Each participant in the interview—interviewer and interviewee—has a role to perform and a set of behaviors that assist in the performance. Because the role and behaviors of each one influence the conduct of the interview, they affect the other participant. The interviewer's role and behaviors can be prescribed and acquired through training, while the interviewee's role and behaviors must be observed by the interviewer, who seeks to modify them as necessary to successfully complete the interview.

To oversimplify, the role of the interviewer is to ask the questions, while that of the interviewee is to respond with answers. Actually, the interviewer must perform at least eight major tasks:

- develop rapport with the interviewee and show interest,
- give the interviewee a reason to participate,
- elicit responsiveness from the interviewee,
- ask questions in a prescribed order and manner,
- ensure understanding,
- ensure nonbias,
- obtain sufficient answers, and
- show sensitivity to the interviewee's burden.

These tasks, which are not isolated but must be integrated into the interview procedure, are discussed below from the viewpoint of the interviewer and his or her responsibilities.

**Developing Rapport and Showing Interest**

Seek to establish a balanced relationship between the interviewee and yourself as an empathetic, friendly individual who is not too different from the interviewee but who is also an independent, unbiased, and honest collector of data. Your appearance, verbal mannerisms, body language, and voice will determine the rapport, starting with the contact that sets up the interview. Since this is usually done by telephone, your voice and verbal mannerisms are
extremely important (as they are later in the interview setting). Of course, for CATIs, voice and verbal mannerisms are key factors in the success of the interview. Remember that this interview is an artificial situation in which nonverbal cues are not available.

Make your verbal and voice cues calm and unflustered. Speak so the interviewee need not strain to hear and understand. Changes in voice inflection, sighs, or other noises give clues to your feelings or moods, as do your facial expressions and body language. Control these so that the interviewee does not pick up impatience, disapproval, or other negative feelings. Ideally, you should not experience such feelings during the interview, since you are supposed to be an impartial, unbiased, and tolerant observer. Likewise, you should control expressions of positive feelings or agreement with what the interviewee is saying.

It is important that the interviewer be aware of characteristic nonlinguistic cues such as change in voice, facial expressions, or gestures, since as much as half of the communication that takes place during the interview is conveyed by these modes of expression. Failure to understand these cues may result in miscommunication. More details on understanding and using these cues are presented in the methodology transfer paper entitled Designing and Using Questionnaires.

Your appearance is still another variable that influences rapport and, therefore, the tone of the interview. Dress to fit both the interview and the interviewee. If the interview is with a state welfare official in his office in the capitol, it is appropriate, perhaps mandatory, to wear office-type clothing (suit and tie for men, and suit or dress for women). This is what you would expect the interviewee would be wearing. Try to live up to the expected standards of the interviewee in this case. Not doing so might get the interview off to a bad start.
If, however, the interview is to take place at a construction site or with young people at a summer youth-recreation site, wear more casual clothing. This makes sense in that it gives interviewees the feeling that you understand the nature of their circumstances. Also, you are not set off as being totally different from the interviewee.

Giving the Interviewee a Reason to Participate

Generally, interviewees do not benefit directly from the information that they give to GAO. Why, then, should they agree to give you their time for an interview? The reasons are various. Some interviewees are obliged to cooperate with GAO because of their positions and to provide information on how federal money is being spent. Such individuals usually understand why they should participate and need only be told something about the evaluation procedures. In other cases, where interviewees are not operating some part of a federal program but are the recipients of funds, such as program beneficiaries and contractors, greater explanation may be required.

Interviewees who are not aware of the importance of the evaluation and how they can help may not give sincere and well-thought-out answers. Your explanations to them, therefore, are important to the validity of the resulting data.

Helping the Interviewee to Be Responsive

Many people you may contact, especially program beneficiaries, have never before been interviewed during an evaluation or audit. They may have had job interviews and interviews prior to receiving benefits, where they have given name, address, age, number of children, work experience, and the like. But generally they have not been asked for their opinions and feelings.

Thus, the individual may need to learn how to act as an interviewee. The interviewer should help in this process, and while this should not include hints
on how questions should be answered, it does involve making the interviewee comfortable and capable as a respondent. For example, you will impart information that helps the interviewee learn to use an answer format that has been programmed into the structured interview. Where responses form a closed set, the interviewee must know how to choose from the alternatives given.

