
Uses of Interviews in Usability

• EARLY: User and task analysis
  – About past and current activity, tools, etc etc.
  – Ask about preferences, perceived needs
  – Evaluation of available tools, services…
  – Including: contextual interviews
    • Watch them do their work, activity and ask about it

• MIDDLE: Usability assessment at various stages of development (formative evaluation)
  – Interview them before and after they use a prototype, competitor, etc.
  – Ask them about a product that they are using, recent experiences…

• LATE: application is up and running (summative evaluation)
Process Overview

- Goals
- [Selection of methods]
- Selection of respondents
  - What’s needed, what’s possible
- Interview logistics
- Content
- Question formulation
  - Exact content, ordering, wording
- Interviews (and revisions)
- Analyzing the data
Goals

• What do you need to know?
• How can you get at this information?
  – What’s possible
    • Including documentation, other forms of data
  – When are interviews useful?
• Validity and reliability issues
  – Recollection and self-reporting
• Measurement issues
  – Conceptualization
  – Operationalization
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Surveys</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F2f, Phone, email, IM, and other interactive media</td>
<td>Self-administered F2f, Mail, Email, web Interviewer-administered</td>
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**Characteristics**

**Interviews**
“Semi-structured”
Can establish relationship with respondent
Can clarify qns, follow up on responses, respond and adjust
Flexible
Time consuming - few, in depth
Hard to analyze
Best for complex topics

**Surveys**
Structured
Easy for them to say no
Cannot clarify or follow up, or adjust – hard to formulate qns & interp answers
Can survey many people
Tend to be superficial – hard to address complex issues
Easy to analyze
Best for straightforward Q&A
Selection of respondents

- Selected list – e.g., specific people w/i organization (not a sample)
- “Sample” – in general:
  - Range of different (relevant) kinds of people
  - Several of each kind
  - Look for people who are good information providers: articulate, observant, cooperative
  - Rule of thumb: keep going until you don’t learn anything more
  - Pros and cons of “key informants”
- “Snowball sample”
Interviewing more than one person at a time?

- **YES:**
  - Couple re family photos
  - Friends re their exchange of photos
  - *Where synergy x them will be useful*

- **NO:**
  - Boss and subordinate(s)
  - *Where they are likely to influence one another in ways that will interfere with your study*

- **Sometimes you can’t avoid it**
  - Get them to talk with one another, not you
  - OR end the formal interview, get rid of the unwanted person, then continue informally
Locating, identifying respondents

- **Ask people for suggestions**
  - “Snowballing”
  - “Follow the actors” – they will lead you to others
    - But probably to people like themselves

- **Pre-qualify via phone or email**
- Look at org charts and the like
- Some interviews will be throwaways
- Be open to the unexpected
- Look for different views
- Be cautious:
  - Managers vs. front-line employees
  - Those whom *they* think you need to talk with
  - People with axes to grind
Logistics

• **You are asking them to do you a favor and give you their valuable time**
• Contact them ahead of time
• Purpose of study, why them, what you want to know
• Scheduling – be flexible; be respectful of their time; be clear how long you need
• Convenient for them
• NOT too many in one day
• *Do your homework* (e.g., we always looked at public Flickr stream ahead of time)
• *End on time* (unless they say OK to do otherwise)
• Thank them afterward
Where to Interview

• Your place
  – Neutral, non-invasive
  – Intimidating?
  – Have tech, set-p, space you need

• Their place
  – See their setting, materials, etc.
  – Convenient for them
  – Comfortable (for them)?
  – Intrusive?
  – Interruptions?

• Remotely
  – Tech > record you can go back to

• Neutral place
Logistics, more

• BRING:
  – Consent & release form(s)
    • Copies for you, plus copies for them to keep
• START WITH:
  – Explanation of research
  – Explanation of confidentiality
• YOU:
  – 2 interviewers sometimes
  – Questioner; note-taker
  – Taping (video, audio) – and still photos (3rd person)
    • What will be done with the tape
    • Offer to turn it off
  – *Make sure everything works, have back-ups*
  – Take judicious – i.e., few -- notes during interview, if you’re the interviewer
    • Key issues, themes
    • Qns to ask later
  – Detailed notes of your own ASAP
    • Tape recorder, laptop
    • Include impressions, physical setting, chance events...
The Interview

• Establish interview partnership
  – “participant” not “subject”
  – Interviewer as “respectful student”
  – A conversation, not an interrogation
    • You are human, too – establish rapport without biasing their responses

• Repeat goals of project and why them
  – Not putting them on the spot
  – “Negative” responses are sought, too!

