



TRANSITIONS LAB • FIELD INSTRUMENT

In-Depth Interview Guide

How the Lab reaches depth in qualitative fieldwork: the five-levels-down principle, the funnel, the probing craft, and how to build an interview guide of your own.

START HERE

How to use this resource

This is a complete, practical guide to in-depth qualitative interviewing: the method behind the depth a survey cannot reach. It explains the principles, gives you the full technique, and, uniquely, teaches you how to design an interview guide of your own for any subject. It is both a demonstration of how the Lab works and a usable manual.

What this is

A working reference, not a marketing brochure. Read it in order, or jump to the section you need using the contents opposite.

Who it is for

Researchers and field teams who conduct interviews, programme staff who commission qualitative work, and anyone who needs to understand why a well-run interview produces evidence a questionnaire cannot. No prior training in qualitative methods is assumed.

How to get value from it

- 01** Understand the core principle
Section 1 gives you the five-levels-down idea, the single most important concept. Everything else serves it.
- 02** Learn the structure and the craft
Sections 2 to 4 cover the funnel, the probing techniques, and a fully worked example, the mechanics of a real interview.
- 03** Learn to build your own guide
Section 7 is a step-by-step method for writing an interview guide from scratch, based on principles, for any topic.
- 04** Get the practical disciplines
Sections 5, 6, 8 to 10 cover sampling, consent, adaptations, pitfalls, and turning transcripts into evidence.
- 05** Use it in the field
Treat this as a working manual. The appendices give you a reusable question bank and a consent script you can adapt.

CONTENTS

What is inside

- 1** **Five levels down**
The core principle: reaching meaning, not just fact.
- 2** **The funnel**
Wide, then deep, then wide again: the shape of an interview.
- 3** **The probing craft**
Six techniques for getting from level two to level five.
- 4** **One question, taken five levels down**
A fully worked example thread.
- 5** **Sampling that answers the question**
Choosing the right respondents, not the convenient ones.
- 6** **Consent, in practice**
What the respondent hears before recording begins.
- 7** **How to build an interview guide**
A step-by-step method for designing your own, from principles.
- 8** **Adapting to the setting**
Language, phone, group, and sensitive topics.
- 9** **What derails depth**
The recurring pitfalls, and how to avoid them.
- 10** **From transcript to evidence**
Coding and synthesis: turning depth into a defensible finding.
- 11** **Appendices**
A reusable question bank, a consent script, and further reading.

THE INSTRUMENT

Why an interview, done well, beats a survey

A survey tells you what changed. An interview, done well, tells you why, how it felt, and what the person would do about it. This guide shows the structure and the probing technique behind that depth, and how to build an instrument of your own.

Qualitative interviewing is often treated as the soft, unrigorous cousin of survey research, a chat, as against a measurement. That is a mistake. Done properly, a depth interview is a disciplined instrument that produces evidence a questionnaire structurally cannot: the reasoning behind a choice, the meaning of a change to the person living it, and the precise friction they would fix first.

The difference is not the topic; it is the depth. A survey and an interview can ask about the same thing and return entirely different evidence. The survey records the answer. The interview reaches the layers beneath it, and those layers are where the actionable insight lives.

KEY POINT

What this guide is

Both a demonstration and a manual. It shows the depth the Lab reaches in its own fieldwork, and it teaches the method well enough that you can design and run depth interviews yourself. The craft is learnable; this is the curriculum.

THE INSTRUMENT, CONTINUED

What each tool can and cannot do

The interview is not a better survey. It is a different instrument, answering different questions. A serious study usually needs both: the survey for scale and comparability, the interview for reasoning and meaning. Knowing which does what is the start of using either well.

Question	Survey	In-depth interview
How many? How much?	Strong. Comparable across a large sample.	Weak. Not its job.
Who is affected, who is missed?	Strong, if the sample is right.	Strong on why they are missed.
Why did they choose this?	Weak. Pre-set options bias the answer.	Strong. The core of the method.
What does the change mean to them?	Cannot reach it.	Strong. Levels four and five.
What would they fix first?	A ranked list of your options.	Their priorities, in their words.
Is the finding generalisable?	Strong, with statistics.	Through saturation and segments, not statistics.

