

## Interviewing in Phenomenology Research

Using iterative interviews to collect phenomenological data

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Hi, I'm Dr. Karen Johnson.

I'm with the University of Phoenix where I work as a university research methodologist, and as a dissertation to publication reviewer.

Today, we're gonna talk briefly about interviewing in phenomenological research studies.

To gather data for phenomenological research, researchers use initiating, prompting, and probing questions in a series of reflective interviews.

These interviews are typically with a small number of people who share or who have shared a lived experience.

The purpose of collecting data, as we know, is to answer the overarching research question of the study.

These research questions in phenomenology typically ask something like, what is the lived experience of, whatever group of people we're interested in knowing more about, who experienced a specific phenomenon, and the research question should mention that phenomenon.

And how do the people involved, the participants, internalize and make sense of the phenomenon? In other words, the researcher wants to know how has the shared experience shaped their lives, or the meaning they assign to the experience.

We know the research question is the main question or questions of the study.

These are not the interview questions.

We don't ask the participants the specific research question.

We ask a series of interview questions that might answer research questions, such as some of those I have listed here.

I'm gonna look a little bit at the last one because that's a particular interest of mine.

If a research study had a research question of, how do the members of a Parkinson's support group find meaning in their shared experiences of living through the progressive Parkinson's phases? We might use only a few initiating questions in the first interview, but we would follow those by prompting and probing questions, in both that first interview and later in more reflective interviews.

So, our initiating questions could be something as simple as these two that I have listed here on the screen.

What is it like living with Parkinson's disease? And what changes do you experience as your Parkinson's progresses? This is where probing and prompting questions come into play.

Probing simply means that the response to the initial question is dealt with in such a way that the researcher brings the conversation back into focus to get more information, or clarify information offered so far.

Probing questions can be either directive or non-directive.

What does that mean? For each given response, non-directive probing question or prompt could be something as simple as, hmm, oh, okay.

In other words, acknowledging that you're hearing the answer.

Or, can you tell me more about that? Or, oh, that's interesting, keep going.

A more directive probing question on the other hand might be, you said that you're experiencing a lot of off time with Parkinson's, what is an example of what happens during that time? Or, you mentioned that your memory is worse during off times, how do you feel when that happens? So, in these instances, when the researcher has asked those initiating questions, those initial general questions, like what's it like to live with Parkinson's, and they might give an answer that mentions on time and off time.

These are examples of the follow-up questions that are probing or prompting, that the researcher would ask to get more clarity and greater detail.

Finally, participants in phenomenological studies are typically interviewed more than once or in more than one setting.

Both the researcher and the participant can benefit from time to reflect on previous questions and answers.

And then having follow-up interviews to ask additional probing questions.

The researcher might think of missed questions when analyzing the data from the first interview.

They could be looking for themes and see clearly or fairly easily that something was missing, or there's another question they wish they had asked.

or they wish they'd asked the question a different way.

This reflective, reiterative interview series gives them the opportunity to do that.

Similarly, the participants might think of something new they want to add, or believe they need to clarify some previous response.

They might wish they had answered a question a little bit differently, or maybe they're not sure they really understood the question, and now they thought about it some more, they think the answer they gave really wasn't the right answer to that question.

Again, having a follow-up, reflective interview gives them a chance to reflect on that and make those changes in the next interview, or make those additions.

In a second or third interview, a researcher might ask, specifically, in our first interview, you mentioned an instance of, whatever that instance was, and then ask, have you thought of any more examples about that? And likely, over time, the person has, if they've truly reflected on the first interview.

The goal of interviews in phenomenology is to get deep, rich data to answer the research questions.

We want to know more than what's happened on the surface.

We want to know how the person has internalized experience and how they have adjusted anything in their approach to that phenomenon as a result of having that lived experience.

Initiating probing and prompting questions, and holding multiple reflective interviews may be the best way to get that data.

If you're interested in this topic, if you want to talk about it or share more about it, or you have different ideas, I'd be happy to communicate with you.

My contact information is here at the bottom of this screen.

Thanks for listening.

