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# Semi-Structured Interviews:

## A Team-Based Approach to Design, Implementation, and Analysis

*Rachel Wishkoski*

### INTRODUCTION

Utah State University is a public, land-grant, research university serving more than 27,000 students at its Logan, Regional Campus, and online locations. The USU Libraries' information literacy instruction program, coordinated by the Learning & Engagement Services Unit, has two main components: foundational research skills are introduced through library integration with the English composition sequence, and liaison librarians provide discipline-specific instruction in targeted departmental courses. Our information literacy program is robust, reaching students in all class formats (face-to-face, online, and synchronous broadcast). Discipline faculty, however, typically consult with librarian colleagues only after most of their course- and assignment-design work has been completed. The project presented in this chapter reflects one of our efforts to engage with faculty earlier in the process.

I arrived in Logan, Utah, in the summer of 2016, a newly minted reference and instruction librarian eager to find my place in academic librarianship and at Utah State University. There was, of course, a lot to learn, from the curricula of my liaison departments to the culture of my library and Learning & Engagement Services unit. As a tenure-track librarian, I had some pressing questions to address as well: How would I frame a research agenda that could connect my interests with the mission of my unit? How would I approach doing so in a highly collaborative workplace and profession? How might I use practice and research to inform one another, while building the relationships that are foundational

to my role as an academic librarian? In this chapter, I discuss the project that helped me begin to answer these questions—a two-year, team-based qualitative study of the impact of an assignment design workshop on faculty teaching practices. I will use our primary method—the semi-structured interview—as a lens into our process of collaborative, practice-driven research, reflecting on my own growth as a novice practitioner-researcher over the arc of our study.

## PROJECT BACKGROUND

Shortly after starting my new position at USU, my supervisor invited me and a colleague to join her in launching a new library outreach and engagement program for faculty.<sup>1</sup> Having recently attended an assignment-design training by the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA), she was interested in positioning the library as an interdisciplinary center for this type of work on our campus. A pilot Curriculum Innovation Grant opportunity from the Office of the Provost jumpstarted our program, allowing us to compensate our initial faculty cohort for their participation and enabling follow-up research about the impact of our efforts.

We held our one-day workshop in December 2016, modeling its structure on NILOA's assignment design "charrettes." This term, used in architecture and other design disciplines, refers to a structured, intense period of peer feedback on one's work. To structure the day, we drew on our unique perspective as librarians and adapted materials from NILOA's online toolkit and resources.<sup>2</sup> Our twenty-four faculty participants were required to submit the signature research assignment for one of their courses for peer consideration. The assignments varied from papers to presentations to more creative final products, and courses ranged as well—from high-enrollment, general education courses taught in a variety of modes to upper-level courses for majors to graduate seminars.

The first portion of our workshop presented the Decoding the Disciplines cycle<sup>3</sup> as a model for assignment revision, encouraging faculty to first identify students' common challenges and then to scaffold opportunities for practicing the implicit or assumed research skills embedded in those challenges. After reflecting on their own assignments, faculty used a set of guiding questions to review the assignments of three of their peers. The second half of the workshop was devoted to charrette discussion in these small, interdisciplinary groups. The charrette was facilitated by a librarian (who also gave feedback on the assignments) and followed a set structure in timed rounds. In each discussion round, an assignment was briefly introduced by its author and discussed by the other participants before time for written feedback. Our workshop concluded with a large group debrief of the charrette experience, focusing on shared challenges in teaching and learning across disciplines.<sup>4</sup>

Before participants left the event, they completed a survey capturing their immediate impressions of the day. These responses, along with a survey of librarian facilitators and observation notes, comprised a portion of our qualitative data and informed modifications to future workshops. Understanding the larger impact on our faculty participants, however, required taking a longer view. Participants committed to revising their research

assignments based on charrette feedback, using the new version the next time they taught the course, collecting sample work from consenting students, and completing a follow-up interview with a member of our research team.

The opportunity to design and assess this workshop was an ideal one for me as a new librarian. The interdisciplinary nature of the event and the post-implementation interviews would help me meet faculty outside my liaison areas, broadening my network and awareness of the university community. The experience would also help me establish collaborative relationships with colleagues in the library and would demonstrate my interest in innovative programming for campus engagement. Framing program assessment as research also had built-in presentation and publication opportunities, important things to consider while embarking on the tenure track. I would hone the interviewing skills developed in previous graduate training in ethnographic methods and apply them to a new research context. And perhaps most important, these interviews would give me a valuable look into how faculty design assignments and courses, gaining a first-hand perspective on their approaches to teaching.