For CATIs, the development of the questions must be sensitive to helping the interviewee. The success of the interview is very sensitive to question wording and ensuring that the interview takes on a conversational tone. For a CATI, there is a critical tradeoff between formality (with longer, more difficult questions) and conversation (with shorter and easier questions).

During the interview, it may help to reinforce the interviewee with such verbal cues as

- "Un-huh, I see."
- "Let me get that down."
- "I see" (repeat answer).
- "I want to make sure I have that right."
- "It's useful to get your ideas on this."
- "Thanks, it's important to get your opinion on that."
- "I see, that's helpful to know."

Asking Questions in a Prescribed Order and Manner

The order in which the questions appear in the structured interview is not accidental. Questions are ordered so as to lead the interviewee through various topics, correctly position sensitive questions, and hold the interviewee's interest. To the greatest extent possible, you must maintain this order. The words and phrasing used in the questions also have been carefully chosen and tested. For the sake of standardization and understandability, it is important that these be used as planned. For CATIs, this is made simpler, since the order is preprogrammed.
The following tips may help:

- ask the questions exactly as they are worded in the questionnaire,
- ask the questions in the order in which they are presented in the questionnaire,
- ask every question specified in the questionnaire,
- read each question slowly (two words per second),
- repeat questions that are misunderstood or misinterpreted,
- do not let the respondent stray from the questions in the interview, and
- keep nonverbal cues as neutral as possible.

Remember that for telephone interviews, the lack of visual contact decreases the ability to make the interviewee understand.

At times, an interviewee will not understand a question, as indicated either by telling the interviewer so, by not answering, or by providing an answer that seems inconsistent or wrong. When this happens, you should use an appropriate probing technique such as the following:

- repeat the question;
- give an expectant pause;
- repeat the respondent’s reply; and
- make neutral questions or comments, such as “Anything else?” “Any other reason?” “Any others?” “How do you mean?” “Could you tell me more about your thinking on that?” “Would you tell me what you have in mind?” “What do you mean?” “Why do you feel that way?” “Which would be closer to the way you feel?”

To maintain the meaning of the questions and not to bias them, do this “probing” with care. These kinds of probes should be worked out during the pretest. Rephrasing the question or adding new questions should be avoided. If all probes have been tried and
rephrasing or adding questions is the only alternative, notes to that effect should be added next to the responses.

Ensuring Nonbias

In earlier chapters, we covered bias in the way a question is written or in the selection of interviewees. There can be bias also in the way you pose the contents of the query, in the introduction of your own ideas into a probe, or in your adding certain verbal emphasis or using certain body language. All these can destroy the neutrality that should characterize your presentation. When listening to the interviewee’s answer, you can filter out portions of the message that alter the true response.

Obtaining Sufficient Answers

You must learn to judge when an answer is sufficient before going to the next question. If the answer is incomplete or vague, you should ensure that the question is understood (as discussed above) or draw more out of the interviewee to complete the answer. At times, the interviewee is allowed to answer questions in an open-ended fashion, while you match each answer to one of a set of responses on the interview form. You must be sure that the interviewee has sufficient information to select one of the answers. Sometimes, you must select two or more responses (not just one) from the set and ask the interviewee which one best matches his or her answer. This should be done, however, only as a last resort and only after giving the respondent ample time to respond.

On other occasions, an interviewee may not have the answer in mind but may need to refer to documents or ask someone else. If this can be done conveniently and within a short time, encourage the interviewee to do so.

You can also check the accuracy of the answers given by asking for supporting information from
the interviewee. Sometimes the design of the instrument has built into it questions to which answers have already been obtained from files or from other people in advance. Use these to check the accuracy with which the interviewee is answering. Underreporting of information is often found. As the length of time since a subject event increases, there is a greater tendency for the interviewee either to forget the event occurred or to recall it only partially.

Showing Sensitivity to Interviewee Burden

Before conducting an interview, give the interviewee a general statement of how long it is expected to take. You are then under some obligation to adhere to this time limitation.

Frequently, interviewees prolong their answers by adding examples, critical incidents, or other stories. If neither you nor the interviewee has a time problem, this extension of the interview is acceptable. If time is critical, however, use techniques to speed up the interview so as not to lose valuable answers at the end. Besides the length of time taken, the interview can be burdensome because of the amount of work the interviewee needs to go through to produce the information requested. If a relatively unimportant question requires a significant amount of time or energy by the interviewee, it may not be worth pursuing.
Using Structured Interviewing Techniques