

Ethnographic Interview Questions

The four types of interview questions below were adapted from J. P. Spradley's work in *The Ethnographic Interview*. You may wish to include some of the same or similar types of questions when doing your interview to learn more about the experiences that your interviewee had while living in another culture.

(1) Grand Tour Questions: Asking the cultural informant to generalize

Could you describe a typical day in (country)/at work?
Could you describe a typical day at the language school/university/your job?
Could you describe a typical day with your (host) family?
What kinds of tasks or activities were difficult/rewarding/enjoyable for you?
Could you draw me a map of your town/school/workplace/neighborhood and describe places of interest?

(2) Details Through Questions: Asking follow up questions about an act, event, or category

Could you tell me what happened from the moment you arrived on your first day in (country)/at school/university/work?
Could you tell me what happened when you met your host family for the first time?
Could you give me an example of a typical meal (breakfast/lunch/dinner/snack)?
Could you describe an important holiday or festival?
Could you explain the transportation system/educational system/monetary system?
Could you describe your weekly schedule/school calendar/work schedule?
If you got sick or had an accident, what would you do?
Who would you contact if you needed assistance (with the language, etc.)?

(3) Experience Questions: Asking about experiences

Could you tell me about some of your experiences?
Could you tell me how you made friends with people in (country)/at school/at work?
Could you describe a team or club activity that you enjoyed?
Could you describe some place(s) you visited in (China)?
Could you describe some activities you did with your host family?
Could you tell me about what you did on holidays/vacations?
Could you tell me about what you did on weekends/in your free time?
Could you describe one of your most interesting experiences?
Could you describe one of your most challenging experiences and explain how you dealt with it?

(4) Native-like Questions: Asking the cultural informant to use his/her own words and expressions

How would you refer to your host parents?

Could you tell me what you called your friends? Did you use nicknames?

What are some idioms or expressions you learned?

Do people in (country) speak with an accent? Can you give some examples?

When you meet someone for the first time in (country), how do you greet them?

What are some examples of other casual greetings?

When you talked to someone at the language school/university/work, what did you call your teachers/classmates/co-workers/supervisor/boss?

Did you use first or last names? Did you use titles?

Preparing the Interview

Choose one or more question(s) from each of the four types that you may wish to use in your interview, and write them below. Then add some of your own questions.

1)

2)

3)

4)

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10)

I. Peer Interview: In small groups, use the questions to interview a peer who has lived abroad. Ask follow up questions to find out more information about his/her experiences.

II. Role Play: With a partner, take turns playing the role of your interviewee, and practice asking and answering the questions. Ask follow up questions to find out more information about his/her experiences.