## DESIGNING INTERVIEW-BASED QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The road to those outcomes, however, began with careful research design and collaboration. Our first opportunity to click as a research team came in the form of the first major hurdle any new project has to clear—Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. IRB review of research proposals acts as an important check in protecting the rights of human subjects and ensuring ethical research practices. As is typical, our IRB protocol needed to include our interview guide, the list of questions we would ask, and the scripts we would use to open and close the interaction. Solidifying our research design and creating our materials well in advance meant developing a shared understanding of our research purpose, scope, and methods early in the life of our project. The detailed nature of the IRB application process also served as a testing ground for our team dynamic, something particularly important for me as a newcomer. As we took turns writing and editing, we discussed our project in team meetings, negotiated responsibilities, and followed through with them. We also agreed on how we would communicate and negotiated the workload sharing that would be instrumental to our ability to carry out our research. Our IRB protocol, therefore, not only represented a commitment to our participants and institution in terms of research ethics but also a commitment to one another.

Our choice of the semi-structured interview format as our primary research method made sense, as this approach offers flexibility within a guiding framework. Anne Galletta describes the semi-structured interview as “a repertoire of possibilities,” speaking to its affordances and adaptability to a number of research purposes and contexts.<sup>5</sup> What is a semi-structured interview, and how does it differ from other interview methods? A research methods encyclopedia offers this concise definition:

The semi-structured interview is a qualitative data collection strategy in which the researcher asks informants a series of predetermined but open-ended questions. The researcher has more control over the topics of the interview than in unstructured interviews, but in contrast to structured interviews or questionnaires that use closed questions, there is no fixed range of responses to each question.<sup>6</sup>

In an unstructured interview, questions are not pre-set, and the flow of discussion is more organic. In our context, however, we were looking for similar and differing experiences among our twenty-four participants. Because they had shared a common experience, a set of common questions was appropriate. But because their disciplinary contexts and pedagogical conditions varied, some flexibility was also required; a structured or standardized interview would have been far too rigid. In the former, a “questionnaire [is] read by the interviewer [with] no scope for divergence from the set questions,” while in the latter, questions have fixed responses from which the interviewee chooses.<sup>7</sup> The degree of objectivity and neutrality suggested by these formats would also have been inauthentic to our focus: teachers’ self-reflections on change, growth, and community. With room for clarification, follow-up questions, and probes, the semi-structured interview was the most appropriate for our research.<sup>8</sup>

The art of this type of interviewing lies in both the facilitation of the interview itself and the design of the interview guide, also called an interview instrument or protocol. The guide should be deliberately organized, with pre- and post-interview scripts (stating the research purpose, explaining participant rights and the expected length of the interaction, and describing recording, transcription, and privacy procedures) and groups of questions clustered by theme and purpose. This organization, as Grant McCracken explains, outlines the same “terrain” for each interview, clarifies direction and scope, and allows the interviewer to focus on the interviewee and follow-up because the overall architecture has been pre-designed.<sup>9</sup> “With this [guide] in hand,” he explains, the interviewer “has a rough travel itinerary with which to negotiate the interview. It does not specify precisely what will happen at every stage of the journey, how long each lay-over will last, or where the investigator will be at any given moment, but it does establish a clear sense of the direction of the journey and the ground it will eventually cover.”<sup>10</sup>

How is this itinerary best constructed? Galletta suggests a three-part arc, and indeed, our eighteen-question guide had three main topic areas: (1) the faculty member’s assignment revision experience, (2) student work and student experiences, and (3) bigger picture reflections. Following the pre-interview script, the opening portion of the interview is about “creating space for a narrative grounded in participant experience.”<sup>11</sup> It is wise to begin with a “grand tour” question, one that elicits narration of a significant aspect of your interviewee’s experience.<sup>12</sup> This question may cover a particular time period, location, task, or event and gives the interviewer an overview and orientation to the interviewee’s key themes and vocabulary. To ensure rich responses to interview questions—including and especially “grand tour” questions—Irving Seidman suggests asking participants to “reconstruct, not to remember.”<sup>13</sup> Our opening question did this explicitly before subsequent questions dove into the details of assignment revisions: “Tell us the story: What happened between the workshop and implementation of your revised assignment?” The

middle portion of the interview should contain more specific questions that “attend to the nuances of [the] story” you asked about in the beginning, clarifying, deepening, and soliciting additional examples.<sup>14</sup> In our case, the middle portion of our guide shifted focus to the student experience, providing an alternate perspective from which to discuss the experience and outcomes of assignment implementation. The final portion of the interview allows for a re-broadening of perspective, drawing “theoretical connections [before] moving toward closure.”<sup>15</sup> The final section of our guide included questions about major takeaways, challenges, successes, and next steps as well a question tied to theories of teaching and learning (addressing the concepts of “implicit tasks” and “scaffolding,” which had been discussed in the workshop). Reserving theory and technical terms until the end of the interview avoided priming interviewees and influencing their responses with the order of the questions. Our concluding question was an “Anything else you’d like to share?” question, inviting participants to add any other thoughts. The alternate question, “Is there anything I haven’t asked you about today that’s important to add?” can also yield thoughtful responses. The interview should close by thanking participants for their involvement and time and clarifying any next steps.

