

Tips and Examples for Interviewing Users

- Listen and observe
- Remember: who, what, when, where, and how
- Ask neutral questions: don't lead or blame the user
- Use "directed dialog": ask questions that encourage the user to elaborate
- Establish rapport, but keep it professional
- Keep the interview focused on concrete tasks
- Respect confidential information
- Respect situations where you can't ask questions immediately
- If permitted, take notes and record the interview

| If you want to... | Use this type of question | Examples |
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| Get general information or a big picture | Ask broad, open-ended questions | Tell me how you use ____. Describe a typical day. |
| Get facts or details | Ask specific, factual questions | Do you use ____? How long have you used ____? After you typed this ____, what did you type next? |
| Find out if a task was difficult or easy | Use a neutral question | How was doing that task for you? What did you think of that task? How did you feel about that task? How do you define success with this task? Don't use: That was hard, wasn't it? Was that easy or hard for you? |
| Learn the user's terminology | Ask a neutral question; don't use your company's terminology | What do you call this ____ (point to the object)? What do you call the process of ____ (summarize what the user just described)? What does ____ mean? |

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User Interview Tips and Questions

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| Get the user to focus on a task | Ask about a specific task or about an artifact | <p>Show me how you do ___?</p> <p>Can you show me an example of ___?</p> <p>When you created this document, how did you ___?</p> <p>Can you show me?</p> |
| Learn the user's goals | Ask questions that elicit feelings | <p>What kinds of things make a good work day for you?</p> <p>What are the most satisfying/frustrating aspects of your job?</p> <p>How are you evaluated?</p> |
| Validate an inference | State your interpretation and ask the user to verify it | <p>It looks like you're trying to do - ___? Is that right?</p> <p>If I understand you correctly, you do ___ first, because ___?</p> |
| Keep the user from generalizing | Ask for details about a specific incident or task that he or she performed | You said your team always does ____. Do you do that? Can you show me how you do that? |
| Encourage the user to keep talking | Ask for details, paraphrase, or simply encourage the conversation | <p>What are you trying to do here?</p> <p>It looks like you're trying to ___? Is that right?</p> <p>I noticed that you ____. Is that how you normally work?</p> <p>I heard you say...</p> <p>Uh huh.</p> <p>That's interesting.</p> |
| Find out about a task that requires interaction with someone else | Ask the user to role play | Suppose a customer asked you to exchange a diamond bracelet. What would you do? |
| Find out about a task the user can't do correctly | Ask about specific incidents and probe for details | <p>Tell me about a time when you had to ___.</p> <p>After you did ____, what did you do next?</p> |

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User Interview Tips and Questions

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| Get the user's reaction to a design | Ask for an opinion | What do you think of this screen? If you had to fill in this form, would you know how to complete this field? How would you like this process to work? |
| Discourage the user from asking you questions | Politely defer questions to the end of the interview | I will answer your questions at the end of the interview, but right now I'm interested in how you perform this task. |

Source:

User-Centered Design for the Real World; March 20th 2003 STC Willamette Valley Chapter Program Meeting. Presenters and Panelists: Carol Carmick, Matt Yurdana, Jenny Greenleaf, and Kris Dinkel.