



## CHAPTER 8

### Example Interview

Now that we've covered the interview techniques in theory, let's see how they work in practice by dissecting an actual interview for the LocalGuide. This interview includes some good examples of effective technique, and the interviewee is very reflective about her own behavior. However, there's also plenty of room for improvement; in particular, you'll see there are a number of missed opportunities for follow-up.

The interviewers introduce themselves and everyone gets seated. The interview takes place in a very informal meeting room at the interviewee's place of business. It has pillows on the floor and some books scattered around. After a little bit of social chat, the primary interviewer introduces the design problem.

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#### Interview transcript

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** We're designing a product called the LocalGuide. It's a device with a screen and GPS capability for people going new places. Something they will be able to pick up there. So, we're doing research into the way people travel, both the planning for the trip, activities during the trip, and activities once you actually get to your destination and how you decide what you're going to do. To start off, how often do you travel during the year, and what proportion is business versus pleasure?

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#### Comments

The interviewer could skip the first three sentences, which would distract most interviewees, and focus on what he's trying to learn rather than on describing the product.

The overview question is pretty good, in that it's broad and designed to uncover different types of travel. Unfortunately, it assumes that the interviewee categorizes travel in two ways: some people may see travel related to family obligations, for example, as neither business nor pleasure. This phrasing also implies that the interviewers are only interested in two categories, which may prevent the interviewee from mentioning others. Better would be, "How often do you travel, and for what reasons?"

Interview transcript	Comments
	It would also be good to ask for a brief description of the interviewee's family and occupation, since these might shed light later on.
<b>PARTICIPANT:</b> Business tends to just be once or twice a year. Mind you I'm new to business. But personal is more like once every other month or so. Short trips, long trips.	
<b>PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:</b> Can you talk to us about one of your recent long trips?	This is a nice case-specific question. Before diving in to a specific trip, though, it would be worth asking for examples of those short and long trips so the interviewers could decide which is more interesting.
<b>PARTICIPANT:</b> A recent long trip? Let's see... Now, does a new destination count? Because there's... So the longest trip I've taken recently was a trip to Colorado on the way home for winter break.	Interviewees often pause to think. The interviewers are just listening, as they should.
<b>PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:</b> Where's home?	
<b>PARTICIPANT:</b> Kansas. So, I had driven with some friends to Colorado, and they were from Colorado, so I dropped them off there and stayed with them for a few days, and then went on to Kansas, and then flew back, because I was basically getting rid of my car because I was tired of having it in the city.	
<b>PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:</b> Tell us about that trip.	This kind of vague encouragement can work well if you're not sure yet what to ask next.
<b>PARTICIPANT:</b> So it was kind of one of those trips that takes two weeks, but I get three or four big things done. Like, holiday with the family, dropping the car off, taking some friends home and celebrating Hanukkah with them, and then Christmas with my family. And I have never driven this direction, from California back that way, so that's part of the reason I was looking forward to having friends with me so that we could figure out ... they could all navigate.	There's an implied sense of safety in numbers or discomfort with navigation that's probably worth exploring. It might be too personal for this early in the interview, but it's the sort of topic to make a note about and return to later.

Interview transcript	Comments
<b>PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:</b> Talk to us a little about the planning for that trip. How many friends were you traveling with?	These are fairly distinct questions, so it would be best to ask them one at a time. Otherwise, interviewees (and interviewers) can forget what was asked.
<b>PARTICIPANT:</b> It was two guys and so there were three of us. That was nice actually because I sort of took charge of the date and just making sure that we were all planning on leaving Friday evening and that type of thing; that everyone was sort of packed. And the two guys actually looked stuff up on maps and were checking the weather because we were driving and this was December so there were all those snow storms. And we actually made it to Colorado right as they had cleared the roads after that really bad storm in Denver so that was amusing. We were driving through Denver and there were all these cars out on the side of the road, like they had just spun off the road and had just crashed.	There are a couple of things worth following up on here. What else does she mean by "...that type of thing?" What kinds of information did the guys look up on maps? (Note that third-party behavior is sometimes worth asking about as long as you take the answer with a grain of salt).
<b>SECOND INTERVIEWER:</b> You really did just miss the danger.	Also notice that although the storm was a memorable part of her trip, it has little to do with the future product. It's best to acknowledge that this must have been scary, then ask a closed question to redirect the conversation in an unobtrusive way. Ideally, the interviewer should ask for the sequence of events from the point of deciding to go on the trip through arriving in Colorado.
<b>PARTICIPANT:</b> Oh yeah. And it was a fun trip, too, because one of the guys had just gotten a GPS in-car device, so we probably shouldn't have done this, but we drove through snow storms that we probably shouldn't have because the two guys were assuming that it probably maps to the road pretty well, so we can drive faster than normal because we can tell what's coming up.	This statement without any question following it elicits more on the same topic.
<b>PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:</b> So the visibility was bad enough you couldn't quite see the road?	Not entirely relevant to the research, though it's worth noting what they expected the GPS device to be capable of.
<b>PARTICIPANT:</b> There were times when I would have driven really, really slowly and when the guys got behind the wheel, the two of them were in charge and they, despite the fact that that's not what I wanted, drove much faster than I would have liked. I was scared.	Now the car isn't the only thing at risk of going off the road; so is the interview. There's no harm in this kind of digression if you have lots of time, but that's not the case in most sessions.