Like everything else in this project, we approached our interview question development as a team, meeting to brainstorm, select, and edit the questions in each section of our guide. Ideally, semi-structured interview questions should be open-ended, non-leading, and free from embedded assumptions, not “presuppos[ing] which dimension of feeling or thought will be salient for the interviewee.”<sup>16</sup> We broke multi-part questions apart to be asked in succession rather than all at once, and since our interviewees would be hearing (rather than reading) our questions, we practiced asking them aloud in the drafting and editing stages to make them as clear as possible.<sup>17</sup> Finally, we kept in mind that each question needed to have a clear purpose; real estate on an interview guide is valuable, as it represents your interviewees’ time.<sup>18</sup>

## CONDUCTING OUR INTERVIEWS

Our interview guide was by no means perfect; many of our questions could have been rephrased in more open and less leading ways.<sup>19</sup> But the flexibility of the semi-structured format allowed for follow-up, and indeed, how we facilitated our interviews was just as important as the design of our guide in eliciting detailed and meaningful responses from our participants.

From a logistical perspective, pre-interview arrangements set the tone for the interaction, with success resting on clear communication with participants as well as organization among the members of the research team. To demonstrate respect for your interviewees’ time, communicate the interview scope and duration as you work to schedule a convenient and comfortable meeting.<sup>20</sup> We were careful, for example, to set interviews with faculty at a point in the semester when the revision experience and implementation of the assignment were still fresh and when they might have a sense of how students performed. We were also flexible with location, holding the majority of interviews in library meeting rooms but also going to faculty offices or conducting sessions through videoconferencing.<sup>21</sup> Prior

to each interview, I reviewed the interview guide and the materials we collected from the interviewee, such as their pre- and post-revision assignments. We divided the interviews equally among the three of us, and our data collection period stretched over ten months (as some participants had revised assignments for the spring 2017 semester and others for fall 2017). We created a spreadsheet to track communication and progress for each participant along the way, with regular check-ins allowing us to navigate bumps in the road (such as scheduling conflicts and participant dropout).

Careful research design and logistical preparation come together in the interview interaction itself—a highly nuanced and dynamic interpersonal interaction. Even with an interview guide in hand, the art of interviewing is an active one, requiring several levels of awareness in the moment. The reflexive turn in qualitative research means we can no longer ignore our role in the interviewer-interviewee dyad, and skilled interviewers tune into their own words and behaviors even as they attend to those of their interlocutors.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Galletta argues,

A common thread across qualitative research and its diversity of interpretive paradigms is attention to the role of the researcher. This is particularly true when the semi-structured interview is used as a data-collection method. Here it is fundamental to reflect and act upon the nature of the exchange between the researcher and participant. You may prompt the participant, rephrase questions, and make changes according to the interview situation. In this manner, the idea of *researcher as instrument* is a frequent point of emphasis evident in qualitative research.<sup>23</sup>

Self-awareness as a research instrument requires listening not only to the “substance” and delivery of the interviewee’s responses but also remaining cognizant of the overall “process” of the interaction as well.<sup>24</sup> This masterful multitasking takes practice. Going into interviews, I appreciated my prior experience conducting interview-based qualitative research but I also appreciated the opportunity to refine how I attended to my interlocutors, my own actions, and to my research team this time around.

## Listening to the Person Being Interviewed

As is common in qualitative research projects, we recorded our interviews with participant consent in order to have a verbatim transcript to analyze. Recorders, as Patton points out, are beneficial tools because unlike the interviewer, they “do not ‘tune out’ conversations [or] change what has been said because of interpretation (either conscious or unconscious).”<sup>25</sup> But the listening ear of the interviewer does a different type of listening from the objective hearing of the recorder. The recorder is a partial documenter at best and an interference or hindrance at worst.<sup>26</sup> The interviewer, however, can listen “not only for what exists in the interview but also what this material points to in the mind of the respondent.”<sup>27</sup> Listening for what is *not* said is an active skill that allows you to guide the interview appropriately, knowing when to ask for more information and when to move on to the next topic. Core components of this skill include creating space for silence, mental and physical notetaking, and probing (or asking follow-up questions).