• Confirm confidentiality
Gaining Trust

• Be honest
• Be interested
• *Judicious* self-disclosure
• Be sympathetic – but not artificially so
  – And not in a way that makes you a partisan in disputes
• Depersonalize conflicts, problems
• LISTEN; ask questions for clarification, but also know when to keep silent
• Be willing to show your ignorance when necessary
• *How you talk about others to them is how they assume you will talk about them to others*
Content: *they must be qualified to answer*

- Respondents’ characteristics – demographics, experience, training… (survey/form?)
- History, experiences
- Opinions, preferences, understandings, reasoning, opinions, feelings… (Why did you x?)
- Recollections of behavior
  - Strength of self-reports
  - Problems with self-reports
  - “Critical incident technique”
- Reactions (“Try this and tell me …”)
Types of interviews

• Unstructured, open-ended
  – Useful when you’re not sure what you want or when what you need is complex
  – May be very time-consuming; indirect
  – May have to go back later
  – Have a list of topics and/or clear goals; maybe some pre-worded questions

• Semi-structured – don’t be obsessive about structure if it interferes with the interview
  – Ordered list of topics, suggested wording, specific formulation of at least some questions
  – Systematic, inclusive

• Structured
  – Systematic, comparable results
  – Specific wording of questions
Interview structure

- Establish rapport – easy questions
- Demographics, history, background
- Specific to general OR General to specific
- *But* let them lead the transitions if possible
  - let them follow their train of thought
  - But not so that you lose needed info
- Focus on areas where they have most to contribute
- End with something easy and congenial
- *Ask them* – *anything else you think I should know? Anything else you think it would be useful for me to know?*
Example: general to specific

• Background
  – Early experience: cameras, content, sharing, archiving

• Current
  – Technology – cameras, computers, websites
  – Content – kinds/subjects of photos [art vs social?]
  – Uses of photos – self and other
  – Archiving

• Flickr
  – Why joined, when, pro account?, # of photos
  – How shared photos before/otherwise?
  – Which photos get uploaded and why
  – Tagging – which, why, for whom
  – Sharing - which, why, with whom
  – Viewing others’ photos
  – Contacts, friends? Kinds of relationships  (not who but what kind of person)
  – Key issues – e.g., Strangers? Privacy?
Developing questions

• Your question/goal - the problem are you investigating
• Breadth, density of info needed
• What people can, will tell you
• Understanding from previous work, study, lit, experience
• Pilot research
  – Understanding develops throughout the study
  – Don’t really know what’s going to happen in interviews until you get started
• What will give substance to report
  – Story line, narrative, chronology
  – Explanations, causality
  – Quotes, anecdotes are useful illustrations
• Be (somewhat) willing to go where interviewee wants to go
Asking good questions

• Your demeanor:
  – Match respondents’ language
  – Match respondents’ behavior, models of their work, their world

• Singular questions – i.e., NOT double-barreled
  – Do you order online? What do you order?

• Clarity

• Watch the assumptions
  – Who do you share your images with? (What if they don’t)
Asking good questions

• Open-ended, neutral
• Non-defensive, non-offensive
• Some possibilities for difficult questions:
  – Devil’s advocate
    • Someone might say... Some have said...
  – Paint a scenario
    • If you were going to x, what would you do...
  – Point to others (but don’t break confidentiality)
    • Some people have described this as... while others say... How would you describe this?
  – Point to events
    • At the last meeting, there was a debate about...
    • I noticed that you...
    • When I looked at your Flickr stream...
Asking Good Questions

• Quoting them
  – “You said you didn’t like to…”
  – “Curating her life?”