Interview transcript	Comments
<b>PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:</b> So you were awake during this, you weren't sleeping.	The digression continues.
<b>PARTICIPANT:</b> Well, I was trying to sleep. Because we were heading up through Tahoe, for example, the visibility was really bad and the roads were pretty nasty, and I would have gone 20 (mph) or 30, but they were going 50, 60.	
<b>PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:</b> What kind of car?	More digression.
<b>PARTICIPANT:</b> RAV 4.	
<b>PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:</b> A bit of false confidence there, too.	More digression, as well as a big assumption about what's driving the behavior.
<b>PARTICIPANT:</b> Yeah. Handles pretty well, but not that well. Let's see... they were fun to travel with too, because they're pretty laid back so as far as getting food and stuff, we kind of had some ideas. They knew some destinations in Colorado to check out along the way and just things like, "Let's hit In-N-Out Burger before we leave," so we used the GPS device to find out where the nearest In-N-Out Burger was as we were moving along. Because our trip was being planned along with the weather. When the weather would get really bad, we'd have to stop, and so we'd use the GPS device then to find out what was nearby.	It's actually the interviewee who pulls the discussion back onto the road. She also presents several opportunities for follow-up questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— How did finding things work?</li> <li>— What kinds of things did you look for besides food?</li> <li>— When did you look for specific names, and when not?</li> </ul> This would be a good time to see how the GPS device worked if it were available, find an image of it online so the interviewee could have a visual prompt, or at least ask about its name to look up later.
<b>PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:</b> How did you check the weather?	The interviewee didn't mention checking the weather, so this is another assumption.
<b>PARTICIPANT:</b> Well, if we were in it, and it didn't seem to be clearing and the radio said that it would only get worse...	
<b>PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:</b> Okay, so, through the radio and reality. So, when the weather was particularly bad, you'd use the GPS to find... what?	This question is headed in the right direction.

Interview transcript	Comments
<b>PARTICIPANT:</b> It actually lets you search for nearby restaurants, and you could search restaurant genres, so, "Does everyone feel like Mexican? Yeah? There's something nearby."	So what came first? Was it the kind of food people want to eat, or what's close by? It's important to understand the starting point.
<b>PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:</b> Did you have lodging planned? How many days did you take from San Francisco to Colorado?	This question is somewhat leading, since the interviewee hasn't mentioned lodging yet. It may be necessary to bring up later, but there are plenty of other questions the interviewers could have asked.
<b>PARTICIPANT:</b> We had planned not to stop.	The reason she didn't mention it.
<b>PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:</b> Well, with three people...	
<b>PARTICIPANT:</b> I'm trying to remember if we ended up actually stopping or not. I can't quite remember if we did. No, I don't think we stopped. I think we just went straight through. I've done that a couple times.	Memories can be fuzzy, even with fairly recent events. This is one reason trip artifacts (even receipts) could be helpful.
<b>PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:</b> So how long did it actually end up taking you, with the weather?	
<b>PARTICIPANT:</b> With the weather, to Denver, I think it took about 19 hours or so.	
<b>PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:</b> Okay, once you were in Colorado, what did you do?	This is a reasonable second overview question for this segment of the interview. However, it's a bit early to move on from the previous topic. How often did they stop on the way? Where did they stop? What difficulties did they encounter in finding things? While road trips are not strictly part of the LocalGuide plan, there's still useful information to be had.
<b>PARTICIPANT:</b> Okay, so we get there, and we stay at...	
<b>PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:</b> This is in Boulder?	It's best not to interrupt.

## Interview transcript

**PARTICIPANT:** Uh-huh. Yeah, we stayed with one of the guys, his family, and we sort of took it easy because of the storm, and I actually had to go get my car checked for... the lights had turned off on the inside of the car and were not turning back on, even though the car was running, for the last... This is funny, we were driving with a flashlight in the morning as we were coming into... because there were no lights. Just a fuse had burned out. So we had asked my friend's parents where to go, and they suggested a Sam's Club or a Wal-Mart or one of those attached car stations.

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** So otherwise you just hung out with them?

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah.

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** How many days were you in Boulder?

**PARTICIPANT:** Let's see, I was there for... I think it was just two days. There was a little bit of shopping and a little bit of visiting with friends at a coffee shop or planning for the dinner and going out and getting supplies for the dinner, the Hanukkah dinner. And most of that was word of mouth, as far as knowing where to go. "Where should we go buy some wine?"

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** From whom?

**PARTICIPANT:** From my friend's parents. Both of those guys had lived in that area just a while ago, so they would call someone and confirm that a restaurant they used to go to was still there. So, pretty much all friends. I tend to like to travel to places where I know somebody there already. It just makes it a little bit easier, right?

## Comments

Unexpected car repairs are an interesting need to note for the LocalGuide.

Follow-up opportunities:

- Where did you go?
- How did you decide?
- How did you find it?

Reflecting back what you hear is good, but don't assume there's no interesting behavior in "hanging out."

Again, the interviewee helps out by volunteering more. This is one reason to make interviews very conversational; once people get going, the interview flow is less reliant on the interviewers asking just the right questions.

Several follow-up opportunities here:

- What did you shop for and where?
- How did you decide where to go?
- How did you find the coffee shop?

An affirmation of the basic product concept, plus an interesting point about the importance of having current information. Follow-up opportunity: What's easier about knowing someone who lives there?

## Interview transcript

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** Yeah.

**PARTICIPANT:** Or I end up traveling somewhere that someone else I know has traveled recently.

**SECOND INTERVIEWER:** Why is that better?

**PARTICIPANT:** It's just so much easier when somebody can give you a few pointers to get started. I tend to travel in such a way that I have a couple destinations that I'd like to go to and maybe they helped me figure out, oh, you should go to this landmark because there's that, plus there's other stuff around it if you don't like that. And then I tend to... "Okay, we're going to go somewhere." But I never really stick to going there, so if something else more interesting shows up or whatever, I like to be very flexible, but still a destination to at least get started towards.