Pauses for silence during interviews can be uncomfortable from the researcher's perspective. But just like a teacher in front of a class, these silences feel longest to those intentionally making space for them. Semi-structured or otherwise, an interview is a specific type of interaction and not a normal conversation. Thoughtful responses require giving interviewees time to think and allowing an extra beat before replying to ensure that your interjection does not cut off their thoughts. Indeed, the fundamental rule for interviewing—and the hardest one to follow—boils down to Seidman's axiom: "Listen more, talk less."<sup>28</sup>

As you allow space for the interviewee to respond, notetaking can help you avoid interruptions, track important details to revisit or clarify, and establish your curiosity and interest with your interlocutor. Mental marking of areas to follow up on may be enough, though often the co-occurring activities of keeping up with the narrative, knowing what question to ask next, managing time, and maintaining awareness of your own verbal and non-verbal signals is a lot to manage. Physical notetaking should be judicious rather than extensive; these jottings are not meant as a transcript and should not take your attention away from the person you are talking to.

Careful listening generates good probes and follow-up questions, and this is another area where nuance is valuable. Sometimes the best follow-up is non-verbal (a tilt of the head), a single word (repeating the last word the interviewee said), or silence. It is key that the interviewer makes "well-informed judgments ... as to when and *when not* to interrupt" a response.<sup>29</sup>

When you do decide to interject, there are several types of follow-up questions and rhetorical strategies you can use to structure them. Clarification questions and questions that ask participants to restate key ideas are beneficial both in the moment (ensuring understanding so you can guide the remainder of the interview appropriately) and after the fact (decreasing uncertainty when analyzing the transcript). The latter is especially important in collaborative research, where not all team members are present for each interview. Clarification questions might be a broad "Could you tell me more about that?" or far more specific. For example, I asked an interviewee to elaborate on a particularly rich turn of phrase with the following: "Just to clarify, what do you mean when you say 'sense of ownership tends to bleed away?'" Follow-up questions might also ask for more detail or examples ("What was your evidence for that?"), encourage reflection on assumptions or ideas ("What would the benefit of that narrower scope be, do you think?"), or revisit key themes from earlier in the interview ("I want to come back to the comment that you made about teachers... or I made a note to myself to ask you about that pre- and post-test that you did...."). Rhetorical strategies for structuring follow-up questions include summarizing, reusing vocabulary, and distancing. Using the phrase "it sounds like" to summarize what you think you've heard an interviewee say can serve as a quick comprehension check, an opportunity to be corrected, and a transition to a request for elaboration: "You've highlighted a few major revisions you made to your assignment after the workshop. It sounds like these were additional mini-assignments and adding some in-class sessions. Could you talk more about those revisions and any others that you made?" Reusing your interviewee's vocabulary signals your attentiveness and helps frame your request for more information

in the language they use to conceptualize their experience: “Can you think of any further examples of those ‘joyous moments of connection?’” Finally, distancing moves that draw the interviewee’s attention back to the frame of the interaction (an interview for research purposes, not a friendly conversation) can sometimes help minimize any awkwardness of following the interview guide: “I know these questions are repetitive, but we want to ask them all... or I know you already spoke a little bit about this, but...” One area for caution in phrasing follow-up questions is the word “why,” as Patton explains:

When used as a probe, “why” questions can imply that a person’s response was somehow inappropriate. “Why did you do that?” may sound like doubt that an action (or feeling) was justified. A simple “Tell me more, if you will, about your thinking on that” may be more inviting.<sup>30</sup>

## Listening to Ourselves

“Keep[ing] one eye on where you are and the other on where you’re headed,” as Galletta puts it, requires concentration and reflexivity.<sup>31</sup> As the interviewer, you need to be aware of your own dispositions—your filters and biases, body language and affect, comfort with silence and lack thereof.<sup>32</sup> You should also remain aware of the interview context—time management and pacing, recording equipment, and the extra considerations that come when conducting interviews through videoconferencing or over the phone.<sup>33</sup> Attending to your own words is important as well. As you ask follow-up questions, avoid stacking questions and feeding your interviewee your own vocabulary or categories. When I heard myself do this in one interview, I flagged that portion of the transcript so that we did not misattribute my words to the interviewee in later analysis. Finally, in listening to yourself as an interviewer, modulate the enthusiasm you show. Express appreciation for thoughtful responses, nod to convey understanding and curiosity, or give a non-committal “mmmm” as a response to an interesting comment. But try to

avoid reinforcing what your participant is saying, either positively or negatively ...[by] saying “uh huh” or “O.K.” or “yes” or some other short affirmative response to almost every statement from the participant. Sometimes interviewers are hardly aware they are doing it. [...] But interviewers who reinforce what they are hearing run the risk of distorting how the participant responds.<sup>34</sup>

I find this to be one of the most difficult aspects of interviewing, and in reviewing one another’s transcripts, we found this to be an area for growth for the team as a whole.