The two are complementary, not rivals. The interview explains the survey's numbers; the survey tells you how widespread the interview's findings are. The Lab's method (see the Measurement Method resource) is built to run them together, with the qualitative depth explaining the quantitative pattern.

SECTION 1

Five levels down

Most interviews stop at level one or two. The Lab's standard is to reach level four or five on the questions that matter, because that is where the actionable insight lives.

Any answer can be taken deeper. A person tells you what they did (fact); with the right follow-up they show you how (behaviour), then why (reasoning), then what it meant to them (meaning), and finally what they would trade, fear, or fix (tension). These are the five levels. A survey reaches the first one, sometimes the second. The rest are the interview's territory.

Level	What it captures	Example question	Survey?
1 · Fact	What happened	What did you do?	Yes
2 · Behaviour	How they did it	Walk me through it.	Partly
3 · Reasoning	Why they did it that way	What made you choose that?	No
4 · Meaning	What it means to them	What did that change for you?	No
5 · Tension	What they would trade or fix	What is the part you would never accept?	No

The craft is not in the question list. It is in the follow-up, staying on a single thread until it reaches level four or five, rather than moving on to the next item. A new interviewer collects ten level-one answers. A skilled one collects three level-five threads, and those three explain far more.

- › Depth is a choice made in the moment, not a question written in advance. The guide sets the threads; the interviewer decides, live, when an answer is deep enough to leave.

SECTION 2

The funnel: wide, then deep, then wide again

An interview has a shape. It opens wide to put the person at ease, narrows to go deep on the threads that matter, and opens again at the end to catch what the structure missed. Five phases, roughly an hour.

Phase	Time	What happens
Opening	5 min	Plain-language consent, permission to record, and a genuinely easy first question. The goal is for the person to start talking in their own words before any probing begins.
Orientation	10 min	Map their world: who is around them, what the alternatives were, what normal looked like before. This is the context the rest of the interview depends on.
Core	25-35 min	Go deep on two or three threads. Pick the ones that carry the impact claim and follow each down the five levels. Better to reach level five on three things than level two on ten.
Lived experience	10 min	The change, felt. What is materially different now, what it cost, what they would change first, what they would never give up.
Close	5 min	The open door: What have I not asked that I should have? This routinely produces the single best quote in the interview.

The opening question matters more than it looks. A warm, concrete, unthreatening prompt, tell me about an ordinary day, and where this fits into it, gets the person talking in their own words and register before any pressure arrives. An interview that opens with a hard or abstract question rarely recovers.

KEY POINT

Why it opens wide again at the end

The close is not a formality. After forty-five minutes, the respondent understands the study better than they did at the start, and the single question What should I have asked? hands them the authorship. It is the most reliably productive question in the whole interview.

SECTION 3

The probing craft

Getting from level two to level five is a set of learnable techniques. None is complicated; the skill is deploying them by reflex, in the moment, without breaking the conversation's flow.

The echo. Repeat their last few words back as a question. Almost no effort, and remarkably effective at making a person expand without leading them.

Respondent: ...so I just stopped using it after that. Interviewer: You stopped using it?

The ladder up (to meaning). Ask why something matters, then why that matters, until you reach a value. This is how you climb from reasoning (level 3) to meaning (level 4).

Why was the cost the thing that mattered? → Why does keeping the cash right now matter? → reaches the real constraint.

The critical incident. Do not ask about the general; ask about the last specific time. Specific memories are accurate; generalisations are stereotypes.

Not How do you usually find it? but Tell me about the last time you used it. What happened, start to finish?

The contrast. Make them compare to the alternative they actually had. The difference is where the value or the friction becomes visible.

Compared to how you did this before, what is different?

The silence. After an answer, wait. The second thing a person says is usually truer than the first. New interviewers fill the pause; the pause is the interview working.

