

Refusal Aversion Techniques

First and foremost, as interviewers we must sound professional and mature. We must convey that the research we are conducting is important, both to the general public at large as well as to the individual respondent. With the ever-increasing number of telemarketing calls, as well as the “Do not call” legislation that went into effect last year, it is imperative that we strive to NOT sound like telemarketers.

Once we have gotten someone on the phone and listening to us, we can use several techniques to get the interview completed.

I. Tailoring

A good interviewer tailors his or her responses to respondents' questions. He or she listens to and acknowledges the concerns respondents share. Tailoring is all about improvisation. Interviewers have to think on their feet, keep their head in the game and have an arsenal of possible responses to counter respondent reluctance that they can choose from depending on the situation. “I understand what you are saying...”

II. Maintaining Interaction

If you can keep them on the phone, there is a higher likelihood of the respondent eventually cooperating and going through the interview with you. The trick is to establish rapport. Tailor your response to the respondent; emphasize the value of the research project itself, the importance of each respondent's participation and the fact that the respondent represents many others who have similar opinions and experiences. Participating in the interview is an opportunity both to express personal opinions and to make a positive contribution to society.

“Are there any questions about the study I can answer for you?”

III. Diagnosing Concerns

The most important technique for dealing with a reluctant respondent is "active listening." Carefully listening to a respondent's reasons for hesitating or refusing to participate can help you effectively explain why he or she should consider participating. A good interviewer asks himself/herself “How can I address this concern?” and tailor his or her response to the concern, all the while maintaining interaction. ☺

IV. Countering Reluctance

Many people are reluctant to participate because they doubt the legitimacy of the study.

Respondents have to feel the study is relevant to them and that they have something to add.

The top 5 reasons people participate in surveys are:

1. They believe in the study and feel it will do some public good. They think they might get something out of it. The subject matter is important to them.
2. Interviewer persistence. We just don't give up so they give in and stop wasting time for both of us with setting appointments.
3. Incentives: What are they going to get from giving their time to us?
4. Sounds interesting: People who think the survey is interesting or important are more likely to participate.
5. They like to help. Some people are just altruistic and like to help their fellow man. They participate out of "civic duty"

It is our responsibility to convince the respondent that the study topic is worthwhile, important, legitimate and relevant to them. Finally, the most important thing for an interviewer to remember about refusals is not to take them personally. All interviewers experience refusals.