## Tuning In to the Team

A final area for careful attention during the implementation phase of our research was on a team level. This had to do not only with managing the relationship among ourselves but the multiple relationships we had with our interviewees. Sociologist S. M. Miller coined

the term “over-rapport” to describe cases where qualitative researchers are or become too close to the worlds and lives of those they study. In any research context, interviewing is a relationship, one that is complicated by identities, hierarchies, and power. In our case, we had connections with our interviewees that extended beyond the interview interaction. We had not only served as charrette facilitators but had personal and professional relationships with interviewees by virtue of being part of a mid-size campus community in a small town. How did we navigate this potential issue? First, we were aware of it, tuning in to the complexity. We distributed interviews carefully among ourselves to create distance, not assigning an interviewee to a researcher who was their charrette facilitator, subject liaison, or close friend. We acknowledged our multiple roles at the conclusion of each interview and sent all participants an anonymous survey afterward where they could express anything they did not feel comfortable sharing during the interview.

## FROM TRANSCRIPTS TO FINDINGS: ANALYZING OUR MATERIAL

Having at least a general plan for analysis is important before any data are collected. In the case of interviewing, you need to know to what level you will analyze. Are you video recording interviews to analyze non-verbal content of the interview interaction? In an audio-only interview, will you assess delivery (prosody, cadence, pauses, or use of filler words) and therefore need to transcribe your interviews with that level of detail? For us, simple text transcription was enough to answer our research question, and we were able to use grant funds to cover transcription with a company whose privacy and confidentiality standards were approved by our IRB.

The analysis phase of qualitative research can feel daunting, as good interview technique yields extensive amounts of information. The sheer volume of text in interview-driven research means analysis is time-consuming and themes can be challenging to distill. This is where team-based research is valuable, both from a division of labor standpoint and from a sense-making standpoint. Though solo research allows for a single individual to collect, analyze, and represent the entirety of the data, there is value in checking your own perspective as a researcher against others’ interpretations of the material. We collaborated in every stage of analysis, from developing a plan for organization to coding our material to synthesizing our major findings.

### Keeping Ourselves Organized

Surfacing meaning in qualitative research through an inductive approach requires analysis in multiple stages. This is a time-intensive but required process. Indeed, Seidman argues, “there is no substitute for total immersion in the data.”<sup>35</sup> Researchers move through a general series of steps: closely reading the research material, generating words or phrases that describe meaningful portions of that material, refining and defining those labels (called codes), listing these codes and their rules of use in a table (called a codebook),

and, finally, re-reading the research material and applying the appropriate code(s) to passages of the text.<sup>36</sup> Codes as labels represent “ideas evident in the data”<sup>37</sup> (in the case of interviews, ideas evident across transcripts) and allow you to easily “index text for retrieval.”<sup>38</sup> Collocating passages of text related to the same idea—achieved by having a comprehensive codebook applied consistently to all your data—allows you to discover patterns, discrepancies, values, and meanings shared between interviewees.

While simple coding can be done manually, we used qualitative data analysis software in order to more efficiently manage our transcripts. Three popular options we explored were ATLAS.ti, Dedoose, and NVivo. Though “software can’t think and see relationships . . . or interpret meaning,” as Debra Gilchrist points out, it is extremely useful for collocating related material across your data.<sup>39</sup> Many factors come into play when choosing a program, including supported data types and formats, cost, data security, ease of use by multiple coders, visualization and analysis features, and the intuitiveness of the interface itself. We found that a period of experimentation was necessary, attempting to code a sample transcript in each of the programs we considered before committing to Dedoose. Our project was relatively simple: text-only data and a relatively small number of transcripts. For this purpose, Dedoose allowed us to most easily import our transcripts, have multiple people code them, and export lists of excerpts labeled with a specific code. Dedoose also includes a test function that allowed us to assess our level of agreement and consistency in applying our codebook.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, in addition to employing software to facilitate the coding of the text, we also used spreadsheets to track and communicate our overall progress through the analysis phase of our project. We also kept an analytical log, a recommended best practice for any type of research. Documenting analysis steps is not only important for research transparency but is also a useful reference when writing the methods section of any resulting publications.

## Building In Time for Immersion and Iteration

Establishing and applying our codebook as a team required time for multiple rounds of reading and discussing our data.<sup>41</sup> We began by assigning each researcher two random transcripts to read three times. The first read was for orientation to the content, the second to note possible codes in the margins (at this stage, using participant language when possible, rather than our own terms), and the third to refine those codes. We each compiled a list of possible codes we had generated and then met to compare lists. Through discussion, we identified and combined codes that were similar and drafted a codebook with preliminary definitions of each code. Each of us then independently applied the codebook to another transcript and met to review our results. In this meeting, we were able to eliminate rarely used codes and add further clarification to others (for example, when revisions pertained to the assignment or to the course). We repeated this process with a final transcript in order to arrive at the final version of our codebook. This process of recoding and revision “should not be viewed as a step back; it is always indicative of forward movement in the analysis.”<sup>42</sup> Indeed, our codebook moved from more than forty initial codes (an unwieldy number) to twenty-five. These covered topics related to the workshop itself, assignment revisions, student performance, library involvement, and