[Respondent finishes. Interviewer says nothing for three seconds. Respondent continues, with the real answer.]

The fix-it question. Hand them the controls. Asking what they would change surfaces the precise friction, ranked by their own priority, not yours.

If you could change one thing about it tomorrow, what would it be, and what would that fix for you?

SECTION 4

One question, taken five levels down

A single thread, moving from surface fact down to the meaning and friction underneath. This is what the technique produces in practice, one question, followed patiently through all five levels.

Level 1 · Fact

Q. "Did you start using the service?"

A. "Yeah, for a few months."

Level 2 · Behaviour

Q. "Walk me through how you used it."

A. "Mostly at the start of the week, to sort out payments."

Level 3 · Reasoning

Q. "What made you do it at the start of the week specifically?"

A. "That is when the money comes in. If I wait, it is gone."

Level 4 · Meaning (ladder up)

Q. "Being able to sort it the moment the money comes in, what does that change for you?"

A. "I am not chasing it all week. I know where I stand."

Level 5 · Tension (fix-it)

Q. "What is the part you would never go back on, and the part you would fix tomorrow?"

A. "I would never go back to carrying it all in cash. But the fees, every time I move money it takes a little. That I would fix."

KEY POINT

What the thread yields that a survey could not

The timing logic (income arrives, must act immediately), the meaning (control, knowing where I stand), and the precise friction (per-transaction fees) the person would fix first. Three things a satisfaction score of seven-out-of-ten would have hidden completely.

SECTION 5

Sampling that answers the question

Twenty interviews with the wrong people tell you less than eight with the right ones. Depth research is a sampling discipline as much as a question discipline.

Who you interview determines what you can learn, more than any technique. The goal is never a round number of respondents; it is coverage of the segments that each answer a different question the headline number cannot.

Principle	In practice
Purposive sampling by segment	Not '20 users' but '5 who paid off; 5 who defaulted; 5 who never adopted; 5 who used it and stopped.' Each segment answers a different question.
Deliberate inclusion of the missed	The people the intervention was designed for but did not reach are usually the most informative interview of the study. Sample them explicitly.
Saturation, not a fixed n	Add interviews within a segment until the last three produce no new themes. Stop there, whether that is at ten or twenty-five.
Second-degree recruitment	One respondent introduces the next, especially in informal settings where a client list would miss the population the study needs to reach.

The BRW framework enters at sampling too. If the study is measuring a bypass of an incumbent system, the respondents most worth interviewing are the ones who tried the incumbent first and switched, and the ones who never tried the niche at all. Sampling is where the analytical question and the fieldwork meet.

SECTION 6

Consent, in practice

Consent is not a form to sign; it is a conversation to have. Field researchers use language along these lines, adapted to the setting and the language of the interview.

**WORKED
EXAMPLE**

Adapt to context and language

Who and why. Thank you for meeting me. My name is [name]. I work with Transitions Lab, an independent research team. I would like to ask you about [topic], to understand how it works for people like you.

No right answers. This is a conversation, not a test. There are no right or wrong answers, and you can skip anything or stop at any time.

Recording. I would like to record our conversation, only so I do not have to write while you speak. The recording is used by our team to analyse what people told us. Your name will not be attached to anything we write.

Revocable. If at any point you want me to stop recording, or delete part of what we discussed, you only have to say so.

Check. Is that all right? And do you have any questions before we begin?

Consent is asked again, in the same tone, if the interview reaches a more sensitive topic mid-conversation. A yes at the start does not cover everything that might come up. For the full ethical standard behind this, see the Lab's Field Research Ethics guide.

SECTION 7

How to build an interview guide

The technique in the earlier sections is a spine. This section teaches you to build the instrument itself: a guide for your own subject, designed from principles rather than copied. It is the part most method texts leave out.

An interview guide is not a questionnaire. It is a map of threads to follow, not a script to read. A good one fits on two pages, leaves room for the interviewer to think, and is organised so depth is possible. The difference is worth making explicit, because building a guide as if it were a survey is the most common way depth is lost before the interview even begins.

