Tutorial 1: Interviewing

Human Computer Interaction
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1   Introduction

Interviews are a commonly used method for identifying user needs and establishing requirements. However, interviewing isn't always as easy as it sounds and there are may aspects that you can really only learn through practice. The goal of this tutorial is to get you that practice in the presence of a tutor who can help you answer questions that come up.

2   Research goal

All research needs a goal, without one it becomes impossible to identify what questions to ask, or determine what information the participant is saying is important and what is not. Some goals can be quite broad ("What does the word 'privacy' mean to different people?") and some are quite narrow ("What privacy problems do developers introduce when integrating the Amazon Mobile Ad API into a pre-existing app?").

Today our goal is to understand how students at the University of Edinburgh use Learn:

> *What course-related tasks do students use Learn to accomplish and what are some of their pain points when using it?*

3   Roles

Today you will be both practising interviewing and gathering some data for your first coursework. Each member of the group will then assume one of three roles:

Interviewer   This person is in charge of running the interview during their 10 minute time slot. They should follow the script associated with their type of interview. Interviewers should focus on listening to the participant and asking questions, they do not need to make notes.

Recorder   This person is in charge of observing the interview and taking notes. They should not talk during the interview. Instead their focus is on recording the information they are observing. For a structured interview, this is fairly easy. For an unstructured and semi-structured interview, the recorder has a bit more work as they must record what both the interviewer and the participant are discussing.
In groups of 4, there will be two recorders.

Interview Participant   This is the easiest role. The participant answers the questions posed as best they are able. There are no wrong answers and "I don't know" is a perfectly reasonable answer.

Procedure

The interviewer will conduct an unstructured interview using the provided script. The participant will answer the questions posed by the interviewer, while the recorder observes and keeps notes. The participant should close the instruction sheet and not look at the questions. Just answer the questions

that the interviewer asks even if they ask the wrong question or in the wrong order. If the participant is confused at any time, they should ask the interviewer to repeat or clarify the question being asked.

The unstructured interview will be carried out for about 10 minutes, after which you should rotate the roles within the group and move onto a semi-structured interview. Then rotate again and conduct the structured interview. For groups of four, the last rotation can select the interview method they prefer. Each member of the group should have performed each role at least once.

4   Interviews

Below are three interview scripts, one each for unstructured, semi-structured, and structured.

4.1   Unstructured interview script

An unstructured interview starts with a set question followed by the interviewer asking follow-up questions based on what the interviewee has said and what they are interested in learning.

Interviewer: You must read the following verbatim to start the interview. Do not change anything except where between brackets (i.e. [your name]). Once this part of the script is finished you should ask follow-on questions of your own choosing.

Recorder: Make sure you record what both the interviewer and participant are talking about. Questions are important, not just answers.

4.1.1   Read this verbatim to the participant:

Hello, my name is [your name] and today I will be interviewing you about your experience with using the Learn education software at the University of Edinburgh. [recorder's name] is also with us today and will be taking notes. We may use some of the information you give us in our HCI coursework, but we will not use your name or any other identifying information. Please remember that our goal today is to better understand how you use Learn. There are no wrong answers.

I am going to start with an easy question to get you started thinking about how you use course web pages and Learn. Please think about a recent time when you had to lookup information about how a course is assessed. For example, seeing if a course has an exam, or finding the details about a coursework. Please tell me about the experience. Such as what you were looking for, if you found it, and if anything worked particularly well or badly.

4.1.2   Follow-on question suggestions

Unstructured interviews are participant lead. So you will start with a basic question, and then follow-up by asking other questions based on what the participant is saying.

You may ask anything reasonable in this section. Please keep the following in mind when doing so:

- The participant's voice is the most important. So, try and limit how much you speak.

- If the participant is quiet and you think they still have something they want to say, then do not fill the silence. Wait, and give them time to respond.

- Really listen to what they are saying. Your goal is to help them teach you. Try and think of yourself as a student that is here to understand a process you have never seen.

4.2   Semi-structured interview script

In a semi-structured interview, a set of questions are planned in advance. After the interviewee answers each question, the interviewer can either move onto the next question or ask any follow-on questions that they would like if they are unclear.

Interviewer: You must read the following section verbatim to start the interview. Do not change anything except where between brackets (i.e. [your name]). Once this part of the script is finished you should ask each of the questions to the participant in order. If a participant answers a question before you ask it, you are allowed to skip the question. You can also change the wording a bit if it makes the question easier to say or if re-phrasing is likely to help the participant better understand. It is ok if you do not get to all the questions, normally this would be important, but we have provided more questions than the recommended 10 minutes. So it is ok to stop before you hit the end.

After each question you can ask a follow-on question if you want to know more about the answer. The follow-on questions are up to you. Just keep your main research goal in mind.

Recorder: For semi-structured interviews you should use the questions below to help organise your notes. If the interviewer asks an important question not listed, you should record it along with the participant's response.

