Probing Questions in Interviews

Often, we want or need more information than we get when we ask a question during an interview. Probing is asking follow-up questions when we do not fully understand a response, when answers are vague or ambiguous or when we want to obtain more specific or in-depth information. For example: “What did you like best about the program?”

1. Could you please tell me more about...
2. I’m not quite sure I understood …Could you tell me about that some more?
3. I’m not certain what you mean by… Could you give me some examples?
4. Could you tell me more about your thinking on that?
5. You mentioned….Could you tell me more about that? What stands out in your mind about that?
6. This is what I thought I heard…Did I understand you correctly?
7. So what I hear you saying is…”
8. Can you give me an example of...
9. What makes you feel that way?
10. What are some of your reasons for liking it?
11. You just told me about…. I’d also like to know about....

Probing questions often begin with “what” or “how” because they invite more detail. Questions that begin with “Do you...” or “Are you...” invite personal reflection. “Why” questions can be problematic. They may put the respondent on the defensive or result in little useful information and require additional probing. Example: “Why did you do that?” “...because I wanted to”. If possible, try to replace “why” with “what”. With any question, watch for leading questions or bias in your probes.

References: