



SFMOMA Visitor Interview Tips by [Dana Mitroff Silvers](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License](#).

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SFMOMA VISITOR INTERVIEWS

TIPS FOR INTERVIEWING FOR EMPATHY + SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

Ask why. Even when you think you know the answer, ask people why they do or say things. The answers will sometimes surprise you. A conversation started from one question should go on as long as it needs to.

Never say “usually” or “always” when asking a question. Instead, ask about a specific instance or occurrence, such as “tell me about the last time you _____”

Encourage stories. Whether or not the stories people tell are true, they reveal how they think about the world. Ask questions that get people telling stories.

Look for inconsistencies. Sometimes what people say and what they do are different. These inconsistencies often hide interesting insights.

Pay attention to nonverbal cues. Be aware of body language and emotions.

Don’t be afraid of silence. Interviewers often feel the need to ask another question when there is a pause. If you allow for silence, a person can reflect on what they’ve just said and may reveal something deeper.

Don’t suggest answers to your questions. Even if they pause before answering, don’t help them by suggesting an answer. This can unintentionally get people to say things that agree with your expectations.

Ask questions neutrally. “What do you think about hearing from artists?” is a better question than “Don’t you think online videos of artists would be great?” because the first question doesn’t imply that there is a right answer.

Don’t ask binary questions. Binary questions can be answered in a word; you want to host a conversation built upon stories.

Only ask one question at a time, one person at a time. Resist the urge to ambush your user.

If you get a “dud,” move on. Not every interview is going to yield insights and stories. If you get a “dud,” find a way to gracefully wrap up the interview.

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INTERVIEW FORMAT AND QUESTIONS

Introduction. Introduce yourself and your partner, and what we are doing (“Trying to learn more about visitors’ experiences with SFMOMA.”)

Kickoff. Shift the focus to the interviewee. Ask their name, where they are from.

Specific SFMOMA questions. If your interviewee starts to tell you an interesting, juicy story, it’s OK to stray from these questions.

1. Why are you at SFMOMA today?
2. What’s been the most memorable part of your visit today (good or bad)?
3. Tell me about the last time you were here. [if this is their first visit, skip to #7]
4. How do you keep up with what’s happening here between visits?
5. Why do you come back to SFMOMA?
6. Did you know we will be closed? What will you miss most when we are closed for construction?
7. Are there things you wanted to know about the art or artists that we didn’t give you today?
8. What do you like most about SFMOMA and why?

If you get stuck...

“Why?”

“Why did you do/say/think that?”

“Really? And why was that?”

“Can you say more about that?”

“Tell me more.”

“And what were you feeling then?”

Take a photo. Ask if you can take a picture (not for publication, just to help you remember who you talked to).

Last chance. Signal that the interview is over, but keep listening! Often, users mention a juicy bit of information as they reflect on the interview experience.

“Is there anything you didn’t mention that you would like to tell us?”

Thank them. Don’t forget to give the interviewee a visitor pass!