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** When you're traveling like that, how do you decide what other things to do? So if you planned to go one place, how do you find other things to do?

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, I guess it depends on how you're moving about. So I had gone to Venice last November, and my friend and I had both looked in some tour books. So we went to Venice, which is a pretty small place, and so we had picked out a couple of things like, "Oh, we really need to go see this, and this." And we were there for an event. Again, this is like, I like going somewhere where there are people involved.

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** What was the event?

## Comments

This is exactly the kind of follow-up opportunity the second interviewer should be looking for, in case the primary interviewer doesn't catch it.

This would be a good point to paraphrase: "So, it sounds like you start out with a loose plan, but you often change it if something else seems more interesting."

Don't worry if your first attempt at a question is a bit unclear; you're trying to track too many things in the interview to be perfectly articulate at all times. If you realize it's unclear, immediately try a different rendition.

The interview is dealing in generalizations at this point, so it would be good to get case-specific again soon.

Once again, the interviewee volunteers just the right sort of thing.

## Interview transcript

**PARTICIPANT:** Architectural Biennial show that was put on by one of the universities there. So, we knew that that event was going to take most of the time, and so we had a little standing list of things that when we had free time, we should do. Check out the major square there. Go to the major shopping street. There was a glass blowing... island actually. An island with glass blowing workshops, which we did not make it to.

**SECOND INTERVIEWER:** But you wanted to?

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, it was definitely on the list. But I guess that's the thing. I don't like making the list solid because then I regret if we didn't get somewhere. But maybe there's something more interesting.

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** So once you had some free time, and you wanted to get to one of these places, how did you find it?

**PARTICIPANT:** We were looking at tourist maps in tourist books for the most part.

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** Guidebooks that you brought with you?

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, guidebooks. And attempting to ask directions.

## Comments

Opportunities for follow-up:

- Was this just a loose list of possibilities in your head, or did you have them laid out more specifically as an itinerary?
- What information did you note before you left on your trip, and what did you find while you were there?
- What other preplanning did you do?

This sounds like a goal: Have a plan to use as a starting point, but maintain flexibility. This would be a good thing to paraphrase back for confirmation. Follow-up opportunities:

- Can you give us an example of a time when you dropped your plans because something else seemed more interesting? What made you decide that?
- How did you come across these opportunities?

This question should yield some good information. It's still a little general, though. The interviewers would get more detail and ensure better coverage by asking for an overview of each day's itinerary, then focusing on a few different examples of behavior.

Good clarification. It would also be useful to take a look at the guidebooks if they were nearby, or at least ask for their titles and look at them later.

## Interview transcript

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** Neither of you spoke the language?

**PARTICIPANT:** No, not really.

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** How did that work out?

**PARTICIPANT:** We'd usually figure out where we were going eventually. One of the people who had... so I went with a friend and there was another group of people who met us there. And when we finally connected with them, one of them spoke better Italian and had been to Venice before. Again, using people is the easiest way. So he would direct us. I think the hardest part became that you'd get somewhere, and then getting back was usually the hardest part.

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** Why?

**PARTICIPANT:** Because I felt like I should know how to get back, and so it's really frustrating when you can't retrace your steps. I *should* know how to get back to the apartment that we're staying at but everything's in reverse and I can't quite keep it in my head straight. I think the hardest part usually of traveling is dealing with the mass transit. I don't usually get to rent a car when I go somewhere, but I always kind of like that because you can just sort of head out in the right direction and hopefully you'll end up there. If you're stuck with mass transit, you have to know how to do it.

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** Can you give us an example of when you ran into that?

## Comments

Good clarification. This highlights an interesting design issue: How will the device account for people who don't speak the language very well, or at all?

Good follow-up.

Follow-up opportunity: Why, exactly, is it easiest to ask a person? It might sound like a question with an obvious answer, but the interviewee's reasons might be different from yours: Local people have more recent information, the guidebooks lack detail, she doesn't want to carry a map...there are many possibilities.

Be sure to note her mental model regarding navigation: The place she's staying is the center of her universe and the ultimate point of reference. This will have design implications later on.

Opportunity for follow-up: What in particular is hard about dealing with mass transit?

Good, case-specific follow-up.

## Interview transcript

**PARTICIPANT:** So in Venice, for example, we were trying to get to the airport to leave. And my friend was sort of in charge of navigating that day. And we took the wrong boat but we didn't know it, and we didn't know it for a very long time, because it was supposed to be a very long boat ride. And ended up on some other island, not the mainland, and missed our flight back to the states. So, that's pretty scary.

I lived in Japan for a while, and we would travel to other cities. Their mass transit's pretty easy to use, but when you'd end up on one of the older systems that didn't announce very well which stop was coming up or that sort of thing... I was with a friend and we were headed to Kyoto and the station that we were supposed to get off on never got announced and then there was a 20 minute ride to the next station. And it was very late at night and so we were very disappointed in having to turn around and come back. And we were nervous that there wouldn't be any trains going back. None of that stuff was very obvious because of the language issue.

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** How long were you in Japan?

**PARTICIPANT:** I lived there for a year and did a lot of traveling while I was in the country.

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** What took you there?

**PARTICIPANT:** I taught English in the JET program. Japanese Exchange and Teaching program, I think, because it's not just English. Yeah, it's run by the government and it's a very sweet deal if you can run off for a year. If you're a college graduate, they pay you well and give you lots of vacation and send you out to the boonies, that's the catch.

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** Oh, how far out were you?

## Comments

It sounds like there might be another goal here: Avoid the negative consequences of navigational error.

Opportunity for follow-up: What resources did you use to figure out how to get where you were going?