instructor reflections on teaching. Our codebook included twelve broad “parent” codes (used when a narrower code did not apply) and thirteen nested “child” codes, each with a definition including clarifying information and when and when not to use the code.<sup>43</sup> For example, “Revisions” was a “parent” code, used rarely and only when an interviewee discussed assignment revisions that were not captured by a more specific revision-related code. An example of a more specific revision-related code was “Scaffolding,” used for portions of text discussing that specific type of revision. Our definition for that code was: “Includes research scaffolds, group work scaffolds, the need for scaffolds, and reorganization or restructuring of assignment. Also includes mentions of practice and in-class work (part of the scaffolding process).” Our final codebook is available as an appendix to an article presenting our research findings in *portal: Libraries and the Academy*.<sup>44</sup>

Once the codebook was established, we set some basic rules for our process and decided how we would divide the work of coding our transcripts. We allowed no more than two codes per passage of text. In selecting passages, we aimed to keep as much context as necessary to make the text intelligible when separated from the rest of the transcript. This sometimes meant including back-and-forth between interviewer and interviewee. As discussed above, we used the more specific child codes whenever possible, reserving parent codes for when there was no applicable narrower code. Finally, text that was not relevant to our research questions (such as the exchange of pleasantries) did not need to be coded, but if the content was potentially meaningful, we applied a catchall “Other” code for later review. As our Dedoose tests showed sufficient agreement (see above), we divided the transcripts between two members of the research team for independent coding. The third member of the team reviewed all of the coded transcripts in order to bring an additional level of consistency to the analysis.

We were intentional in structuring our research so that each of us encountered most if not all the content, whether it was working with a participant in the charrette itself, conducting interviews, or coding transcripts. This cyclical rather than linear process allowed us to become familiar with the richness of our data through “interpretive waves.”<sup>45</sup>

## Moving from Coded Content to its Significance

The next step in qualitative analysis is moving from coded content to meaning, surfacing the themes and connections within and between categories. Seidman reflects on this process, arguing that coded excerpts do not “speak for themselves”:

What connective threads are there among the experiences of the participants they interviewed? How do [the researchers] understand and explain these connections? What do they understand now that they did not understand before they began the interviews? What surprises have there been? What confirmations of previous instincts? How have their interviews been consistent with the literature? How inconsistent? How have they gone beyond?<sup>46</sup>

To begin answering these questions, we divided the codes and their corresponding experts among ourselves. We each wrote a synthesis document (memo) using a shared template that summarized trends and their significance, including representative quotes as evidence. These synthesis documents formed the core of the findings section of our subsequent article, and reflection on them informed our discussion section.

## RESEARCH AND/AS REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

According to Seidman, qualitative research does not end with the synthesis of coded content into the findings and discussion sections of an article. There is a final step to interpreting one's findings, one in which researchers ask themselves "what meaning they have made of their work."<sup>47</sup> This step parallels what is asked of interviewees:

In the course of interviewing, researchers asked the participants what their experience meant to them. Now they have the opportunity to respond to the same question. In doing so they might review how they came to their research, what their research experience was like, and finally, what it means to them. How do they understand it, make sense of it, and see connections in it?<sup>48</sup>

In order to engage in "reflective practice," which Etienne Wenger defines as the "ability to both engage and to distance—to identify with an enterprise as well as to view it in context," qualitative researchers must close the loop.<sup>49</sup> Writing this chapter is one effort to do so; contributing to a volume on becoming a practitioner-researcher requires me to adopt the stance of *reflective* practitioner-researcher.

## REFLECTIONS

This chapter has explored team-based, semi-structured interviewing as a method in multiple senses—as a qualitative research method but also as a method of enriching one's practice as a librarian and member of the university community. Seidman writes that "through [interviewing] we can come to understand the details of people's experience from their point of view. We can see how their individual experience interacts with powerful social and organizational forces that pervade the context in which they live and work, and we can discover the interconnections among people who live and work in a shared context."<sup>50</sup> Our project not only investigated that shared context but encouraged me to consider how I could deepen my contributions as part of it.

- Collaboration does more than divide the labor; it enriches the analysis. One of qualitative research's potential pitfalls is that it risks "capturing" nothing more than the investigator's own logic and categories, so that the remainder (sic) of the project takes on a dangerously tautological quality.<sup>51</sup> While this is a concern regardless of whether research is done solo or in a group, working in a team can mitigate

myopic perspectives and illuminate blind spots. We designed our process so that each of us would ultimately work with all our material in some capacity, but it was our conversation and writing as a team that allowed us to surface the connections, meaning, and implications of our qualitative data.