A questionnaire	An interview guide
A fixed list of questions, asked in order	A short set of threads, followed as the conversation allows
Every respondent gets the same words	The opening question is shared; the probes adapt to each person
Designed to be comparable	Designed to be deep
The instrument is the paper	The instrument is the interviewer; the paper is a prompt
Success is completion	Success is reaching level four or five on what matters

Three principles sit underneath every good guide, and the seven steps that follow are simply how to apply them. First, depth over coverage: a few threads followed all the way beat many touched lightly. Second, the respondent's world, not yours: the guide is written in their language and starts from their experience, not the project's categories. Third, room to think: a guide that scripts every word leaves no space for the follow-up that reaches meaning. Building one is a seven-step process.

SECTION 7, CONTINUED

The seven steps

- 1** **Start from the decision, not the topic**

Write down the actual decision the research must inform, will we scale this? why are people dropping out? Every thread in the guide must earn its place by helping answer that. A guide built from the topic alone collects interesting but useless material.
- 2** **Name the two or three threads that carry the answer**

You cannot go deep on ten things in an hour. Identify the few threads that carry the decision, the switching moment, the friction, the meaning of the change, and design the guide to reach level five on those. Everything else is orientation.
- 3** **Write threads, not questions**

For each thread, write one opening question and a list of possible probes beneath it, not a fixed sequence. The opening question is wide (tell me about...); the probes are the ladder-up, contrast, and critical-incident moves ready to deploy if the thread is rich.
- 4** **Sequence from easy to deep to reflective**

Order the threads so the interview warms up before it asks anything hard, and reflects at the end. Never open with the sensitive thread. Follow the funnel: orientation, then the core threads, then lived experience, then the open door.
- 5** **Write in the respondent's language, and register**

Draft the guide in the language the interview will happen in, not in English to be translated later. Translation loses the pragmatic layer that produces level-four answers. Match the register too: plain, concrete, the words the person actually uses.
- 6** **Build in the fix-it and the open door**

Every guide ends with two questions that reliably produce the best material: the fix-it (what would you change tomorrow?) and the open door (what should I have asked?). Reserve time for them; they are not optional extras.
- 7** **Pilot, then cut**

Run the guide twice with real respondents. You will find half your questions are redundant and one thread you did not plan is the important one. Cut ruthlessly. A guide that has been piloted and halved is worth more than one that looks thorough on paper.

SECTION 7, APPLIED

Building a thread, worked

To make the method concrete, here is one thread built from scratch, for a study on whether riders adopt an electric motorbike.

The decision. Should the programme invest in more charging, or in better financing, to lift adoption? (Step 1.)

The thread that carries it. The switching moment: what actually decided riders who adopted, and what stopped those who did not. (Step 2.)

WORKED EXAMPLE

One opening question, then probes ready to deploy

Opening (wide). Tell me about the time you decided whether to get the electric bike. What was going on for you then?

Probe, critical incident. What was the actual moment you decided? Where were you, who did you talk to?

Probe, contrast. Compared to staying on petrol, what would change for you, for better and for worse?

Probe, ladder up. You said the daily payment mattered. Why is paying daily rather than upfront the thing that made the difference?

Probe, fix-it. If one thing had been different, you would have decided the other way, what would it have been?

Notice that the thread never asks is charging or financing the bigger barrier? directly. It lets the rider's own switching story reveal which one was binding, which is far more reliable than asking them to rank abstractions.

INTERLUDE

The interviewer, as the instrument

In survey work the questionnaire is the instrument. In depth interviewing, the interviewer is. The same guide in two different hands produces very different evidence. Four qualities separate a good interviewer from a transcriber of answers.

Quality	What it looks like in the room
Genuine curiosity	The interviewer actually wants to understand, and it shows. People go deep for someone who is truly listening, and stay shallow for someone working through a list.
Comfort with silence	The willingness to wait after an answer, without rescuing the pause. This single habit produces more depth than any clever question.
Neutrality of response	Acknowledging without agreeing or judging, so the respondent tells the truth rather than the answer they think is wanted.
Self-awareness (positionality)	Knowing how one's own identity, gender, age, outsider status, language, shapes what a respondent will and will not say, and adjusting for it.

These are trainable. The Lab develops them through paired fieldwork, transcript review, and debrief, a new interviewer runs interviews alongside an experienced one, and both review the recordings for the moments where depth was reached or lost. Positionality in particular is why the Lab works through local researchers who share language and context: the same question lands differently across a social distance, and the person who can close that distance gets the truer answer.

A FULL SAMPLE INSTRUMENT

An interview guide, start to finish

To show what a finished guide looks like, here is a complete instrument for a real question, whether a household adopts and keeps using a clean-water service, built with the seven-step method. It fits on two pages and follows the funnel.

WORKED EXAMPLE

Ease and consent

Consent. [Full consent script, see Appendix B, in the respondent's language.]

Easy first question. Before anything else, tell me a bit about an ordinary day for you, and where getting water fits into it.

WORKED EXAMPLE

Map their world

Context. Where does your household get water now? Walk me through a normal week of it.

The alternatives. What other ways of getting water do people around here use?

Before. How was it done before this service existed?

WORKED EXAMPLE

Follow to level 5

Opening. Tell me about when you decided whether to use the service. What was going on then?

Probes. Critical incident: the actual moment you decided. / Contrast: versus your old way, what changed? / Ladder up: why did that matter? / Fix-it: what one thing would have changed your mind?

A FULL SAMPLE INSTRUMENT, CONTINUED

The core, lived experience, and close

WORKED EXAMPLE

Follow to level 5

Opening. Since you started, tell me about a time it was hard to keep using it.

Probes. Critical incident: the last time you nearly stopped. / Reasoning: what made you continue, or not? / Ladder up: what would stopping have meant for the household?

WORKED EXAMPLE

The change, felt

Materially. What is different now in your day compared to before?

Cost. What has it cost you, in money, time, or anything else?

Trade-offs. What would you never give up now? What would you fix tomorrow?

WORKED EXAMPLE

The open door

The best question. What have I not asked about that I should have?

Thanks and consent check. [Thank the respondent; reconfirm consent for how the material will be used.]

Notice what the guide is not: a numbered list of thirty questions. It is a handful of threads with probes ready beneath each, leaving the interviewer free to think and to follow what the respondent actually says. That freedom is what the depth requires.

SECTION 8

Adapting to the setting

The technique is a spine. It has to be tuned to the setting, and the tuning is often what separates usable evidence from wasted fieldwork.

Setting	The adaptation
Language-first design	Write the interview in the respondent's language from the start, not translated after English. A translated instrument almost always loses the pragmatic layer that produces level-four answers.
Phone vs face-to-face	Phone interviews are 30-40% shorter, more literal, and worse at silence. Reserve face-to-face for the highest-stakes threads; use phone for reach.
Group settings	Some contexts do not allow one-to-one privacy. A well-run pair or small-group interview trades some depth for social validation of what 'normal' looks like in the community.
Sensitive topics	Anonymisation, revocable consent, a trained same-language interviewer, and a plainly stated permission to pause or refuse. Some threads should not be asked in front of a household or an employer.
The technology in the room	Where the interview is about a device, ask to see it. What people show, and what they hide, is often more informative than what they say.

- › None of these adaptations changes the five-levels principle. They change how you reach it: which channel, which language, which social configuration makes depth possible in that particular place.

SECTION 9

What derails depth

Even a well-designed guide can slide back to level one or two in the room. These are the recurring reasons, and every one is avoidable.

- › Leading the answer. 'So the price is the main issue?' turns an interview into a survey with a bias. Ask 'What has been the main issue?' instead.
- › Moving on too fast. The temptation after a rich level-three answer is to feel finished. Level four is the next question, not the next topic.
- › Filling the silence. New researchers speak into a pause. The pause is the interview working. Wait.
- › Confusing rapport with agreement. A respondent may say 'yes' because you seem to want one. Neutral acknowledgement ('thank you', 'I see') beats visible agreement.
- › Skipping the disconfirming case. The respondent whose experience contradicts the emerging pattern is the most important to interview, and the most tempting to under-code.
- › Asking about the general. 'How do people usually...?' produces stereotypes. 'Tell me about the last time...' produces evidence.