4.2.1   Read this verbatim to the participant:

Hello, my name is [your name] and today I will be interviewing you about your experience with using the Learn education software at the University of Edinburgh. [recorder's name] is also with us today and will be taking notes. We may use some of the information you give us in our HCI coursework, but we will not use your name or any other identifying information. Please remember that our goal today is to better understand how you use Learn. There are no wrong answers.

4.2.2   Questions

1. This year Informatics has tried to run most of its courses on Learn. How many of your courses put the majority of their material onto Learn, as opposed to other platforms like a website or Teams?

2. When you were deciding on what courses to take this year, in what ways did you use Learn and the various course websites to help you decide between different courses?

3. Think back to a recent time when you have looked for information on Learn about a course. This could be any type of information, such as when coursework is due, what readings you need to read, or how to attend lecture. What information were you looking for and how challenging or easy was it to find?

4. Think about one of your courses that has the most easy-to-use setup on Learn, on a webpage, or on some other platform. You can also pick a past course if it is a better example.

   - What makes that class feel easy-to-use?
   - What are some of the tasks or activities you have used this course's website to do?
   - What is one thing about the way the course is setup that you wish other instructors would do?

5. Now think about a course who's materials are more challenging for you to use or navigate.

   - What makes that class feel harder-to-use?
   - Can you give an example of a task or activity you had trouble doing on that course's page.

6. If you could give course instructors guidance about how to make their Learn courses more usable for students, what guidance would you give them? Or what would you like to see them do?

7. As part of the HCI course, we will be re-designing a Learn course to make it more usable. What would you most like to see us change or improve?

4.3   Structured interview script

In a structured interview the interviewer asks a pre-determined set of questions to the participant and does not add any of their own questions. This type of interview is very similar to completing a questionnaire verbally.

Interviewer: For structured interviews you must ask the questions below exactly as they are written. Do not change the wording. If the participant is confused, you can clarify the question in your own words. If the participant doesn't answer the question, you can prompt them to do so. Only ask questions on the list.

Recorder: For structured interviews you may find it easier to use the numbers next to the questions below when taking notes. You only need to write down interviewer questions if they are significantly different than those listed below.

4.3.1   Read this verbatim to the participant:

Hello, my name is [your name] and today I will be interviewing you about your experience with using the Learn education software at the University of Edinburgh. [recorder's name] is also with us today and will be taking notes. We may use some of the information you give us in our HCI coursework, but we will not use your name or any other identifying information. Please remember that our goal today is to better understand how you use Learn. There are no wrong answers. I have a set of questions on a sheet right here in front of me, and I will be asking them to you one by one.

4.3.2   Questions

1. Could you please tell me how many courses you are taking this semester and how many of them have the majority of their materials on Learn.

2. Overall, on a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is very easy to use, and 5 is very challenging to use, how usable do you find Learn?

3. List the top three features that you wish Learn had.

4. On a scale of 1-3 where 1 is easy to do and 3 is hard to do, how challenging do you find each of the following tasks to do using Learn? If you have never tried this task before on Learn, just say that you have not tried it.

   (a) Find a course on Learn that you are not currently taking and look at its public pages.

   (b) Open a course you are currently taking in Learn.

   (c) Identify what courses currently have announcements that you have not yet read.

   (d) Know if you are visiting a Learn page as a guest where you are not logged in, as opposed to as a registered student.

   (e) Identify which courses have coursework due soon.

5. I am going to list several types of course-related activities. For each activity can you tell me if you would prefer to be able to complete this activity without leaving Learn, or if you would prefer this activity to happen on another page or service.

   (a) View the course schedule. That is, information about the different activities that occur and what weeks they will happen on.

   (b) View coursework information, such as instructions and any necessary files

   (c) Submit coursework

   (d) View lecture recording videos

   (e) View lecture slides

   (f) View marks from coursework

   (g) View feedback from coursework

   (h) Participate in class discussions

   (i) Communicate with your coursework group by chatting or sharing files

   (j) Contribute to a document that is being written collaboratively by the whole class

   (k) Participate in a live lecture

   (l) View lists of assigned readings along with when they should be read

  (m) Read assigned readings

   (n) Give anonymous feedback to the course Lecturers

6. Name one activity that you do on Learn that I have not listed.

7. I am going to list several types of devices. For each one, could you please tell me if you use that device to interact with Learn content on a: daily basis, weekly basis, monthly basis, very rarely, or not at all?

   - Laptop computer
   - Desktop computer
   - Smartphone
   - Tablet (e.g. iPad)

8. Briefly describe a course that in your opinion is very well organized on Learn.

9. Briefly describe a course delivered on Learn where you sometimes have difficulty finding content you need.

5 Final discussion

When you are done with the interviews have a small group discussion around the following points:

- What was the most surprising thing you learned from the interviews?

- What information are you able and unable to obtain through each respective interview?

- How does the structure of the interview allow for comparison of data collected from multiple participants?

- What are examples of HCI research questions in which this interview type may be more suited, and at what stage in the project?