This is tempting to ask, since it sounds like travel, though living somewhere long-term is not the situation for the LocalGuide.

This is a bit off the track, but okay if you have time.

Still wandering a bit.

## Interview transcript

**PARTICIPANT:** Nobody ends up in Tokyo. They only have one placement in Tokyo, they had four placements in Osaka, and the other two thousand people end up just... everywhere. So I was on an island called Shikoku, well, okay, everything in Japan's an island, but in a very small farming town. In my town, taking the buses, and even using a taxi was incredibly difficult. So, navigating in Japan is incredibly difficult because they don't have street numbers and they don't have ordered building addresses. So, your apartment could be 225 apartment on something street, and the building next to you could be 5 apartment building, same street. Because the numbers don't go in order, they go in order of when the building was built. So it's a little different. But one thing that is nice is the way they organize the... the cities, the way that you organize the mailing addresses and stuff like that... it's about chunking. So you start with... they even write their postal address flipped from us. So their first line is Japan, and the very second line is the county or the zip code. I think it's the... no you probably write the zip code first, now I can't even remember. Anyway, so it's sort of like, the county, the city, the street, and the address number. And in some bigger cities there's a... trying to remember the equivalents, there's like the...

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** Neighborhood?

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, the borough, you'd enter that as well.

**SECOND INTERVIEWER:** So how did you get around?

**PARTICIPANT:** You can see why GPS has taken off there, way more than in other places. 'Cause that was great. We'd be walking somewhere, and you could pretty much ask people on the street, "I need to get to this restaurant or this place," and they would almost always pull out a cell phone and look it up on a map. And show you, "My cell phone says, we are here, and you have to go this way, this way, this way."

## Comments

The helpful interviewee eventually brings it back to navigation, though some of the mailing address information is less relevant.

The second interviewer realizes they've digressed a bit and gives the conversation an appropriate nudge.

This functionality was not yet common in the U.S. at the time of the interview. The LocalGuide stakeholders will want to know they should consider cell phones as competition or as a possible channel for the service.

Interview transcript	Comments
<p><b>PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:</b> So is that what you did, you would mostly ask people? Or did you have any other methods?</p>	<p>Better phrasing would be, "So, did you mostly ask people versus using other methods? How else did you find your way round?" Still, this does the trick.</p>
<p><b>PARTICIPANT:</b> In the cities I'd mostly ask people. There's also... they have police boxes in all cities. In my little city it wasn't really that useful, but, so if you were super lost or just had questions, you could go to the police box and they had huge drawers full of maps and they would point you in the right direction.</p>	<p>Follow-up opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Besides getting directions, what kinds of questions did you ask?</li> <li>— Do you happen to have any photos of one of these boxes?</li> </ul>
<p><b>PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:</b> So like an information kiosk?</p>	<p>Good clarification.</p>
<p><b>PARTICIPANT:</b> Yeah, they're the police, but it's like... maybe they don't have that much to do in Japan 'cause it's safe. They're much more like a civil servant than they are an enforcement agency. Yeah, I very specifically remember being in Tokyo and looking for an art gallery and seeing one of the police boxes, when I was with a friend.</p>	<p>Here's a good opening to follow up on that desire for help with navigating, which came up earlier in the discussion.</p>
<p>Mind you, I don't really travel alone very much. Well, if I do travel alone it's usually out to the woods or something, so there's no need for directions.</p>	
<p>So the two of us went to the police box, had the address of the place. I don't think they like dealing with foreigners very much, so if your Japanese isn't that great—my Japanese was pretty bad at this point—you could tell he was frustrated. Like, oh, no, I have to help this person. And he gave us bad directions, and we ended up walking in a spiral after a while and realized this was completely not the right place, and asking someone on the street who pulls out a cell phone and then actually walks with us to the gallery.</p>	
<p><b>INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT:</b> But for the most part, mass transit, the subways were so easy to use. So, so, easy to use because you could see that big map up front and you could say I'm going from "here" to "here" [points], and there were very few time schedules to deal with because they ran pretty regularly. And so you had very few factors to handle at once, especially with language issues.</p>	<p>Good case-specific follow-up.</p>
<p><b>SECOND INTERVIEWER:</b> So what about the first time you used one of those maps. What was it like for you?</p>	<p>Follow-up opportunity: Do you happen to have a photo or a copy of the subway map?</p>
<p><b>PARTICIPANT:</b> Oh, yeah, it was in Tokyo, and it was like, oh my God, the subway map is this big? What?!? So the hardest part was actually finding the right destination on the huge map, because it just took so long. You had to wander around with your eyes and try to find the right spot. And I think later on I realized there was a listing in alphabetical order, in English, in a corner somewhere.</p>	<p>It may be possible to find one online later.</p>
<p><b>PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:</b> In a corner of the map or a corner of the train hall?</p>	
<p><b>PARTICIPANT:</b> Oh, up on this big board, over in a corner somewhere so you had to get up closer to so you could actually read it type of thing. But the color coding was always really great, especially in the newer systems they'd even color-coded the trains themselves, so you could really understand what was going on. Boston's like that too. The different lines, like the Red Line and the Blue Line, the stations are actually red and blue.</p>	<p>This shouldn't surprise a designer, but it's a good indication of the clues people use to associate things, such as a red train with a red line on the map.</p>
<p><b>SECOND INTERVIEWER:</b> And that helped?</p>	
<p><b>PARTICIPANT:</b> Oh yeah. And it was beautiful too. Like the stations near Harvard are these beautiful, ruby red tiles everywhere. And if you're more downtown, it's shimmery blue everywhere.</p>	

