

COM 200: Research Project One: In-Depth Interview Assignment Summary

This document provides the basics of the assignment. For a more interactive discussion of each element, please visit my website and launch the PowerPoint tutorial and other resources.

Assignment Abstract: Conduct an in-depth interview according to the guidelines discussed in class and our text. Write up a report based on that interview that highlights key findings regarding the interview focus. Conclude the report with a discussion of what was learned by the group about the interpretive research process more generally.

Point Value: 60	Page Range of Body: 4-5	Minimum Sources: 5 + text
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Goals: There are four main goals for the assignment.

- To gain competency in basics of interpretive/qualitative research.
- To understand the value of secondary research within interpretive/qualitative research.
- To gain competency in APA style and formal academic writing within the interpretive paradigm.
- To grow closer as a group through the self-disclosure that occurs through the exercise.

Core Skills: All skills are important in every assignment but here are some that are emphasized.

- Intellectual curiosity: you will need to demonstrate curiosity about people and issues
- Collaboration: the group will need to work effectively to plan and carry out the project
- Critical thinking: this will be needed not only to figure out what needs to be done but also what you have found out through the interview that goes beyond common sense
- Civility: preserving the dignity of all parties—especially the interviewee is critical
- Praxis: you must put the concepts in our text into practice and reflect on that process

Key Steps: Remember the four Ps: *paradigm, purpose, process* and *product*. For each method the basic *process* can be understood in four stages: *preparation, engagement, reflection and analysis*, and *expression*. Below is a brief discussion of how those steps apply to this assignment.

Preparation

1. Meet as a group, share your stories and discuss possible issues and engage in “mini-interviews” until a topic/interviewee suitable for the research project is found (*communication* focus). You’ll need one person in your group to be the interviewee.
2. Refine “topic” into a basic question or two and refined to identify key issues & variables.
3. Conduct secondary research to further understand and refine key question and key variables. **This research may cycle you back through earlier steps. This research also helps us form specific interview questions & further “sensitizes” about potential issues and themes.**
5. Create an interview guide of 10-12 questions. Make explicit use of secondary research to inform key questions of interview guide.
6. Set up a time and place for interview. Note that a public place may be more comfortable for some, and less comfortable for others. Ask the interviewee their preference.
7. Clarify roles and review assignment before interview: who will be interview, interviewer and observers?

Engagement

1. Earn trust of interviewee through setting, verbal and nonverbal communication, etc.
2. Observe, listen, and learn regardless of your specific role in the activity.
3. As interviewer(s) do your best to confirm your understanding with the participant
Example: “Do I hear you saying that”
4. Interviewee should be as authentic as he/she feels comfortable being
5. Interviewer should focus on drawing out themes and examples “Can you give me an example of that?”
6. The observer and interviewers should record your experience and insights in the form of field notes: vocabulary, stories, short quotes, etc. If the interviewee is comfortable with it, you can also record the interview.
7. Observer should also record insights about the research process that emerge.

Reflection

1. All group members should quickly refine field notes or general impressions of the interview into complete thoughts as soon as interview is over. Do this individually.
2. Note connections with theory, key variables, and literature you read earlier.
3. Note patterns, themes, insights from data collected.
4. Attempt to “essentialize” the encounter—what did we find out that is worth sharing?
5. Interviewee should take time to craft notes that form basis of the interviewee reflection section in paper **and** also consider what he/she learned about the research process more generally.
6. Interviewer and observer(s) should discuss and organize findings **and** consider what they learned about the research process generally.

Expression (Product)

1. Draft and revise an essay that follows the basic outline below. This essay should offer a formal distillation and expression of **key insights** to your reader.
2. Review essay focusing just on effort to adhere to APA style.
3. Review essay through the lens of the grading rubric. The essay should meet all the explicit criteria expressed in that rubric as well as meet a holistic sense of excellence.

Key Resources

- The grading rubric: it offers clear sense of obligations, priorities, and standards. If you don’t understand any part of it, ask questions!
- Our textbook and class notes: Can you connect the dots between what you are studying and what you are doing? This is especially critical in the reflection section. You must make explicit connections between our course content and your experience of research project one.
- Our APA Style Guide: Don’t just look up how to cite stuff in the reference section. It has great models for how to cite within the body of the essay, headings, and for formal writing in general.

