

Introducing a PEACE-compliant 'Structured Interview Protocol' to enhance the quality of investigative interviews

Project lead - Professor Fiona Gabbert, Goldsmiths University of London, (f.gabbert@gold.ac.uk).

Academic collaborators

Lorraine Hope, Portsmouth University
David La Rooy, Royal Holloway University
Ashleigh McGregor, Goldsmiths University
Rebecca Milne, Portsmouth University
Tom Ellis, Portsmouth University

Practitioner collaborators & advisors

College of Policing
Greater Manchester Police
Thames Valley Police
Hampshire Police
Leicestershire Police
West Midlands Police

Funding

£119,991. *Promoting justice: Professionalising frontline policing with an evidence-based Structured Interview Protocol*. Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), Knowledge-exchange opportunities scheme. Gabbert, F., Hope, L., La Rooy, D., Milne, R., & Ellis, T. (awarded August 2014).

The need for revised interview training for frontline officers

Concerns over the quality of investigative interview skills and performance is particularly acute for frontline uniformed officers who have a lack of policing experience, coupled with demanding and multi-faceted work priorities. Research by Dando and colleagues (2008) investigated the interviewing practice of 200 non-specialist frontline officers from five UK police forces, with an average of two years service. All officers reported investigating a large number of crimes, including conducting 'interviews' with victims and witnesses often at the scene of an incident. Respondents reported that their training did not equip them sufficiently to conduct interviews when on duty. At best only a couple of days were allocated to learning how to interact with victims and witnesses of crime and it occurred in a limited environment using colleagues as interviewees. Similar findings have been reported by Hewitt (2001), as well as being confirmed by the present research project.

This situation is predicted to worsen as the number of frontline officers is reduced, while at the same time officer workloads are increasing and there are fewer opportunities for training due to severe cuts with respect to training provision (HMIC, 2012). Such cuts are the result of forces having to have made savings of £2.4bn by 2015 due to a 20% cut in Home Office grants to police authorities (HMIC, 2012). The Association of Chief Police Officers' lead on investigative interviewing in the UK, Chief Constable Mick Creedon, stated "...at a time when police budgets are becoming increasingly stretched, the need to optimise performance, with fewer resources, is now a worrying reality in UK policing" (Jenkins, 2010). Indeed, the HMIC report recommends that if forces are to prepare effectively for further cuts in a future spending round, they need to start now preparing to transform the efficiency of their front line (HMIC, 2012).

These critical challenges of falling budgets and rising expectations were the central focus of a recent government policy conference in the UK (Policing and Justice for the 21st Century, July, 2013). The UK Minister of State for Policing and Criminal Justice called for 'greater innovation to maintain standards' as part of his bid to promote recent Home Office policies - 'Making the criminal justice system more efficient' (April, 2013), and 'Helping the police fight crime more effectively' (March, 2013). UK police forces are being encouraged to modernise by adopting new technology such as 'body-worn-cameras' and 'electronic witness statement software'. These new initiatives are promising, and have every potential to

make policing more efficient and effective by speeding up the path to justice, reducing paperwork, and enabling officers to spend more time on patrol.

However, digital innovations will also expose the potential deficits in interviewing and interpersonal communication skills outlined above, due to increased transparency and the availability of recordings. In some forces, for instance, footage of officer behavior in cases of domestic violence is being used in training to show 'how not to do it'. Outside of training, this evidence is also available to defence teams who will exploit 'incorrect interviewing procedure' in order to discredit investigations. Officers are accountable if eyewitness information is elicited in a manner that falls short of recommended best practice. Increased attention and challenge of investigative interviewing practice on these grounds by legal evaluators is already beginning to emerge in a number of jurisdictions, at great emotional cost to victims and witnesses, and at significant monetary expense to the taxpayer (La Rooy & Halley, 2010).

In sum, there is a need for new and effective evidence-based interview procedures and techniques that complement national guidelines on the collection of evidence while also (a) supporting investigating officers, (b) increasing the efficiency of obtaining evidence, (c) enhancing the quality of evidence obtained, and (d) promoting the success of current and future technological implementation of digital-recording in policing contexts. In response the PEACE-compliant 'Structured Interview Protocol' (SIP) has been developed and tested in a randomised controlled trial.

What is the Structured Interview Protocol (SIP)?

The Structured Interview Protocol (SIP) is an investigative interview protocol designed to efficiently and effectively promote the conduct of ethical best practice interviews to elicit high quality evidence. The protocol, which is consistent with PEACE, draws on relevant memory theory and principles of memory, current psychological theory on the strategic control of memory reporting, and cutting-edge psychological developments in investigative interviewing research. Each guideline in SIP is supported by research, thus supporting the ethos of evidence-based policing.