Interview transcript	Comments
<b>PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:</b> When were you in Boston?	This isn't particularly relevant, but it expresses interest in what's being said, and may elicit whether she was a tourist or a resident.
<b>PARTICIPANT:</b> I lived there for a little while, actually when I got back from Japan, so I guess that was two years ago.	Since she was a resident, Boston probably isn't worth pursuing in detail.
<b>PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:</b> So, in Japan, with all this free time they gave you, how did you decide what things you wanted to see?	Good redirection.
<b>PARTICIPANT:</b> Interesting. It's always kind of a mix of things, right, because there's people's recommendations, but a lot of it is based on... I've got this hobby, I've got this interest, so what's unique to this place that sort of caters to that. So if I went to Osaka or I went to Tokyo or I took the time to go that direction, I would make sure I was going to see some art or some design.	
<b>PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:</b> How would you find out what's there?	Nice follow-up.
<b>PARTICIPANT:</b> So, the Internet. A lot of the Internet. I kept running into About.com, which is not one of my favorite Web sites, so that was always kind of frustrating.	
<b>PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:</b> It would just turn up a lot in the search results?	Fine clarification. The question is leading, though relatively harmless. It would be better to ask how she kept "running into About.com" and why it isn't one of her favorites.
<b>PARTICIPANT:</b> Yeah. Exactly. Occasionally you'd read cool things in a blog; someone had visited somewhere and made good notes of it.	Opportunities for follow-up: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— How did you know what blogs to read?</li> <li>— What in those blogs would catch your eye?</li> </ul>

Interview transcript	Comments
<b>PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:</b> What don't you like about About.com?	Good follow-up, since it could help point to things to avoid in the LocalGuide design.
<b>PARTICIPANT:</b> The information is really weird. Sometimes it's too vague, and sometimes it's too in-depth. And it's rarely what I actually need. Because it's not catering to any one use, it's just if you were curious about the subject and wanted to read up on it. But that's not what I'm doing. That's what bugs me about tour books a lot too. Like, I don't actually want to read about this city, that's why I'm going there. And if I'm going to read about a city, I'd prefer it actually be in story format. So I actually did that a lot. When I was in Japan I bought books that were... <i>Wind-Up Bird Chronicles</i> or people's stories of their visits to the city of Tokyo, Osaka, wherever. 'Cause if I'm going to read about the city, I find just reading about the location really bland. Like, it doesn't have any context, it's not associated with people in any way. It's usually about buildings and purchases and stuff that's just really not that interesting. So, for example, in Venice I bought a few books while I was there, like a murder mystery that happened in Venice and that was supposed to be based on some true stories. Like, the stories themselves were not, but some of the characters in the book were real people. It was trying to be historically accurate and it was trying to be very truthful to the feeling of the city. That kind of thing I'll learn about a city from.	If only they had a computer and Internet connection nearby, they could look at an example.  Interesting data about what kind of information appeals to her: stories involving people. Given how often she's spoken about involving people, as well as the enthusiasm she shows here, it seems there's some goal waiting to be discovered. A good follow-up to uncover it might be: "It sounds like you really enjoy getting to know a place through stories about people who live there, even fictional ones. Why do you think that's so appealing to you?"
<b>SECOND INTERVIEWER:</b> You mentioned that you... what do you find valuable in these books or why do you have them?	A good follow-up from the second interviewer; it does the job, even if awkwardly phrased.



## Interview transcript

**PARTICIPANT:** I like that a lot of those books give you a sense of scale. Like, I love that San Francisco Moleskine book because it gives you so many pieces of the scale of the city. So, you can see the full city, you can see the chunks of the city.

I guess it goes back to the way they do things in Japan, with the chunking. I guess that is a very easy way to get around, as it turns out, because you just head in the right direction, and then you get there. And from there you chunk down. And you head in the right direction and chunk down. And you head in the direction... so as long as you're traveling and you don't have to be there at a specific time, that's actually a really great way to move about. So, a lot of tour books are good about ... I'm trying to remember the one I always look for. It has a lot of pictures and their logo is a little open book. And they also do a series of... *[Looks around the room, spots a book by the same publisher next to her on the floor. Pulls out the book so interviewers can see the logo.]* Oh, DK. You know, they do all these look-books and then they also started doing tour books.

**SECOND INTERVIEWER:** And you were saying that's one that you like?

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, lots of pictures. I think that's part of the fun before you go somewhere, is looking at the pictures and getting excited about it. But I try not to put too much pressure on actually deciding. It's more like it's just a fun part of the process, but actually trying to make a decision before I get there is stressful.

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** So let's shift a little bit to business travel, unless you've got any questions? *[Turns to second interviewer.]*

## Comments

More openings to look at artifacts (the Moleskine book and DK tour book) if such things were nearby. If not, the team can look them up later. This is a good example of how artifacts can prompt memory; there happens to be a book by the same publisher in the room. You can see where the interview suffers a bit from not being done in context. It's clearly not possible to follow the interviewee on all of the trips she discusses, but asking her to bring her guidebooks and other artifacts would have helped.

The explicit discussion of information chunking is an unusual level of analysis to get from an interviewee.

More useful data about the kind of information that appeals to her.

This is exactly the kind of team communication that should be happening when the primary interviewer goes in a new direction. It's best not to mention the new topic before checking in with your partner, though.

## Interview transcript

**SECOND INTERVIEWER:** Sure, let me take a look here, just a second. *[Flips through her notebook.]* Let's just talk about Venice for one more minute. You were talking about...

**PARTICIPANT:** And I don't have that much business travel experience. I went to South by Southwest *[a conference]*. Does that even count as business travel? We were actually there doing work, but it was kind of... I work at a start-up. There's no suits, there's no briefcases.

