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**TDC Tip**

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## Free-Format Interview Steps

Some Interview & Interrogation courses focus almost exclusively on interviewing the suspect, so much so, that the all important task of quality victim and witness interviews can be lost in the shuffle. Let's face it, we're not going to have much luck eliciting truthful information from a deceptive subject if we don't have a great deal of confidence in the credibility of our victims and witnesses. The Free-Format Interview is a structured technique we can use to obtain quality statements.

### Step 1: Professional opening and introduction

- Conduct the interview in a private, quiet setting
- Explain the purpose for the interview – to gather important facts
- Let the subject know that you are committed to obtaining a detailed statement as part of a thorough and comprehensive investigation – encourage them to give you every detail that comes into his/her mind and not to censor or leave anything out
- Be mindful of your own body language, posture, and demeanor (they will be evaluating your conduct just as you are evaluating theirs)
- Be mindful of your tone of voice and vocabulary
- Warn the subject about potentially embarrassing questions (this is especially important in cases involving trauma or sexual abuse)
- Complete the Personal History Questionnaire (biographical data) to build rapport and establish a baseline for the subject's truth-telling style

### Step 2: Narrative statement

- Listen, observe, and allow the subject to tell their "story" from start to finish
- No (or very limited) interruption/note-taking

### Step 3: First paraphrase (echo)

- Paraphrase subject's narrative statement –
  - This demonstrates that you have genuinely listened to the subject's statement and the details which he/she has provided
  - Truthful people will typically provide a skeletal outline of the incident without a lot of details (e.g. *The suspect came into the store, pointed a gun in my face, demanded money and left on foot*)
- This may be the first time the subject hears his/her own story from your perspective and will realize that there are significant gaps of missing information

### Step 4: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?

- Ask clarifying questions that arose during narrative

- Ask any additional questions from a prepared list
- Obtain details and descriptions (everything that occurred before, during, and after the incident)
  - Note-taking on the investigator's part is permissible and recommended (be sure to continue paying visual attention to the non-verbal behavior)

#### **Step 5: Second paraphrase (echo)**

- The subject will typically have given you information in random, non-sequential order
  - Review the statement with the subject putting everything in chronological order and ask for confirmation/correction
- Make corrections as necessary in your notes

**BONUS:** If you are recording the interview, you will now be able to fast-forward to this part of the recording and write your report with much greater ease.

#### **Step 6: Professional close**

- Thank them for their assistance
- Give the subject some tips on what to do if he/she happens to see the suspect, accomplices, or vehicles involved
- Tell the subject that they will remember additional information and ask them to please write it down and call you as soon as practical

Next month we will examine a more complex interview technique known as a Cognitive Interview. This is very helpful in eliciting more detailed information from people involved in high profile cases.

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