Research objectives

1. Examine real-life interview data from frontline officers to identify common challenges and training needs (baseline performance).
2. Work with our practitioner collaborators to develop an evidence-based Structured Interview Protocol & related training, for use by frontline officers and other basic-level investigative interviewers.
3. Test the Structured Interview Protocol under controlled conditions to examine the amount of training required to produce effective results.
4. Test the Structured Interview Protocol training in the field with a randomised controlled trial.

Examining baseline performance

Method & Results

Ninety four interviews or first accounts, from officers from four participating UK-based police forces, recorded on BWV were coded in relation to adherence to the PEACE model of interviewing, use of question-types, and interview structure (see Appendix 1).

Common deviations from best practice and PEACE guidelines were as follows;

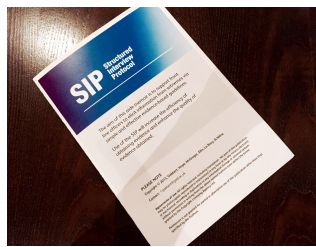
Engage & Explain phase: There was an absence of any attempt to build rapport in 82% of cases. There was no attempt to explain to the witness what to expect in 73% of cases.

Account phase: (i) Poor use of hierarchical questioning (open – closed q's), (ii) Over-reliance on closed and 5 wh- questions, (iii) Interviewer-led structure, rather than interviewee-led (i.e., new questions/topics were introduced by the interviewer), (iv) New topic areas introduced with a closed question

Developing & testing a Structured Interview Protocol

To address the gaps in performance, we created a Structured Interview Protocol that introduced effective techniques via interview training that was designed to be effective and memorable. This took the form of a generic PEACE interview template, also including -

- Evidence-based techniques to facilitate 'engage and explain' (rapid rapport skills; use of empathy; setting threshold of reporting; source-monitoring; encouragement of qualifiers, etc.)
- Evidence-based techniques to facilitate retrieval (appropriate use of questions; interviewee-lead interviewing; use of self-generated cues, etc.)
- Effective training techniques to facilitate retention of learning (psychology of learning, protocol format, use of aide memoirs, etc.)



Method for Mock Witness Study

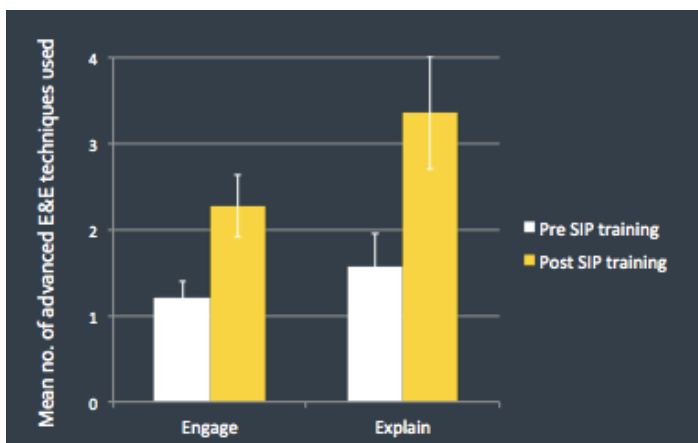
N = 65 response officers from 2 forces

- Phase 1: All officers interviewed a mock witness (a student who had been trained to act as a witness) about a crime event.
- Phase 2: SIP training (max. 1 day).
- Phase 3: All officers once again interviewed a mock witness, about a different crime event.

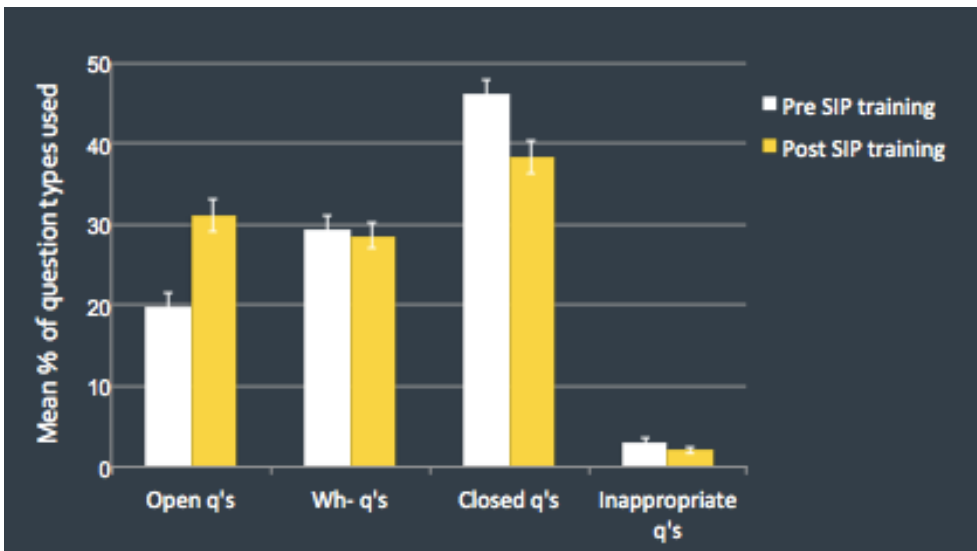
Pre- and Post-SIP training interviews were audio-taped, transcribed and coded (see Appendix 1).

Results from Mock Witness Study

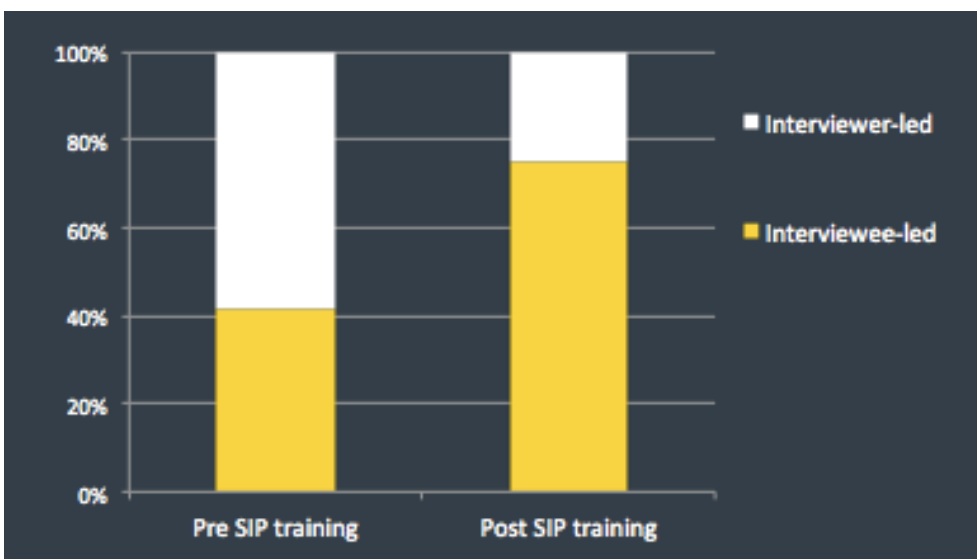
Engage & Explain Phase: We examined frequency of specific attempts to both engage the witness (e.g., use of rapid rapport skills), and to explain expectations of the witness (as per SIP training). Both significantly improved from pre- to post-training.



Account Phase: We examined types of questions used pre- and post-SIP training, and found positive results. Namely, the percentage of open questions used significantly increased from pre- to post-training. Also, the percentage of closed questions significantly decreased from pre- to post-training.



Account Phase: We examined the structure of the interview, and found performance significantly improved, in that interviews swapped from being interviewer-led (pre-training), to interviewee-led (post-training).



Feedback from officers: The following table summarises feedback to some post-training questions.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
SIP booklet useful	1	0	5	43	38
SIP aide memoir useful	1	4	2	41	38
Need more supporting materials	9	34	25	12	6
Feel more confident	1	3	13	48	22
Method for real-witness field study					

N = 216 response officers from 4 forces

- BWV footage of first accounts/ interviews sourced from officers who (a) later received SIP training, (b) did not receive SIP training.
- BWV footage of trained / non-SIP trained officers approx. 1-2 months following the training sessions.

