



by Jeff Baile ~ Certified Forensic Interviewer

The Structured Interview

Expedite your investigation with these great lie detection questions

A truck stops on the dirt road I'm watching. The camouflaged hunter jumps out and heads to the pond. Right where I'm hiding next to the leaf-covered poached 10-pointer. I wait until he starts dragging it before making the pinch. It didn't take him long to deny poaching it; feverishly explaining he'd only seen it from the road. He was going to take it to the warden. I told him he was lying. He said he wasn't. To prove his point, he demanded I give him a lie detection test on the spot. So I did.

I lead him to the water's edge and tied his hands together. "You'll see I'm not lying," he said as I hung a big rock around his neck. He thanked me, walked in about ten feet, and disappeared. When he didn't come up I knew I'd solved the case. Because if he hadn't done it, God would have kept him floating. Instead, the "weight of the crime" prevented that deer poacher from surviving.

Okay, so it didn't happen.

But if we were wardens in the Middle Ages we might have done things like this. And, it would've been legal. There were a lot of strange deception tests, called Ordeals, back then. Blood found in chewed rice meant a lie had been told. Coming away with tar on the hands after pulling a donkey's tail showed innocence. Being burned after licking a hot iron nine times purportedly proved deception. In yet another water Ordeal, the accused was declared innocent if drowned, if they floated they were hanged! A win-win for the king.

Trial by Ordeal was rooted in religion, myth, and superstition. It had nothing to do with analyzing someone's conduct. Generally, if the accused passed or survived they were declared innocent. People were so superstitious they believed the divine would somehow intervene and save them. With that set-up most obviously failed. Today's approaches, of course, are grounded in sixty years of scientific investigation. They rely on what people actually say and do.

History of Standardized Questions

Polygraph examiners conduct a pre-test interview for several reasons. "In Illinois it's law," says Terry McCann, an examiner with the Illinois State Police. "But it's good polygraph practice to let em' know what questions will be asked," he said, adding the pre-test interview also puts them in the right mood. "The charts are skewed if they're unfit to take it."

A key reason, though, for this interview is gauging truthfulness. McCann says asking questions that provoke behavior gives him a pretty good idea if they'll pass. "About 75% of the time these questions tell me who'll pass and fail. The results are usually in line with the charts."

The questions he mentions originated with John Reid, a polygraph examiner in Chicago during the early 1940's. Actually, Reid first noted that his secretary was pretty good at predicting who would pass or fail as they waited to be tested. She noticed that the innocent tended to act one way, the guilty another. Reid knew he was on to something.

Soon, he and his colleagues began compiling responses and behaviors observed during their polygraph tests. They confirmed that there were general differences in innocent and guilty behavior. One general trait observed was that guilty people liked to spread blame. Answers such as, a stranger did it or could be anybody, were common. The truthful usually furnished names even if they were guessing. Liars were also prone to building alibis. The truthful didn't have to because they were indeed innocent. Additionally, guilty people minimized the crime and used face-saving excuses whereas the innocent didn't.

Reid and future researchers eventually developed a pre-test questioning method which set the truthful subjects apart from the guilty. Years later he showed detectives how to use these standardized questions for field work.

The Structured Interview

A structured interview should include a minimum of eight questions. If there are multiple suspects ask each the same. The wording can be adjusted as long as the meaning is not changed. Be careful of your voice and body language so you don't send an unintended message. The goal is to have a conversation with rapport.

Ask questions lightheartedly so people open up. Don't appear you're reading from a list, things should be fluid and informal. Weave the questions in and out of your conversation. The questions are part of the interview, not the interview. And, try not to treat the person as a suspect, they just may be innocent. We look for both verbal and nonverbal responses. After each appropriate response record T (truthful) or D (deceptive) along with their exact behavior and words. If you are unsure of truthfulness mark a zero. Only the questions with an asterisk are scored.

1. Who are your closest friends?¹

This is a good question if there's a possibility of codefendants. Bring it up well before the others, otherwise they may pick up on what you're after. Record names but don't probe.

2. We've been looking into ? for a while and your name came up. Does this bother you talking about this? *

The truthful will usually accept the purpose of the interview; I'm fine with it, no problem, I don't like it but I understand you have a job to do. The liar may take the opposite view; depends, this is a waste of time, I don't like it, this is an insult to my integrity. Regardless the answer, ask them why to draw them out.

3. Like I said we've been looking into this for a while so if you did do this thing you might as well say so. We're you the one who? *

Once in a while people admit they did it, so ask this early. Truthful people flat out reject the suggestion with glaring eye contact. The liar is apt to hesitate, look away then answer no.