**SECOND INTERVIEWER:** It's still business travel. So... you knew about the architectural show before you went over there. How did you find out about that?

**PARTICIPANT:** That was, again, through a person.

**SECOND INTERVIEWER:** So, can you tell me how that happened?

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, it was a friend. He knew about it through a friend, and that friend knew about it because he was friends with a few of the designers who were in the show, and actually worked on one of the projects that was being showcased.

**SECOND INTERVIEWER:** Did you take any actions to find out any information about it for yourself?

## Comments

The second interviewer is looking for things she's marked for later follow-up, which is a good thing to do in your notes.

The interviewee is distracted by the new topic.

The interviewer has to wrest the focus back to the earlier topic.

Note that the second interviewer is temporarily taking the primary interviewer role. This is typical at the end of an interview segment. The primary interviewer should pick up the second interviewer's role for a few minutes.

Open-ended phrasing would be better, but the interviewee is speaking freely enough that it's not a problem.

## Interview transcript

**PARTICIPANT:** I had looked at the Web site before we went, and found that to be kind of... It's hard because a lot of times I want to go see art and design, and Web sites are never very good representations of what you're about to go see. If I'm visiting a historic location, a lot of times the Web sites are a little more interesting because they'll have some of that history up there. If it's a current event type thing that you're going to, it seems like there's not that much you can do beforehand to prepare for it. It's interesting, too, because I think that as I travel more in the states and start to see certain things over and over again, then I'll start to see maybe less current event stuff and start to see more normal destinations I guess. But it's the current event that was... it's the neat thing happening right now is enough motivation to get me to go, whereas going to a park or going to go see a monument is necessarily motivating enough.

**SECOND INTERVIEWER:** Are those the "normal" destinations?

**PARTICIPANT:** That's what it seems like.

**SECOND INTERVIEWER:** Okay.

**PARTICIPANT:** Travel is a little stressful, so those don't make it worth it, but if I've been there already or know someone now in that city that stuff seems more worth it.

**SECOND INTERVIEWER:** Oh, interesting.

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** What do you find stressful about travel?

## Comments

The interviewee starts to answer the questions, then takes a detour to some general statements. The interviewer must decide whether to ask again for the answer to her original question or follow up on this new direction. It's possible to do both if you make a note to return to a topic later.

She chooses the new direction.

This response is too minimal. The interviewer should be giving an indication of where she wants the interviewee to go next.

Follow-up opportunity: What's stressful about travel?

Still not giving any direction.

The primary interviewer (who has briefly played the second interviewer role) steps in to pick up the follow-up opportunity and resume the primary role.

## Interview transcript

**PARTICIPANT:** Mostly making decisions. Knowing that you have a certain amount of time there and you're with other people, and they have certain things that they want to do. And so when you're making decisions, you're making compromises. You're deciding not to go somewhere else, you know that you're possibly not making the right decision.

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** In Japan, were you traveling on your own most of the time?

**PARTICIPANT:** Not really, it was actually a lot of times with other people. If I traveled alone it would be to go visit a temple in another city or a hiking destination.

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** Did you find that less stressful?

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, yeah, because if you make a mistake nobody knows, nobody's affected except for you. It's also really just sort of empowering when you can just walk about on your own in a foreign country. You connect with more interesting people along the way, for example.

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** It sounds like a lot of your trips involve other people. What is it about that that you enjoy, that's worth putting up with the stress?

## Comments

There seems to be another goal here: Don't miss the good stuff by making a bad choice. Other follow-up opportunities:

- Could you give us an example of how one of the compromises was negotiated?
- What information did you use to make the decision?

Follow-up opportunity: How was that different from when you traveled with someone? Could you give us an example?

This is leading, but she's already indicated that group decision-making is stressful, so it's not likely to cause a problem.

The comment about a sense of empowerment is interesting. It sounds like achieving some sense of freedom or mastery might be a goal, so this is worth a follow-up: What exactly is empowering about it?

This is a good question with the potential to uncover a goal.

## Interview transcript

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, I think in some ways it de-stresses a little bit, too. You get to share the responsibilities of the travel with other people. It's not that I can't figure out the map on my own or that I don't have ideas about where to go, but it's nice when you're with someone because you can double check your own thinking on the directions, you can toss it off to them when you're tired or you just want to be enjoying the scenery. So, my little brother had come to visit, and I had taken him around to many different places and ended up in Tokyo, and that was more stressful than normal because he's very bad with directions and so it was not only trying to appease him, but also having to do all of that stuff. Figuring out where to go, and how to get there, and paying for all of it... But it was nice because there was also a lot of shared experiences and so later on when you come back you get to talk to someone about it. Like, I have beautiful memories of hiking and of seeing these temples and things, but I always feel funny trying to tell people about it. It's just... you weren't there, especially nature type of settings and things like temples, where the beauty was what it made you think or feel, not itself.

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** Okay, so, the trip to South by Southwest. Business travel.

**PARTICIPANT:** It was business travel.

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** What was business about it? Was it the conference, or...?

## Comments

There are a couple of goals implicit here:

- Don't stress about navigating and planning.
- Share the wonder of new experiences with someone.

Both should be paraphrased back to the interviewee for confirmation.

The second goal seems to answer the question of why she travels with people, but so far the interviewers have not asked a fundamental question: Why does she travel? What does she want to get out of a trip?

Note that these goals are coming up fairly late in the interview; this is common, and is one reason not to cut your interviews too short.

There are only about 20 minutes left to the interview, so it's entirely reasonable that the interviewer shift gears around this time. The transition could be smoother, though.