KEY POINT

The single most common failure

Moving on too fast. Almost every shallow interview is one where the interviewer had a rich answer in hand and changed the subject instead of asking one more question. When in doubt, stay on the thread.

SECTION 10

From transcript to evidence

Each interview is coded and synthesised so individual depth becomes a pattern across respondents. This is what makes qualitative work defensible rather than anecdotal.

From the conversation	Becomes
Recurring meanings ('control', 'knowing where I stand')	Themes that explain why impact happens
The fix-it answers	A ranked list of friction, in the users' own priority
Critical incidents	Concrete, quotable evidence of the moment of change
Who never reached level four	A signal of who the project is not working for
The contrasts to the old way	The genuine before-and-after, in lived terms

The move from a single rich conversation to a defensible finding across respondents is where qualitative work earns its rigour. It is a disciplined, multi-pass process, not a matter of picking the best quotes. The next page sets out the workflow in order.

SECTION 10, CONTINUED

The coding workflow

Each interview is coded, reconciled, and synthesised so that individual depth becomes a pattern. The workflow runs in order, and each step exists to catch a specific way qualitative analysis can go wrong.

- › Verbatim transcription in the language of the interview. Translation happens only at coding, so the original phrasing, and the pragmatic layer it carries, is preserved.
- › First-pass coding. Every passage tagged with its level (1-5), its theme, and any critical-incident or fix-it flag. This is where the raw conversation becomes structured data.
- › Second-pass reconciliation by a second researcher on a sample of transcripts, to catch coder drift before it biases the synthesis.
- › Cross-respondent synthesis. Themes and their weights across the sample, with disconfirming cases named and examined, not smoothed over. The exceptions are often the most informative finding.
- › Quotable-passage selection. Anonymised, permission-cleared, and faithful to the speaker's meaning rather than lifted out of context.
- › Handover to the quantitative reading, so the depth findings explain the baseline-midline-endline numbers rather than restating them.

Depth is not the opposite of rigour. Coded properly, twenty deep interviews produce findings as defensible as a survey, and they explain the survey's numbers rather than merely restating them.

THE LAB'S STANDARD

SECTION 10, WORKED

Coding, from transcript to theme

To make the workflow concrete, here is a single transcript excerpt taken through coding. The raw words on the left; the codes applied on the right. Nothing is invented at coding, the codes only tag what the respondent said, so the trail from finding back to evidence stays intact.

Interviewer So walk me through the last time you nearly stopped using it.	[probe: critical incident]
R There was a week the agent near me just closed. I had the money on the phone but nowhere to turn it into cash.	L1 fact; THEME: agent-access; barrier: cash-out
Interviewer What did you do that week?	[probe: behaviour]
R I walked to the next stage, forty minutes. I did it because I had no choice, the rent was due.	L2 behaviour; THEME: effort-cost; driver: obligation
Interviewer And how did that feel, having to do that?	[probe: ladder up]
R Honestly I thought, maybe this is not for me. If it is this hard, cash was simpler.	L3 reasoning; THEME: near-exit; contrast: vs cash
Interviewer What made you keep going, in the end?	[probe: reasoning]
R When the agent came back it was fine again. And I remembered I am not carrying it all around any more. That is the thing I would not give up.	L5 tension; THEME: control; retention-driver [FIX-IT flag: cash-out reliability]

How this rolls up. Across the sample, the codes aggregate: agent-access and cash-out reliability recur as the dominant near-exit trigger, while control ('not carrying it around') recurs as the dominant retention driver. Two findings emerge, each traceable to specific passages: the thing that almost makes people leave (unreliable cash-out) and the thing that keeps them (a felt sense of control). The fix-it flag points the recommendation, invest in agent-network reliability, and the quote supplies the evidence for it.