- Collaborative research is an opportunity for both leveraging and developing expertise. In their book on team ethnographic research, Ken Erickson and Donald Stull explain that collaborative research requires “finding a balance among teamwork, team building, and the learning that must get done by team members together and alone.”<sup>52</sup> In this project, I drew on previous experience conducting interviews and expressed interest in developing the plan for how we would code our data. My collaborators took responsibility in other areas, from testing various coding platforms to communicating with the workshop cohort to reporting progress to our administration to navigating the publication process. Thus, we found ways to both skill-maximize and skill-build across the arc of our entire project.
- Reflexivity on an individual level and on a team level is necessary for collaborative research to work. As already discussed, reflexivity must be the default in qualitative research, from the interview interaction itself to reflections on research team dynamics. The process of coding meant that we read one another’s interviews, and the process of synthesizing and writing up our findings required reading and editing one another’s writing. These steps required vulnerability and, cumulatively, built trust.
- If you remain open, the process and products of research will positively impact your practice. The team-building we did in our process of designing, implementing, analyzing, and sharing our research fostered collegiality and self-awareness I could use in other projects with library colleagues. Listening to and observing disciplinary faculty’s approaches to assignment design and to teaching also helped me become a better librarian. This project offered a chance to connect with faculty in and outside my liaison departments, building my campus network, giving me an insider view of faculty approaches to pedagogy, and prompting reflection on how I might better support students and faculty in the challenges of teaching and learning.

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## NOTES

1. Librarians are faculty members at USU. For the sake of simplicity and clarity, however, I use “faculty” in this chapter to refer to the non-librarian faculty members and lecturers who comprised our workshop’s target audience.
2. “Organizing Assignment-Design Work on Your Campus,” National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment, <http://degreeprofile.org/assignment-design-work>.

3. David Pace, *The Decoding the Disciplines Paradigm: Seven Steps to Increasing Student Learning* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017); Decoding the Disciplines: Improving Student Learning, <http://decodingthedisциплиnes.org/>.
4. For additional details about the event and about similar workshops we held in subsequent semesters, see Rachel Wishkoski, Kacy Lundstrom, and Erin Davis, "Librarians in the Lead: A Case for Interdisciplinary Faculty Collaboration on Assignment Design," *Communications in Information Literacy* 12, no. 2 (2018): 166–92, <http://doi.org/10.15760/comminfolit.2018.12.2.7>.
5. Anne Galletta, *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview and Beyond: From Research Design to Analysis and Publication*, Qualitative Studies in Psychology Series (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2013), 45.
6. Lioness Ayres, "Semi-Structured Interview," in *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, ed. Lisa M. Given (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008), 811.
7. Peter Brophy, *Measuring Library Performance: Principles and Techniques* (London: Facet Publishing, 2006), 194. For additional definition and discussion of interview types, see Kirsty Williamson, "Questionnaires, Individual Interviews, and Focus Group Interviews," in *Research Methods: Information, Systems and Contexts*, ed. Kirsty Williamson and Graeme Johanson (Prahan, Victoria: Tilde Publishing, 2013), 349–72.
8. Probes are prompts that "elicit further information or build rapport through the researcher's use of active listening skills" (Ayers, "Semi-Structured Interview," 811).
9. Grant McCracken, *The Long Interview*, Qualitative Research Methods Series, Vol. 13 (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1988), 24–25.
10. McCracken, *The Long Interview*, 37.
11. Galletta, *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview*, 46.
12. James P. Spradley, *The Ethnographic Interview* (New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979), 86–87.
13. Irving Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 1998), 73.
14. Galletta, *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview*, 49.
15. *Ibid.*, 51.
16. Michael Quinn Patton, "Qualitative Interviewing," in *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2015), 447. Patton's chapter provides additional detail about types of interview questions, suggestions for phrasing them, and examples.
17. In some research contexts, it can be beneficial to provide interviewees with the interview questions in advance or to have a print copy available during the interview so that participants can better track and absorb the questions being asked.
18. Galletta, *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview*, 49.
19. For a copy our interview guide, see Appendix A of Rachel Wishkoski, Kacy Lundstrom, and Erin Davis, "Faculty Teaching and Librarian-Facilitated Assignment Design," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 19, no. 1 (2019): 95–126, <http://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2019.0006>.
20. The choice of interview location is never neutral, and physical context is one of the many contexts researchers must be aware of. Hanna Herzog's "Interview Location and Its Social Meaning" discusses this idea. Her essay is part of a rich collection (*The Sage Handbook of Interview Research: The Complexity of the Craft*) of use to those interested in critical reflections on interpersonal, social, and ethical dimensions of interviewing.
21. All but four interviews were conducted face-to-face, with the others held via phone, Skype, or the university's interactive video conferencing (IVC) system.
22. For a nuanced discussion of reflexivity in this dyad, see Linda Finlay, "Five Lenses for the Reflexive Interviewer," in *The Sage Handbook of Interview Research: The Complexity of the Craft*, ed. Jaber F. Gubrium, James A. Holstein, Amir B. Marvasti, and Karyn D. McKinney, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2012), 317–31. Finlay brings awareness to the fact that our research outcomes are affected by our research processes and researcher selves.
23. Galletta, *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview*, 75 (emphasis original).
24. Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*, 64.
25. Patton, "Qualitative Interviewing," 472.
26. We used a Tascam DR-100MKII recorder, with an iPhone as a backup. Position your recording device in a way that ensures sound quality while remaining comfortable for your interviewee. Place the recorder in a location that will capture both interviewer and interviewee and that will let you visually check the status of the recording without taking your attention off your interlocutor. Test audio levels before the interview begins and gain consent before beginning your recording, ensuring your participants understand how the recordings will be used and stored. Narrating your actions regarding recording (e.g., "I'm going to start this now") adds transparency.
27. McCracken, *The Long Interview*, 40.
28. Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*, 63.
29. Galletta, *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview*, 76 (emphasis original).
30. Patton, "Qualitative Interviewing," 455.
31. Galletta, *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview*, 76.
32. For a deep dive into the art of listening and its reflexive requirements, see John Talmage, "Listening to, and for, the Research Interview," in *The Sage Handbook of Interview Research: The Complexity of the Craft*, ed. Jaber F. Gubrium,

