# Tips & Techniques

Practicing interview techniques through training and experience is vital for an Investigating Officer. While there is no substitute for this, the following tips and techniques will help supplement and refresh an Investigating Officers knowledge, skills and approaches.

Listening

This is the vital part of conducting an investigation interview. Effective listening will help an Investigating Officer get a better understanding of the people they interview and their points of view. Typical actions that an Investigating Officer should follow include.

* Have a list of pre-planned questions to follow and tick off.
* Remain focused on the witness and the reasons for the meeting.
* Concentrate on exactly what the witness says.
* Be open minded to anything the witness may say.
* Acknowledge the witness’ viewpoint.
* Listen for points that the interviewee avoids covering or giving details on.
* Allow the witness to finish their point before moving the interview on or asking a further question.
* Use silence to encourage the interviewee to elaborate on points.

Body language

An Investigating Officer should think about their body language and consider how their actions may be perceived. Typical actions that can help to reassure an interviewee that the meeting will be conducted impartially, fairly and professionally include.

* Facing the interviewee in a relaxed body posture.
* Being calm.
* Not folding arms, which can be intimidating.
* Giving an appropriate amount of eye contact
* Giving appropriate affirmative facial expressions and gestures, such as nodding.

An Investigating Officer should be careful to avoid making judgements based on an interviewee’s body language. Where there is some discomfort or unease, an Investigating Officer could ask, in a sensitive way, why the interviewee is acting in a particular way, remembering that an interview of this sort can be stressful.

Questioning techniques

An Investigating Officer should be able to ask questions that challenge and test the credibility of the information being given in a manner that is professional and does not intimidate an interviewee.

There are a number of different types of questions an Investigating Officer may use during an investigation meeting to help them control the meeting and gather the full facts of the matter from the interviewee.

Questioning approaches to use

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| Open questions:  Encourage an interviewee to open up. They can provide a rich source of information that an Investigating Officer can then go on to explore in more detail. | For example:   * Explain to me exactly what you saw... * Describe exactly what happened… * Talk me through what you heard… |
| Closed / specific questions:  Usually give a Yes, No or definite answer. They can be helpful to gather specific facts and can help focus an overly talkative interviewee. | For example:   * What time did you leave your workplace? * How many times did that happen? * Did you speak to your manager about that? * Who else was there? |
| Probing questions:  Can test the strength of an interviewee’s account and challenge any inconsistencies. However, it is important to phrase these questions so they are inquisitive rather than interrogative. | For example:   * When you say she was aggressive what exactly do you mean by aggressive? * You mentioned earlier that X… tell me more about that. |
| Feelings questions:  Can help to focus an interviewee on what is important to them and reveal their beliefs. However, they should be used sparingly as the meeting is mainly to establish the actual facts of a matter. | For example:   * What was important to you about that? * What is your main concern about what happened? |
| Asking “What else?”:  Helps an Investigating Officer to probe deeper beyond the initial information provided. However, care needs to be taken to ask this sensitively. | For example:   * What else can you tell me about what happened? * What else do I need to know about the matter? |
| Summaries:  Provide an opportunity to check that the correct information is recorded. They also allow the interviewee to reflect on what they have said, to correct any inaccuracies and to give further details where there are gaps. | For example:   * So can I clarify that what you are telling me is that you left your workplace at 10am because there was a problem at home and you did not return to work. Have I got that right? |

There are some types of questions that can hinder an investigation and should be avoided wherever possible.

Questioning approaches to avoid

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| Interrogative questions:  The aim of the investigation is to establish the facts rather than interrogate someone. Although sometimes necessary, “Why” questions can make people defensive and close up. | For example:   * Instead of “Why did you do that?”, use “What made you decide to do that?” |
| Leading questions:  These can lead the interviewee to provide the answer the investigator hopes or expects to hear. | For example:   * Instead of “Do you think he was perhaps over reacting?”, use “What did you think of his reaction?” |
| Multiple questions:  Lead to confusion and the interviewee will answer what they heard first, last or the part they are most comfortable answering. | For example:   * Instead of “What is your role, do you like it and why?”, ask each question individually. |