FACE to FACE



Truthful "No" answers: The person answers immediately saying, "You're nuts" or "You're crazy!" etc. No comes in a direct and final fashion or challenge. Deceptive "No" answers: The subject is less direct and body motion is usually seen e.g. nose touch, cough, averted eyes, etc. The liar may also close the eyes, hesitate, or shake the head.

4. **Ever dream or think about doing? even though you didn't do it? ***
The truthful tend to give a direct denial; no, no way, never, are you crazy. The most common trait is hesitating before answering. Following an obvious hesitation the liar might answer; yeah, but not seriously, yeah everyone does it don't they.
5. **Well, why wouldn't you do something like this? ***
Truthful people often begin with "I wouldn't because..." Their answers commonly have a moral or ethical base; I don't steal, it's against my morals, I wasn't raised that way. The liar usually focusses on the punishment; It's against the law, my job is important.
6. **Got any ideas how this thing happened? ***
The truthful often supply ideas. Liars usually don't. Listen closely in either case because the suspect may reveal how it was done.
7. **If we had been there that day/night what do you think we would have seen?**
Watch for nonverbal clues. I find this question really catches the guilty off-guard. If they choose to lie, it should be evident. The verbal response is also important because the suspect may give additional information.
8. **I've been trying to figure out why someone did this. Got any ideas? ***
Truthful people usually speculate. Liars typically do not; I have no idea, never thought about it. Author's Note: Guilty people may actually give reasons, oftentimes factual, which can be used in an interrogation. When I asked a road sign thief this he (truthfully) said, "They probably were going to decorate their room." During the interrogation I told him I was convinced he took them for his room

rather than to sell. And he confessed.

9. **I'm just wondering if people should get a so-called second chance for doing something like this. What do you think? ***
Truthful people usually reject any second chance; No way, absolutely not they'll do it again. The liar might say; it depends on what they did, I don't see why not.
10. **What do you think should happen to people for doing this kind of thing? ***
Truthful people usually offer strong punishment. The liar might say; that's not up to me, I don't know, depends how they did it. Author's Note: Occasionally, both answer the same so really be careful interpreting this one.
11. **Do you think the person who did this wishes it never happened?**
Ask them why. What we want are reasons which can be incorporated into the interrogation. Also listen for the suspect to use the pronoun "I" by mistake such as, "of course I do" instead of "of course they do." Nonverbals often accompany the slip.
12. **If they were here right now what would you ask them?**
The suspect often answers "Why did you do it?" Follow their lead whatever they say to draw out more information. Merge their answer into your interrogation.
13. **Why do you think these people said you did/are involved in this? ***
The truthful person will typically defy the statement as false; Maybe someone did assault them but it wasn't me. A liar normally leaves off the denial such as; I don't know, it's not up to me, that's hard to say. A liar won't appear too upset either. The truthful seem genuinely offended at the allegation.
14. **Is there any reason why even innocently...your prints would be found... someone said they saw you, etc.? ***
An important question used only after the subject has denied something. A hesitation in responding or changing the denial - e.g.: Oh yeah I was on that road...I remember now I did touch that bag, etc., should be viewed as more deceptive than truthful.

15. **Give us one reason why we should believe your answers today? ² ***

Look for an assertion of truthfulness e.g. because it's the truth, because I'm telling the truth, because I didn't lie. Answers such as; why should I lie, because I don't lie, I don't lie, I was not raised to lie, I wouldn't lie about something like that, etc., are problematic. The person has probably lied somewhere during the interview.

16. **If it became necessary could we talk with you about this again?**

When appropriate, get a second interview confirmation. It's a powerful psychological tool used to get the person back into the interview room.

Evaluating the Responses

Add up the truthful and deceptive responses. Seventy percent of the responses marked truthful would indicate a high probability the subject is truthful. The same applies for the deceptive column. If you recorded unsure responses, add those up as well. After deciding where the subject breaks out you will have three choices:

1. **Can I eliminate the person from suspicion?**
 If yes, return to the room, thank them for helping out, and terminate the interview.
2. **If they cannot be eliminated, is there enough evidence to interrogate now?**
 If no, thank them for coming in but make a second interview confirmation.
3. **If there is enough evidence to interrogate, is the subject ready to be interrogated?**
 If no, return and make a second interview confirmation.
 If yes, return to the room after a short break and begin interrogating.

Contact me for a sample structured interview response form and additional information on the structured interview. The response sheet contains other investigative questions and what to look for.

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Reference:

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COURSE OR CONSULTING INQUIRIES TO:

Jeff Baile,
 3408 West Chartwell Road,
 Peoria, Illinois, 61614
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