- James A. Holstein, Amir B. Marvasti, and Karyn D. McKinney, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2012), 295–304.
33. For interviews held via videoconferencing platforms, these include transparency about recording and the degree of privacy of your location, remaining visible in the frame, extra attention to turn-taking, allowing ample time for responses to compensate for any audio lag, and a contingency plan set in advance if technology fails.
  34. Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*, 74.
  35. *Ibid.*, 110.
  36. For additional details about this process, see Galletta, *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview*, and Kathleen M. MacQueen, Eleanor McLellan, Kelly Kay, and Bobby Milstein, “Codebook Development for Team-Based Qualitative Analysis,” *Cultural Anthropology Methods* 10, no. 2 (1998): 31–36, <http://doi.org/10.1177/1525822x980100020301>.
  37. Galletta, *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview*, 122.
  38. MacQueen, McLellan, Kay, and Milstein, “Codebook Development,” 33.
  39. Debra Gilchrist, “Data Analysis: Qualitative,” training webinar for the Association of College & Research Libraries *Assessment in Action* program, January 2015, [http://ala.adobeconnect.com/\\_a1087453682/p8819j71k72/?!launcher=false&fcsContent=true&pbMode=normal](http://ala.adobeconnect.com/_a1087453682/p8819j71k72/?!launcher=false&fcsContent=true&pbMode=normal).
  40. There are different approaches to deciding when sufficient inter-coder agreement, or interpretive convergence, has been achieved in collaborative qualitative coding. In our case, we used tools in Dedoose to quantify our agreement (Cohen’s kappa) during our codebook development phase, allowing us to assess our progress toward a mutual understanding of our codes and how they should be applied. Our primary approach, however, “intensive group discussion and simple group ‘consensus’” (Johnny Saldaña, *Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2009), 25). For additional detail, see Wishkoski, Lundstrom, and Davis, “Faculty Teaching and Librarian-Facilitated Assignment Design.”
  41. In developing our codebook, we drew on the guidelines presented in Kimberly Devotta and Cheryl Pedersen, “Coding Qualitative Data: Working with a Team of Coders,” *CRICH Survey Research Unit Methodology Bits* (2015): 1–2.
  42. MacQueen, McLellan, Kay, and Milstein, “Codebook Development,” 36.
  43. Devotta and Pedersen, “Coding Qualitative Data,” 1–2.
  44. See Appendix B of Wishkoski, Lundstrom, and Davis, “Faculty Teaching and Librarian-Facilitated Assignment Design.” Readers may also find the sample codebook entries in MacQueen, McLellan, Kay, and Milstein (“Codebook Development for Team-Based Qualitative Analysis”) and Devotta and Pedersen (“Coding Qualitative Data: Working with a Team of Coders”) helpful.
  45. Galletta, *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview*, 124.
  46. Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*, 111. This is reflective of what Saldaña calls a “codes-to-theory model for qualitative inquiry” (*Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 11).
  47. Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*, 111.
  48. *Ibid.*
  49. Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 217.
  50. Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*, 112.
  51. McCracken, *The Long Interview*, 21.
  52. Ken C. Erickson and Donald D. Stull, *Doing Team Ethnography: Warnings and Advice*, Qualitative Research Methods Series, Vol. 42 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), 43.

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