Common Mistakes and how to avoid them

College is cumulative. You should approach this project and the final report with the goal of integrating all the you have learned and become up to this point. Everyone needs to be familiar with all aspects of the project. That said, you can work together when needed but also divide and conquer. Part of the group can work closely with the APA guide while the other part works with the grading rubric.

Mistake	How to avoid it
Procrastinating or fear while searching for a “perfect” topic.	Every topic is hard in <i>some</i> way. Sometimes it is the lack of sources, sometimes there are too many. Sometimes the specific variables are hard to label. Don’t spend too much time looking for the “perfect” topic. Spend more time <i>making</i> it a good topic for an excellent <i>write up</i> of your research effort.
Poor use of secondary research.	The secondary research should help you DO things within the essay. It is support for your claims. Use it to establish significance. Use it to support your interpretation of things the interviewee says in the interview. The key way you should use it is to create questions. You’ll see how to demonstrate that below.
Focusing on person and modeling write up after celebrity interview or biographical profile	Focus on communication issues and variables. What is going on in interviewee’s life that seems to connect back with literature?
Writing in an overly formal and stiff style.	Academic writing is formal in vocabulary and grammar but need not be stiff and should certainly not be inefficient. Use first person when <i>needed</i> . Just don’t overdo it.
Underdeveloped reflection section.	This really does matter. For you to begin to master research processes you must reflect on how it went and what you learned about the research process apart from the topic you chose. Further you must connect those insights with the our textbook and course material.

Basic Outline and Expectations

What follows is the basic outline for the major sections of the research project. Understand that mere “filling in the blanks” won’t result in a satisfactory research project. You must demonstrate hard won insights and write with excellence. Wording of headings can vary but basic flow should be consistent with the outline below.

Title Page (see APA style guide; put each author on separate line) <page break>

Title of paper again (centered)

Introductory paragraph that establishes the importance of your topic, the purpose of the essay and some basic biographical background of your interviewee. Notice that there is **NO heading for the introduction**. This section should be roughly $\frac{3}{4}$ of a page.

Findings (center heading)

Discuss your key findings organized by sub-headings that are flush left and underlined or italicized. Begin with an organizing sentence just as you’ve been taught in other classes then offer the first sub-heading. This entire section should be roughly 3-4 pages of efficient writing.

Example of First Sub-Heading

Then more brilliance on your part. Need 2-3 of these to subsections fill out the findings.

Reflections by Interviewee (center heading)

A brief commentary by the interviewee about what it was like to interviewed—at least one connection with our text is required in addition to any other insights worth sharing. This is clearly first person and about 1 paragraph. No need for sub-headings within this section.

The Research Process (center heading)

A solid paragraph or two on insights gained by entire group about doing interpretive research or research generally—connections with our text are required. Insights regarding group dynamics are also possible, especially if connections with CBT material can be made. This should be roughly 1 page and include a brief concluding sentence or short paragraph to bring a graceful close to the essay. <page break>

References (center heading)

List references alphabetically and strictly follow APA style guide. This should have at least five sources in addition to our textbook. <page break>

Appendix

This should be the interview guide based on your *planned* questions (don’t delete any that you skipped or add any that you added) and you should do the following:

- Use subheadings to denote chronology of question: ice breakers, transition, etc.
- Put in **bold** after each question the TYPE of question: value question, knowledge question, etc. (class notes) or some combination of those types with page 166 of our text.
- Put (author, year, and p.#) when appropriate after questions drawn from secondary research. Hint: most key questions should need this if you’ve done things correctly.

There should be about 10-12 questions total with about 3-4 “Key” questions.

ATTACH THE GRADING RUBRIC SIGNED BY EVERY MEMBER OF YOUR GROUP. Your signatures indicate that you understand the standards by which your research project will be evaluated. Be sure to look at it early and ask questions.

THE LAST PAGE IS PEER EVALUATION ONE. DETAILS ARE ON MY SITE.