

SIP

Structured Interview Protocol

The aim of this aide memoir is to support front line officers to elicit information from witnesses via simple and effective evidence-based guidelines.

Use of the SIP will increase the efficiency of obtaining evidence and enhance the quality of evidence obtained.

PLEASE NOTE

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SIP Structured Interview Protocol

The Structured Interview Protocol (SIP) complements national police guidelines on the collection of evidence (PEACE model of interviewing, and Achieving Best Evidence)

P - *Planning and Preparation*

E - *Engage and Explain*

A - *Account*

C - *Closure*

E - *Evaluation*

Planning & Preparation

- Consider information already held (eg. emergency call log / history / first account)
- Consider needs and expectations of the interviewee (witness categorisation)
- Determine interviewer roles (if necessary)
- Make any practical arrangements required
 - Are any special measures required?
 - Access to safe/quiet areas to carry out interview
 - Sufficient time to carry out interview
 - Separate interviewees
- Ask if they have encountered any information about what happened (from other witnesses, on social media, etc.)
- If relevant, use body-worn video as per force-policy.

Engage & Explain

Public perceptions of police responsiveness (responding professionally and effectively to the needs and expectations of the witness) significantly predicts witness cooperation in interviews. Therefore it is vital to get all interactions with witnesses right by following these steps:

Introductions

- Introduce yourself (and colleague/s if present)
 - Explain where you're from
 - Clarify what you're doing and why

Engage with the witness

- Establish use of preferred name
- Calm and reassure the witness if necessary (*address concerns/anxieties*)
- Use rapid rapport skills to encourage engagement and cooperation
 - Acknowledge shared interests such as interests, preferences, or experiences; a feeling of similarity can promote trust (e.g., "I think/do/like/etc. that too")
 - Using similar communication styles and phrases can reduce any perceived social differences
 - Subtle use of mirroring
 - Empathy when appropriate (*I can see you're upset; I understand this is difficult*)
 - Active listening (*non-opinionated feedback; no interruptions*)
 - Relaxed, open, body language (non-confrontational)

Explain

- Stress the importance of the person's contribution to the investigation
 - Explain that you weren't there and do not know what they saw.
- There is a difference between remembering information and reporting information. Witnesses sometimes withhold information that they don't think is important. Tell them to **report everything that comes to mind, in as much detail as possible** (e.g., "I'd like to be able to pick the person out from a crowd based on the description you give me").
- **Don't interrupt!**
- Encourage people to use qualifiers (*"I don't know" or "I'm not sure"*)
- Invite people to close their eyes to help them focus
- Tell witnesses not to guess.

Account

The aim of this phase is to gain information in the witness's own words, as this helps increase accuracy and consistency, and makes it easier to defend the legitimacy of statements.

A: Information Gathering

USE OPEN QUESTIONS FOR BREADTH OF INFORMATION

- "Tell me what happened"
- Use neutral facilitators (nodding, "uh huh", etc.) to encourage them to keep talking
- **Do not interrupt**

IF MORE INFORMATION IS REQUIRED, USE OPEN QUESTIONS FOR DEPTH OF INFORMATION (TED)

T "Tell me more about X, Y, Z"

E "Explain in more detail what you mean about Y"

D "Describe in more detail Z"

Note, that X, Y, & Z should always be details that have already been mentioned by the witness (use the witness's own wording rather than your own, e.g., "big guy")

- Use neutral facilitators (nodding, "uh huh", etc.) to encourage them to keep talking.
- Use echo statements (repeating back the witness's words in instances of silence, e.g., "So, you said you were in the shop...") to encourage them to resume talking.
- **Do not interrupt**

Use open questions as much as possible; the aim is to gain all of the information you need in the witness's own words.

All of the following question-types are appropriate to use in an interview, with the condition that you should work through the green (most safe) to red (least safe) question hierarchy to extract the level of detail you require.

IF MORE INFORMATION IS STILL REQUIRED, USE FOCUSED QUESTIONS FOR MORE SPECIFIC INFORMATION (5-WH)

“You mentioned you were outside, **where** exactly were you?”

“You mentioned you were talking to someone at the time, **who** was this?”

“You mentioned one of the men had a knife, **when** did you first notice this?”

“You mentioned one of the men made a threat, **how** was that made?”

“You mentioned one of the men had a tattoo, **what** did it look like?”