## Interview transcript

**PARTICIPANT:** We had gone as a company. We were still pretty early in the stages of the production of our product. But at that point we had wanted to show the concept to some different people and get their feedback on it and just see what else was out there right now. It was an information-gathering trip, which is why the company paid for it. I think most of us would have gone anyways, because for a lot of us it's just a really fun conference and event. But it was really nice having the company because they actually paid for a house rental, and we all stayed at the house. And we had a few planned company things. Like, "You need to be here at this time because we need to go over... we need to do some work." That was one of the days, and then we were going to have this big company dinner at this point, and all of us had various people that we wanted to meet with and show the project to. See, we each had our own schedules around that. And of course the conference. Trying to go to the panels that mattered, and also I think all of our founders were speaking at various panels, so making sure that we got to those.

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** How did you decide which panels mattered?

**PARTICIPANT:** We were sort of allowed to do just what interests us, which is part of the reason that I work for a start-up. You do a job that interests you, or else you wouldn't be here. So, I do game design, so I went to a lot of game design panels, and talked to a lot of game designers. And it was the same pretty much for everyone else. They would go to the panels that were both interesting and relate to their jobs, but it's practically the same thing.

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** So, did you have any free time?

## Comments

Knowing what she did for a living would help give this response a bit more context.

This may be another detour, but it's probably just occurred to the interviewer that the LocalGuide might be of use at large conferences. Design research often provides insight into new opportunities, so it's worth pursuing such possibilities for a few minutes.

This is not open-ended, but it doesn't matter much since the interviewee doesn't need encouragement at this point.

## Interview transcript

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, there was actually a fair amount of free time, because the conference panels are over around 6:00 or so, and then that whole week is just jam-packed full of parties and events. And we had a party as well. I forgot about that. I can't believe I forgot, it was a big party. So this is kind of interesting because it's business, but it's... especially in the small start-ups you have to be... it's about having a lot of fun and so you might be doing marketing, but it better be fun. So, having a party is marketing for us. So that was pretty important for us. And, probably the most stressful part of that was having to do work while... trying to fit in the chunks of work into all of the events and meeting up with people. 'Cause we all had a few things we needed to get done that week. We couldn't completely stop working. So, it was harder on the programmers; they had to just stay home one day and program. I had to do some promotional materials for our party, and had gotten a lot of it done on the plane ride over. But I had an afternoon off and I needed to go to a print shop and get things printed. And I had to find the print shop in the first place.

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** How did you find that print shop?

**PARTICIPANT:** Yelp. [yelp.com]

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** Yelp? Okay. Did you have a rental car while you were there?

## Comments

Most of this is not relevant to the design problem, but the interviewee isn't providing any pauses for the interviewers to redirect the conversation. It's sometimes better to let the interviewee go for a little while like this than to be too abrupt in redirection. At the end, she gets to an interesting point and provides an opening.

Good follow-up.

Follow-up opportunities:

- Why Yelp.com?
- Did you know the name of the print shop to begin with, or were you trying to identify one as well as figure out how to get to it?

A better question than "Did you have a rental car?" would be, "How did you get around while you were there?"

## Interview transcript

**PARTICIPANT:** No, there was no rental car. Austin [Texas, the location of the conference] is thankfully pretty small, though, and a lot of cabs and stuff too. And there's also the "Dillo," like a free shuttle that runs down one of the main streets. And our house wasn't very far from one of the stops. I believe it's short for Armadillo.

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** So, after all of that, did you have any free time left to explore Austin?

**PARTICIPANT:** There wasn't a lot of personal free time. It's one of those events where, if you're by yourself, you might have done something wrong. But I did end up walking to a park with a friend, and walking down the shopping street at one point. I never buy anything, but I always end up at the shopping streets. There's a lot of stuff to look at.

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** Just window shopping...

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, exactly.

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** How are we doing on time?

**SECOND INTERVIEWER:** I've got about 10 minutes... We could start wrapping up.

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** Yeah, do you have any follow-ups on business?

**SECOND INTERVIEWER:** How much of it did you plan ahead of time, before you went out there?

## Comments

Follow-up opportunities:

- Which of these did you use?
- How did you discover them?
- What questions did you have about using them?

Closed-ended again.

Follow-up opportunities:

- How did you decide to do these things?
- How did you know where the park and shopping street were?

It's often important to watch the time, and this kind of sidebar conversation is usually fine unless it happens too often.

The interviewers asked this earlier about personal travel, so it's good to see to what extent business travel differs.

## Interview transcript

**PARTICIPANT:** Oh, for South by Southwest? A lot of the planning around that was connecting with people, and making sure that we could meet up at some point. So it was a lot of e-mailing people before I got there saying, "We're going to be here and..." And most people had set up Google calendars specifically for South by Southwest, and had started filling in all their time blocks. Like, "I'm going to go to this event at this time, maybe we can meet there." Or, "I'm going to this panel," so you could actually just... It was an interesting upsurge of all these connection tools, too. So I was keeping a calendar and checking other people's calendars a lot. E-mailing. Figuring out when we could meet up. Making sure that we had kind of set something aside, otherwise it wouldn't happen. 'Cause once you get there, it's one of those events where you sort of... the entire week just goes. It's this huge flow forward of events and people and music.

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** It was during the music festival? Or was it...

**PARTICIPANT:** There's no overlap, but there's still a lot of parties and stuff. And it's really interesting because the whole geek sphere is funny, because you're out partying but you always end up talking about tech stuff. It's the weirdest form of business, but there it is.

**PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:** Yeah, it is kind of... all consuming, I'm curious if you've ever taken any solo vacations to places you don't know? It sounds like a lot of those places you don't know you've gone with other people...