• Paraphrasing, reflective listening
  – “Let me be sure I’m clear about this…”
  – “You canceled your account? Or just stopped using it?”
  – “You sound annoyed about that…”

• Probes – follow ups
  – “You said….Could you tell me more…?”
  – “Was this person what you would consider a friend in real life or do you mean what Facebook calls a “friend”? 
  – “After x….then what?”
Specific kinds of questions

- **Critical incident – specific, not general**
  - What did you do the last time...
    - Concrete details
    - Maybe: was this different from the usual?
  - What is this a picture of? Why did you take it? What did you do with it then?
  - Vs generalized present (Weiss)
    - E.g. “How do you share photos?” vs. “the last time you shared some of your photos with someone else, how did you do it?”

- **Hypotheticals**
  - If you found that someone you didn’t know had made you a Flickr contact, what do you think you would do?

- **Counterfactuals**
  - “You said that you consider yourself an art photographer, but the images we’re looking at seem to be casual pictures of your friends..”
Helping them answer (mostly from Weiss p. 75)

- Allowing enough wait time (i.e., silence!): Let them think before answering, finish a thought before you jump in
- Probes: Asking them to:
  - clarify
  - Extend (what next)
  - Fill in detail
  - Identify the actors
  - Explore inner events: cognitive and emotional
  - Make indications explicit ("you’re laughing about that"…)
- Giving support and recognition responses
  - “this is really helpful...” (NOT “I agree”)
Questions that incite a lengthy response from them

- “walk me through”
- “help me to understand”
- “tell me (more) about”
- “talk about xx…”
- “say more about that”
- “what was happening”
- “What were you thinking” (maybe)
Markers

• They subtly correct your statement, wording
  – You say “friend,” they say “contact”

• They make a finer distinction than you do
  – You say “your cameraphone,” they say “my iPhone.”

• Hints at emotions, priorities
  – “But then I’m rather particular about that.”

• Indications they may be opening the door to another topic – perhaps to see if you’re interested
  – “of course, that was before I got sick”
  – “that was before my gender reassignment”
Closing

• *Thank them!*  
• Anything else I should have asked? Anything more you think I should know?  
• How to reach them, how they can reach you  
• What you’re going to do with the results, time frame  

• The going-out-the-door comment  
• Follow-up soon on anything you promised!  
  – E.g., incentives
Audiography, photography, videography

• Both still and video images often useful, for two purposes
  – Your own records
  – Presentations, reporting
    • Interviewer: keep quiet! Give non-verbal listening responses. Minimize “uh-huhs” on tape.

• Audio? Less so – could combine with still images...

• Take the time to get good images

• Ask permission – again and again

• Ask permission for close-ups of belongings

• Let note-taker, videographer, etc. ask questions
Audio/vidiotaping

• Test everything – need good quality image and sound

• Interviewer needs to keep quiet! Limit the “uh-huhs”
  – Use expression, body-language, not verbal assurances

• Ambient noise
Taping and transcribing

• Audiotaping: usually YES
• Videotaping: MAYBE
  – More intrusive
  – More complex logistics

• Transcriptions? Several choices:
  – Descriptions, summaries of key points from each interview
  – Paraphrasing, detailed narrative but not verbatim
  – Verbatim transcripts
    • Illustrative quotes – “constipated cameraphones”
    • New, different topics
    • Articulate statements
Notes on notes: Some practical advice

• Use full terms/phrases, correctly spelled
  – For searching, summarizing x interviews
  – Can use auto-expand or abbreviations that are consistent

• Clarify summary/transcript as needed
  – For others
  – For yourself, later

• Keep DETAILED notes – really!!!!!!
  – Who was interviewed
  – When, by whom
  – Video, audio – done? Files are where? Filenames?
  – Type of interview (if relevant)
  – Releases?
Summarizing Interview Data

• By person
  – Narrative - chronologically
  – By theme
    • Easier for reader to absorb
    • Highlights key points
    • Helps to >> summarization across respondents

• Thematically – summarized x respondents
  – Top x themes, problems, suggestions, whatever
  – Often useful in your notes to identity who said what, who fell into which group
    • “X was identified as a key point by a,b,c, while Y was named by e,f,g, and h.”
Coding and summarizing data

