



Type of resource (article, template, worksheet, other)

Conducting interviews for your start-up

As a founder of a tech start-up, understanding your users is crucial. Interviews can provide valuable insights into how people use your product and why. This guide will help you conduct effective interviews, even if you don't have a research background.

Why conduct interviews?

An interview is like a conversation, if that conversation is highly structured and has specific goals. They can provide useful data for your start-up, helping you:

- Understand the "why" and "how" behind user behaviour
- Explore user experiences in-depth
- Gather personal and contextual information
- Identify problems and replicate best practices

Type of interviews

There are many different types of interviews, but the two that will be most useful for your start-up are likely to be these:

<i>Semi-structured</i>	<i>Focus groups</i>
Organized around specific themes with a list of prepared questions for each theme	Interviews with multiple participants (6-8 people recommended)
Flexible order of questions. Allows for follow-up questions and prompts	Driven by conversations between group members, not just Q&A



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Recommended for most situations	Requires an experienced moderator
Balances consistency across interviews with adaptability to each conversation	Participant selection is important. (strangers vs. pre-existing groups) Need more than one focus group for comparison

How to conduct an interview

Follow these steps to prepare for and conduct your interviews.

1. Prepare your themes and questions

List the main topics you want to cover, and for each theme, develop:

- Main questions
- Follow-up questions
- Prompts for deeper exploration

2. Choose your participants

Define your target audience

For focus groups, decide between strangers or pre-existing groups

Ensure participants share relevant characteristics or backgrounds

3. Design your questions

Mix different types of questions:

- Yes/No or scale questions for quick insights
- Open-ended questions for detailed responses
- "Why" questions to understand motivations
- Requests for specific examples
- Questions to clarify participants' viewpoints
- For focus groups, consider the level of structured questions versus conversation prompts



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4. **Pilot test your questions**

Conduct practice interviews
Ensure questions are clear and provide useful data
Refine your questions based on the pilot results

5. **Schedule the interviews**

Find convenient times and locations for participants (or set-up video conferences)
For focus groups, plan well in advance due to logistical and group scheduling challenges

6. **Address ethical concerns**

Prepare consent forms – you want to make sure you have permission to use the data you collect!
Explain data usage and ensure confidentiality
For focus groups, stress confidentiality among participants. Everyone needs to feel safe speaking openly.

7. **Conduct the interview**

Record the interview (with permission)
Take notes on key points and non-verbal cues

- For semi-structured interviews, be prepared to:
 - Change the order of questions
 - Adapt questions to each participant
 - Probe for more information when needed
- For focus groups:
 - Have an experienced moderator lead the session
 - Encourage conversation between participants
 - Manage group dynamics (e.g., dominant vs. quiet participants)

8. **Analyse the data**

Review recordings and notes
Look for patterns and insights across interviews
Consider how findings can improve your product



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Final thoughts

Remember, the goal is to gather honest, detailed feedback about your product. This information can be invaluable in refining your startup's offering and direction.

Tips for Success

- ✓ Start with easier questions to make participants comfortable
- ✓ Be neutral – don't lead participants to specific answers
- ✓ Pay attention to body language and tone
- ✓ Practice active listening – show you're engaged with the conversation
- ✓ Be prepared to go off-script if interesting topics emerge
- ✓ For focus groups, manage group dynamics effectively
- ✓ Ensure your questions elicit the type of information you need (e.g., specific examples, explanations of viewpoints)
- ✓ Use interpretation questions to confirm you've understood the participant's meaning

Reach Out

See our other data collection methods guides or our guide on Planning your Technology Pilot in the Learning area of the Breakthrough Labs community.