## Comments

If the interviewers are interested in potential conference uses, this might inspire ideas about potential social uses of the LocalGuide at large events and possible extensions to a Web-based service.

The first sentence is the sort of brief acknowledgement of shared experience that can help build rapport. The question seems oddly timed, but it's probably the result of the interviewer either looking at his notes or doing a mental inventory of topics that still need to be covered. This is a good thing to do toward the end of an interview.

## Interview transcript

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, this is interesting. I never really realized that I don't take that many solo trips to places that I... I'm trying to think of... Yeah, I have never stayed at a hotel by myself, for example, I don't think. I'm trying to remember if I have... I maybe have while traveling from one place to another. I stayed a couple extra days in Osaka at one point by myself, and stayed in a hotel by myself at that point. So, I guess that would be... that's what it is basically, if you stayed somewhere by yourself. But that was because I had a little extra vacation time compared to everyone else. And then at that point I really didn't have destinations. I had parts of the city that I hadn't been to yet and wanted to explore. So, I went to two different neighborhoods basically.

**SECOND INTERVIEWER:** Did you think about deciding what you were going to do during that part of the trip when you were alone any differently than you thought about it when you were with other people?

**PARTICIPANT:** Um, definitely less planning than I even normally do, which is pretty minimal in the first place. I had wanted to go to an area that had a bunch of cooking stores, and then I kind of looked to see if there were things that were interesting around it. And I ended up at some of those places, but I definitely didn't map out how to get there or anything like that. The only thing I really kind of mapped out for myself was, ok, here's my hotel and here's the closest train station, and then when I got to that neighborhood, I made a note of where that train station was, and tried to stay... and keep its location in my mind.

**SECOND INTERVIEWER:** But it was more serendipitous...?

## Comments

Awkwardly stated, but essentially a good question.

More good information on how she navigates: again starting with the hotel, identifying an area where she wants to go, and using the train station as another sort of anchor for subsequent navigation. It's also interesting to note that she chose a general area that seemed likely to be interesting, then looked for things to do once she was in that area.

Fine clarification. Note that the second interviewer has again stepped into the primary role; she opened the line of inquiry about how the interviewee makes decisions when traveling solo, so the primary interviewer appropriately steps back and lets her lead the follow-up on that topic.

Interview transcript	Comments
<b>PARTICIPANT:</b> Yeah. This is making me want to go on a trip by myself now.... That's something I really haven't done. Interesting.	The interview process prompts people to reflect on their behavior in unusual ways. Most people enjoy that aspect of being interviewed.
<b>SECOND INTERVIEWER:</b> That's the fun part about these things, is that ... we've heard from a couple of people that have been through the [interview] hour, contemplating their vacations and they're like, "I'm realizing some things, hmmm..."	A better response would be a brief acknowledgment of the statement, then some follow-up to get more detail on the behavior just mentioned.
<b>PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:</b> Well, I think I'm all set. Do you want to ask your favorite question?	The primary interviewer indicates that he has no more questions, but knows from prior interviews that his partner probably has at least one more.
<b>SECOND INTERVIEWER:</b> Yeah, I have a question that I like to end with...	
<b>PARTICIPANT:</b> What's that?	
<b>SECOND INTERVIEWER:</b> When you look back on a trip, how do you know if it was a good trip or not such a great trip?	This is a good question designed to uncover goals, and would be good to ask even earlier in the interview.
<b>PARTICIPANT:</b> Hmmm... It feels like the only thing that ever makes it a bad trip is people.	
<b>SECOND INTERVIEWER:</b> Any kind of people?	
<b>PARTICIPANT:</b> If someone was upset or hurt by the trip, then it was not a good trip. I'm trying to think of what makes it a really, really good trip, though, because that's independent of other people really. Hmmm. There's something to, like, having some sort of new perspective. Basically, did I learn something new on the trip? I probably wouldn't enjoy going somewhere and seeing things that I've already seen before, or already knew about.	This point is worth a bit more exploration.
<b>SECOND INTERVIEWER:</b> Interesting, new perspective. Okay.	
<b>PARTICIPANT:</b> That's a good question.	

Interview transcript	Comments
<b>PRIMARY INTERVIEWER:</b> Okay, well, I guess we're done. Thanks for your time!	Always thank the interviewee. Also be sure to establish a means for future communication (even though you might not use it), including a way for the interviewee to share any further thoughts.

## Summary

You can probably see that the interviewers worked together pretty well, catching a couple of one another's misses and making a fairly smooth switch in interview leadership on a couple of occasions. They asked a number of good questions including some effective follow-up. They missed several good opportunities they had the time to pursue (the transcript covers 49 minutes). There would have been even more time for follow-up without a couple of digressions. Perhaps the biggest missed opportunities involved getting more detail about what caused the interviewee to choose destinations other than the ones she initially planned on, what information she used to make decisions and find places, and what information she needed when she got there. If other interviews don't provide this information, the team will find themselves making guesses about too many things as they start designing.

However, hopefully you can see that even a far-from-perfect interview can be packed with useful information. Don't let concern about mistakes keep you from conducting interviews. It takes considerable practice to develop your skill, and even the most expert interviewer will sometimes ask the occasional clumsy question or miss a follow-up opportunity. Also, there is seldom time to cover absolutely everything in a single interview, which is a good reason to reflect on interviews and discuss approaches to subsequent ones as you go.

To work on your interview technique, ask a colleague to give you feedback. If that's not an option, videotape or audiotape an interview, wait a few weeks to get distance from it, then dissect it yourself as I've done here. See what you could have done better, do some more interviews, then record another one to see how you've progressed. If you don't have much confidence in your interviewing yet, wait until you develop some before taping yourself; it can be a humbling experience.