- Use neutral facilitators (nodding, “uh huh”, etc.) to encourage them to keep talking
- **Do not interrupt**

WHEN OPEN AND FOCUSED QUESTIONS DO NOT GAIN ANY FURTHER INFORMATION FROM THE INTERVIEWEE, YOU MIGHT NEED TO USE CLOSED QUESTIONS, OR OPTION POSING QUESTIONS FOR THE PURPOSE OF CLARIFICATION.

Only use closed questions if necessary! They are most frequently associated with errors!

“Was the shop busy with customers?”

“Did he carry the knife in his left or right hand?”

“Did that happen before or after X?”

DO NOT USE LEADING QUESTIONS THAT SUGGEST SOMETHING TO THE WITNESS THAT THEY HAVEN'T REVEALED THEMSELVES

e.g., “Was the car black?” (suggesting 1. there was a car, and 2. it might have been black)

Structuring your Interview

Effective note-taking can help identify important evidential information

1. Note down key words and phrases as the witness is freely reporting what happened. Use their own words, and do not interrupt them;
2. Use these as topic areas to probe for further information;
3. Use the question hierarchy (open to closed questions) to elicit all of the information you need.

For example:

Verbatim from the witness:

"I was walking home from the pub. A dodgy guy left at the same time and followed me. Suddenly he pushed me really hard and I fell over. He took my handbag and ran off."

Your notes:

... walking home...pub... dodgy guy...left same time...followed me...suddenly...pushed me really hard...fell over...took handbag...ran off...

"walking home"

- You said you were walking home.
Tell me more about that...
- What route do you take?
- How busy was it?
- Were you by yourself?

"pub"

- You said you had been in the pub.
Tell me more about that...
 - Who else was there?
 - Where were you sitting?
 - Did you notice the guy in the pub?
-

Remember ADVOKATE throughout the interview.

Tips

- Consider which topic areas you need to probe for investigatory and evidential purposes
- A witness's own retrieval cues are most effective at helping them remember as much as possible, so facilitate this, e.g.
 - "You said (use the witnesses own words). Tell me more."
 - "Start by describing the person you remember the most clearly"
 - "Is there anything that is particularly memorable, tell me about that"
- Facilitate retrieval by asking the witness to close their eyes or take time to focus on when they had a clear view of X Y Z

B: Enquiries and Clarifications

UNMENTIONED DETAILS

Following the information gathering stage there may be aspects of the incident that you wish to probe which were left unmentioned by the interviewee.

Using the same question hierarchy as much as possible (open questions, then focused questions, then option-posing or closed questions), you can now probe for any additional information that would help the investigation. e.g.,

- Open question** - “You have told me a lot of information but I would like to know more about the location; tell me more about that.”
- Focused question** - “You mentioned it was very busy, who else was there?”
- Closed question** - “Did this happen in the kitchen or the living room?”

DON'T KNOW RESPONSES

People say “I don't know” for many reasons.

When a question is answered with a ‘don't know’ response the interviewer can seek clarification by asking -

When you say you don't know do you mean...

- ...you don't know if it happened or not*
- ...it did happen, but you don't remember clearly*
- ...other reasons for saying “I don't know”?*

ESTABLISHING THE SOURCE OF A MEMORY

People often have awareness of the source of their memories, so you can ask -

- Did you see this yourself?
- Did this happen to you personally?
- ...or did someone tell you about it?

C: Investigative Material

Investigative material is any information, additional to the witnesses report, that will help your investigation.

- Is there anyone else you should speak to?
- Is there any evidence of premeditation?
- Is there an MO or any common link between incidents?
- Are there any other investigative leads?

Closure

Encourage the interviewee to add to the interview:

“Is there anything else you would like to tell me?”

Encourage the interviewee to ask questions:

“Is there anything you would like to ask?”

Provide a summary of the interviewee’s information and ask if this is accurate:

“So you said X, Y, Z; is all of that correct?”

“Tell me if I have missed anything out.”

Provide information about future processes:

“I have your contact information which will be used to follow up X; here’s my contact information; this is what will happen next...”

“if you remember any information following this interview, please write it down and contact me using the details I have left with you today.”

Provide official end point for discussion and thank them for participation:

“That’s all we need for now. Thank you for your time”

Evaluate

Did you get all of the information you need at this stage?

What evidential information have I obtained?

Reflect on your conduct of the interview

- Did you follow the interview question hierarchy?
- Did you use appropriate non-leading questions?
- Did you use any inappropriate questions?
 - What might the consequences be?
 - How could you have re-phrased your question?

Implement appropriate next steps