

The background features a collage of various user interview questions in different colors and fonts, such as 'Why do you ...?', 'How often do you...?', 'How much/many...', 'Can you describe to me how you... / your experience with...?', 'What do ...?', 'How come?', 'sounds like you are saying [xxx], is that correct / do you understand correctly?', 'Soooooo, ...', 'Repeating part of the sentence...', and 'Can you show me how you did [xxx]?'.

A Cheatsheet For User Interview And Follow Ups Questions

User Interview Questions

A list of interview questions that you can put into your core interview guides

1. Open discovery questions

To keep the conversation going I want to ask open questions. Those questions are questions that require more than a single word answer (like yes/no). Avoid starting questions by “did you” / “have you” / “were you” and replace them by “why”, “how”, etc.

- **“Tell me about ...”**
- **“Why do you ...?”**
- **“What is / are ...?”**
- **“What ... do you use / do?”**
- **“Describe to me how you... / your experience with...?”**
- **“How often do you...?”** (to ask about frequency and quantity)
- **“How much/many...”** (can also be used to probe level of knowledge like “how much do you know about this topic?”)

2. Understanding user tasks / activities

Here are a few starter questions that help me understand how people perform tasks and activities. Most of the time I work on digital products, but those can apply to any type of task or activity.

- **“How do you [task]...?”** (direct)
- **“Describe how you would [task]?”** (indirect)
- **“What are all the things you need to do and know in order to [task]?”**
- Sequence: **“Walk me through the steps, how do you [task]?”**
- Comparison: **“What is the difference between [task 1] and [other task]?”**

3. Performing / showing

User interviews don’t have to be limited to questions you can also ask people to perform tasks.

- **“Show me how you [task]”** ask them to perform the task, share their screen, etc.
- Role playing: **“Let’s pretend** I’m a colleague who knows nothing about [task]. **Guide me** so that I could do it myself afterward” (a friend of mine likes to use “explain to me like I’m a five years old”, I like the idea but it might not be good in some situations ^^)

4. Talking about problems and pain points

Part of my job is to understand issues and pain points in order to try to solve them. Here are some questions that help.

- **“How does this problem impact you?”**
- **” How did you solve / get around that issue?”**
- **“What’s the hardest / most frustrating part about ...?”**
- **“If you had a magic wand, what would you change?”**

5. Opinions / points of view / attitude and projections

Those questions usually help me ask about opinions. Still, you need to bear in mind that opinion questions are highly susceptible to some biases. For example: like courtesy, bias is “the tendency to give an opinion that is more socially correct than one's true opinion, to avoid offending anyone”.

- **“What do you think about ...?”**
- **“What do you like/dislike about...?”**
- **“What would your friend/partner/colleague think of that?”**
- **“Some people ..., other ..., what is your opinion on that?”**
- Variant: **“Last week I interviewed people who did // said ... What do you think of that idea // how do you feel about this approach?”**

6. Recalling the past / anticipating the future

You can ask people about events in the past. Be careful, though: **any event prior to a few days in the past might be distorted**. People are [Lazy, Forgetful Creatures of Habit](#). Also note that **people have a hard time projecting in the future** so, again, treat the replies to those kinds of questions accordingly.

- **“Please recall a situation when you ..., what did you do?”**
- **“Tell me about your most significant/ memorable experience/interaction with...?”**
- **“How do you think ... is going to help you?”**
- **“Describe to me the ideal product / experience...?”**

7. Sentence completion and drawing

Last, but not least, I sometimes ask people to **complete a sentence**. I also **ask them to draw something** like a process, how they recall the interface, etc. Some people are more visual thinkers than others, so it can really help. How many times did you end up in a conversation where someone just said “wait, let me show you” and started drawing a chart to explain to you? 😊

Follow Up Questions

Follow-up questions are asked in the middle of the interview to dig further in a topic the person just mentioned. But they can also be asked at the end to come back to a specific topic. Especially if you didn’t want to interrupt the thoughts of the person you are interviewing.

1. Bouncing back

Those follow-ups help me bounce back on what people said and sometimes let me ask for clarification

- “You mentioned [xxx], (**can you**) **tell me more** about it?”
- “That’s interesting. Could you **elaborate on that / give me an example?**”
- “**What do you mean by** [xxx]?”

2. Digging further

The beauty of interviews is that you sometimes get nice surprises when people bring up topics you didn’t think about. Those sentences let me come back and dig a little bit further in those topics.

- “**Why**”, yes, the all powerful why, as simple as that.
- “**How come?**” also works
- “You mentioned [xxx], **what’s the reason for that?**”

3. Asking for clarification

Sometimes I ask for clarification to get more information on a topic. But sometimes I also need more information to understand the context. Especially when the interview is about a complex business process I don’t fully master.

- **What did you mean** by [xxx] ?

4. Rephrasing / interpreting / mirroring

Those sentences help me check if I understood correctly . They also let me give a gentle nudge to again, dig a little bit further a specific topic I am interested in:

- “Sooooo, **you are saying that** [xxx] ?” + wait
- “It **sounds like you are saying** [xxx], is that correct / did I understand correctly?”
- **Mirroring: repeat part of the sentence** with a question mark. For example: “*I had problems using that part, I didn’t understand what the button did, it was quite frustrating for me*” would become “**hum, frustrating?**” (you need to convey the question mark when you talk). Usually this helps dig further into a feeling.

5. Recalling past experience

In the interview questions I sometimes ask directly to recall past events. But this method can also be used as a follow-up question.

- “Please **give me / think of an example** of [xxx]?”
- “**Show me how you did** [xxx]?” (if you can ask them to show them their screen and do the task for example)

6. One Last Thing?

After I thank the person, I usually finish the interview with an open question. This the user talks about a topic I might not have thought about when preparing the guide.

- “Is there **anything you would like to add?**”
- “**Would you like to talk about a specific topic** before we finish?”
- “**Any questions you would like to ask me** about the project?”

Most of the people will say no. So I wait. Then they think a little bit and actually have things to add. So here again, don’t underestimate the power of silence, don’t turn the recorder off. A lot of people will **give you interesting feedback once the interview is "finished"**. They are more relaxed and might speak more freely. Especially at the end of the interview. Wait... a little bit. Usually the “no” turns into a “actually” + interesting conversation about a point you didn’t cover in your interview.

7. The Power of Silence

Silence is powerful. An interview is about actively listening. The person you interview might sometimes need time to collect their thoughts. **Wait** for the person to complete or continue. It might feel awkward, but it’s powerful. Most people will say no. Wait... a little bit. Usually the “no” turns into a “actually” + interesting conversation about a point you didn’t cover in your interview. If you struggle with this, my fun advice: count

in your head, the same way you count when lightening strikes: 1 Mississippi, 2 Mississippi... up to 5 Mississippi. Eventually, you will get more comfortable with silence.