

Example of interview protocol

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



InterviewProtocol: 1. How would you define biology? 2. How would you define life? 3. Give 5 examples of life and explain why they exhibit life. 4. What is the smallest unit of life? 5. Is soil alive? Why or why not? 6. Is air alive? Why or why not? 7. What body part makes us most alive? Why? Interview #1

Interviewer (LH): How would you define biology? Interviewee (BM): Um.. as a part of life LH: Okay, how would you define life? BM: Uh.. everything around you...from the sky to the grass LH: Can you give 5 examples of life and explain why they exhibit life.

BM: Plants, because you need them to breathe oxygen, yourself, because you are you, animals, because they are part of the food chain (she flashed a thumbs up here because she was proud she recalled this information), the sun, because you need it to grow and not be moody, and water, water because everything needs water. LH: Nice.. what is the smallest unit of life? BM: Um...um.. um...I know this... LH: I know you do... (Another minute passed and never recalled despite looking around the room and looking directly at the cell poster) LH: Is soil alive? Why or why not?

BM: Yes, because you can make it grow. LH: Is air alive? Why or why not? BM: Um...(about 30 second delay)...I am going to say no... LH: Why not? BM: (she shrugs) LH: Okay, go back to how you defined life. How do you define life? What makes something alive to you? BM: It grows and survives. LH: Okay, so is air alive? BM: No, because it doesn't grow. LH: One of your examples of life was the human body. What part of the human body makes you most alive and why? BM: Your heart because it makes everything move. Because you can live without a brain, can't you? You can be brain dead.

LH: But once your heart gives out then you are dead? BM: Yes, because you still can live... LH: Without a brain but not without a heart? BM: You can live more without a brain than a heart. LH: Very nice, thank you for participating.

Interview #2: Interviewer (LH): How would you define biology? Interviewee (YC): The study of life. LH: And...how do you define life? YC: Something that moving, breathing, functioning LH: Ok.. can you give me five examples of life and explain why they exhibit life. YC: Plants, cause they grow, humans, cause they move around, they function, they think and they also grow.. m.. wait...animals cause that's like humans.... um.. LH: Two more YC: I really can't think of two more. Those are the only ones I can think of right now. LH: Ok, so plants, animals and humans, what is the smallest unit of life? YC: The cell LH: And, is soil alive to you? Why or why not? YC: Um.. yeah because it makes things grow. LH: Okay.. is air alive to you? Why or why not? YC: No, because in order to be alive you have to be, like, functioning, growing, moving and air is just two chemicals put together to make one chemical. LH: Okay, and what body part makes a human being most alive and why?

YC: The heart because without your heart you can't function, you can't, because your heart makes your whole body function so without that you won't be able to function. Because the heart is the one that produces the blood and the blood sends out to all of your...um.. cells and all your body parts. It also sends out reflexes. It also helps with your reflexes and everything. LH: Nice, thank you.

Analysis: The most surprising part of the interview came after the interview when the two subjects started arguing about their answers. I invited two friends to come after school but interviewed them separately.

After I was done with the second interview, the girls started discussing how they answered each question. Their focus was specifically on the last two questions: is air alive and what part of the body makes a human being alive? They started discussing molecules and molecular interactions in air that could create life or prevent life depending on the quality of air. In addition, they considered the importance of the brain in the human body and discussed the implications of being brain dead but still alive. After some discussion, the girls decided the brain is the coach and the heart is the player.

Both students are basketball players so it helped them to process the information by relating to basketball. In other words, the coach gives direction but the players still have to execute the plays. Another point of interest was the correlation of grades with ease and accuracy of recall. My first subject is receiving a B in my class and the second subject an A. The first subject knew the concepts but had more difficulty with the exact definition. The first subject talked around topics demonstrating knowledge of content standards but had difficulty pinpointing her ideas.

The second subject gave exact definitions and answers quickly. The comfort level was visible in the answers provided, both in accuracy and timing. In addition, despite discussing the characteristics of life, I realized both students still created a superficial definition of life. They summarized life as something that moves and grows and breathes, but they did not consider reproduction and they are made of cells and more technical aspects of the definition of life. The students also had trouble with their own definition when

I started asking them about specific questions regarding living/non-living parts.

Although it was interesting the second subject had a greater connection between her definition and her explanation of why a heart is the most critical organ for life. I also noticed when giving examples of life, both subjects focused on broad categories of life: plants, animals, humans and neglected specific examples of living things. I would be interested to see if a younger student would name specific living things or focus on broad categories. I suspect the broad categories come from the fact we are studying cells and just studied ecology and the focus is on plant versus animal or consumer versus producer. After completing my interview I realized my questions were too narrow. I tried to predict what the students would say and create appropriate follow-up questions but the questions still had short answers. I need to reflect on how to write my questions to solicit longer responses with more detail to demonstrate feeling. The discrepancy between what I anticipated and what happened could be the result of the nature of the survey and the focus on content compared to my research survey that focuses on experiences and emotions.