• Qualitative research software
  – Can do much the same using wordprocessing software
• Combining specific codes into more abstract categories (could use card-sorting)
  – E.g., Photos:
    • email, posting to web, posting to photo sharing sites, mailing prints >> distant sharing
    • Showing pictures on laptop or cameraphone, or prints >> co-present sharing
• Counting occurrences (when relevant)
  – “50% of our respondents were quite happy with x, while another 25% hated it…”
  – “We found 3 types of use: 10% of users did x, 50% did y, while the remaining 40% did a mix of x and y…”
What to do with the data

• **Backups of your backups**
• Label tapes/files well!
• *Detailed records* of who was interviewed, when, where, by whom, their contact info, demographics, where your files are...
  – I use spreadsheet
• Keep track of your transcriptions and notes
• **Be obsessive about data – hard to know what you will need later** – and don’t expect to remember later
• Meet confidentiality requirements
Keep Field Notes

• About your experiences in the field
• About your developing thoughts and understandings: your understanding will keep changing
• What have you learned from THIS interview?
• How does it add to, contradict, confirm, etc etc what you have learned so far?
• What does it suggest about:
  – What you need to find out more about
  – WHO you need to talk to?
• Don’t be afraid to add/delete/change questions
Judd Anh 2:23.05
Interviewer: 

Generally takes pics.
Has 2 digital cameras – one big & clunky, and a camera borrowed from a research project the size of a credit card (bad quality)
Has always had a camera – first was an SLR
Freq of pics: wishes he had camera most of time, forgets most of time, usually spec occasions
Considers himself a casual photographer
Takes lots of pics but only pays attention to a few
Leaves pics on computer and occasionally browses
No kids in sphere
Diff in photo habits: film & development pricy w/film camera, not a concern w/digital. Snaps away, can delete them immediately; no longer uses a film camera because it’s broken, last used 3 years ago
How often looks at pics taken: once every other week. Looks at photos brother sent him via G-photo.
Doesn’t look at pics he’s taken often. Puts pictures of wedding arrangements on site. Uses Picasa 2 and loves it.
Rarely gets prints. Shoe box under coffee table w/his & Tamar’s pics.
Never prints digital photos.

CAMERA Phone
Did not have one before the Nokia.
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### 35 Quotations for: Flickr

- 52:5 Re film: "Individual reactions... (32:32)
- 52:6 [nwh1] We are seeing in Flickr... (41:41)
- 64:2 2. Showed Flickr photos of hai... (6:6)
- 66:48 Q: you have flickr, but you do... (455:457)
- 69:2 They're on Flickr, another cha... (21:59)
- 69:19 told Matthew I was going to a... (94:95)
- 69:41 V. You have Flickr, but you do... (230:231)
- 70:2 Has 6680 from Symbian workshop... (12:18)
- 70:35 When it was running It was a v... (129:140)
- 70:44 Take a hundred photos and maybe... (18:18)
P70: Mike W 3-30-06 enriched.txt - 70:44 [Take a hundred photos and maybe..] (18:18)  (Nancy)
Codes:  [Flickr]
No memos

Take a hundred photos and maybe 10 will be interesting. I'll put those on Flickr.

P70: Mike W 3-30-06 enriched.txt - 70:48 [Yes. But I'm starting to make ..] (149:149)  (Nancy)
Codes:  [connecting web content] [Flickr] [multimodality]
No memos

Yes. But I'm starting to make everything public. Because I have much more personal photos on my regular site than anything that's on Flickr. I'm really into the whole connecting aspect of web content.

P70: Mike W 3-30-06 enriched.txt - 70:49 [If you still had MMM2 would you..] (177:178)  (Nancy)
Codes:  [Flickr] [MMM] [online sharing]
No memos

If you still had MMM2 would you use?
Yeah if I had phone compatible with.. Unless flickr had all the aspects. I suppose it would have to have an advantage over something flickr. Flickr has been evolving and getting better since last summer. So now I need to weigh the options. Why use both... I want all my photos in as few places as possible.

P70: Mike W 3-30-06 enriched.txt - 70:51 [When did you start your flick ..] (157:161)  (Nancy)
Codes:  [Flickr] [MMM]
No memos

when did you start your flick acct?
Probably a year ago.

While you still had the 7610?
Yes, I didn't really mix them or anything.
Spreadsheet