BEFORE THE FIELD

Practical logistics

Depth is lost as easily to a bad recording or a rushed schedule as to a weak question. The practical set-up matters as much as the technique.

Practicality	The discipline
Recording	Two devices, always, one is a backup. Test both before the interview. A lost recording is a lost interview; there is no reconstructing depth from memory.
Setting	Somewhere the respondent is safe, private, and comfortable, not where it is convenient for the researcher. Privacy is part of both ethics and data quality.
Timing	Book 90 minutes for a 60-minute interview. Depth cannot be rushed, and the best material often comes when the respondent stops feeling the clock.
Note-taking	Light notes only, threads to return to, not verbatim. Writing while they speak breaks eye contact and signals that you have stopped listening.
Fatigue	No more than three or four depth interviews a day per researcher. A tired interviewer stops probing and starts collecting, and the depth quietly disappears.

› None of this is glamorous, and all of it decides whether the fieldwork is usable. The best interview guide in the world produces nothing if the recording fails or the respondent is not at ease.

A QUALITY CHECK

Did the interview reach depth?

After each interview, before the next, a quick self-check tells you whether it worked and what to adjust. Run through these questions while the interview is fresh.

- › Did I reach level four or five on the threads that mattered? If every answer sits at fact or behaviour, the interview did not do its job, and the next one needs more patience on the thread.
- › Did I hear something I did not expect? An interview that only confirmed what you already believed is a warning sign, either of a leading style, or of an under-curious one.
- › Did the respondent speak more than I did? The interviewer should be near-silent. If you talked a third of the time, you led too much.
- › Did I get at least one critical incident and one fix-it answer? These are the most quotable, most concrete evidence. If both are missing, the guide or the probing needs work.
- › Did I capture a disconfirming voice? If everyone so far agrees, actively sample someone likely to disagree next.
- › Is the recording good, and is consent clear? Confirm both immediately, while they can still be fixed.

KEY POINT**The one-line test**

If you cannot state, in one sentence, the most surprising or important thing the respondent told you, the interview probably stayed too shallow. That sentence is what the whole hour was for.

APPENDIX A

A reusable probe bank

Keep these where you can see them during an interview. They are the moves that turn a level-two answer into a level-five one, phrased generically so they fit any subject.

To reach...	Ask something like...
Behaviour (L2)	Walk me through it, from the beginning. / Then what happened?
Reasoning (L3)	What made you do it that way? / What were you weighing up?
Meaning (L4)	What did that change for you? / Why does that matter to you?
Tension (L5)	What is the part you would never accept? / What would you fix tomorrow?
A critical incident	Tell me about the last time. What happened, start to finish?
A contrast	Compared to how you did it before, what is different?
More, without leading	[Echo their last words as a question.] / [Wait in silence.]
The open door	What have I not asked that I should have?

APPENDIX B

A consent script, and further reading

Consent script (adapt to context and language).

"Thank you for meeting me. My name is [name]. I work with Transitions Lab, an independent research team. I would like to ask you about [topic], to understand how it works for people like you. This is a conversation, not a test; there are no right or wrong answers, and you can skip anything or stop at any time. I would like to record our conversation, only so I do not have to write while you speak; your name will not be attached to anything we write, and if you want me to stop or delete part of it, you only have to say so. Is that all right, and do you have any questions before we begin?"

Further reading. This guide draws on a long qualitative-research tradition, adapted for the emerging-market and low-connectivity settings the Lab works in.

Weiss, R. S. (1994). *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. New York: Free Press.

Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Spradley, J. P. (1979). *The Ethnographic Interview*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2011). *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* (3rd ed.). SAGE.

Small, M. L. (2009). How many cases do I need? On science and the logic of case selection. *Ethnography*, 10(1), 5-38.

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? *Field Methods*, 18(1), 59-82.

Published openly by Transitions Lab; may be used and cited with attribution. The same rigour that goes into the Lab's own research goes into every interview it runs for others. transitionslab.org