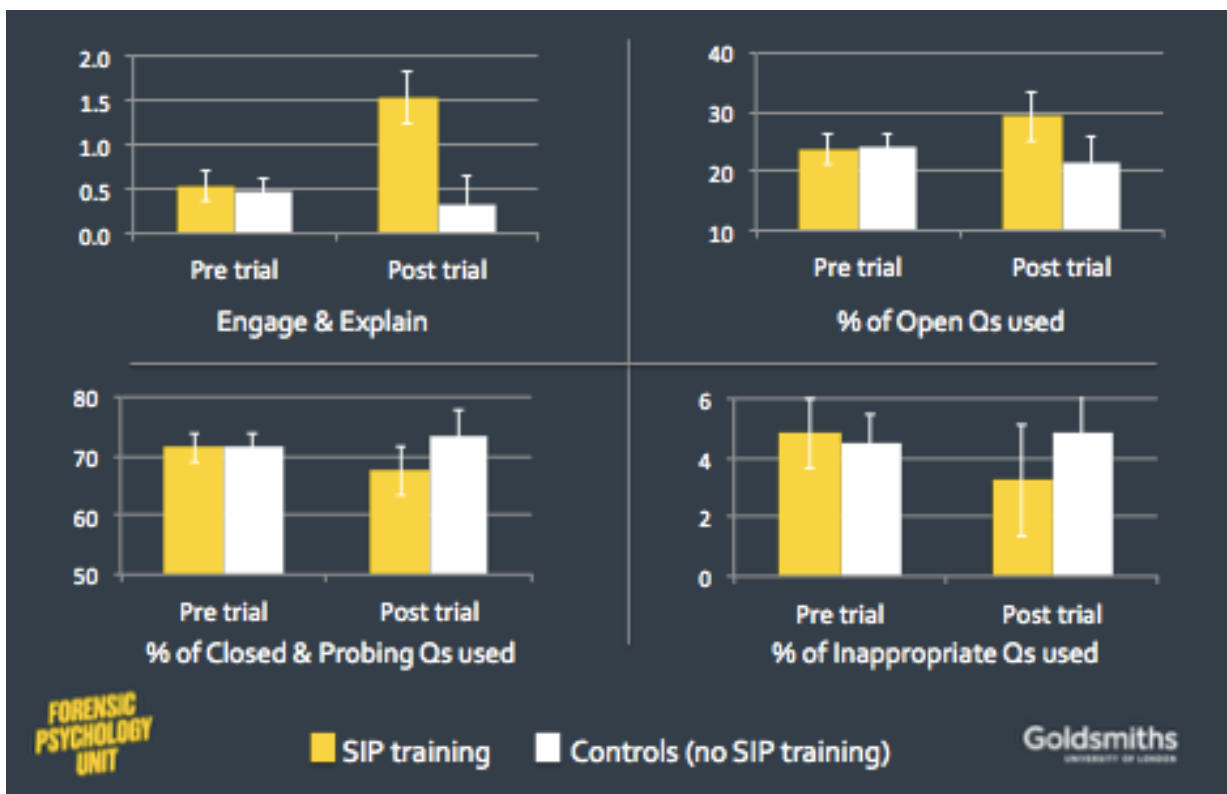
Pre- and Post-SIP interviews were coded as before (see Appendix 1).

Note that with it being a field-trial with real officers and victims/witnesses, there was limited experimental control (different crimes, different contexts, different lengths of interviews, etc.).

Preliminary results (please note that we're still analysing these data)

Engage & Explain Phase: Significantly better for officers who had received SIP training.

Account Phase: The percentage of open questions increased, and percentage of closed questions decreased following SIP training. The use of inappropriate questions (e.g., suggestive questions) was minimal, but there was a trend for these to decrease following SIP training.



Overall conclusion

Results of randomised controlled trials to date indicate that the SIP promotes high quality, efficient, and effective interview performance via skilled use of rapid rapport techniques, enhanced 'engage and explain' skills, and a clear increase in appropriate question types used in a structured manner.

Recommendations based on results

Embed SIP as initial training for all new officers, (a) it is easier than re-training officers, (b) interview skills taught via SIP training create a strong base for advanced interview training.

Appendix 1

Interview coding sheet

Note, this coding sheet only relates to the E (Engage), A (Account), & C (Closure), of the PEACE model, because we were unable to code for P (Planning & Prep), or the last E (Evaluation of Interview)

1. Engage & Explain

1.1 Opening Statement

	yes	no	other	Notes:
Interviewer name given				
Interviewer rank given				
Force/unit name given				
Interviewer role defined				
Interviewee role defined				
Others present named				
Roles defined				

1.2 Engage (Rapid Rapport phase)

	yes	no	other	Notes:
Asks for preferred name				
Uses preferred name				
Active listening demonstrated				
Indication that officer is approachable, trustworthy				
Addresses concerns where applicable				
Uses empathy where applicable				
Rapid rapport techniques used				If yes, frequency?

1.3 Explain

	yes	no	other	Notes:
Reasons for discussion clarified				
Importance of witness information stated				
Explain taking notes				
Explain won't interrupt				
Explain level of detail required				
Other				

2. Account, Clarification and Challenge (Substantive phase)

2.1 Information gathering stage

	yes	no	other	Notes:
Open prompts used initially				
Interviewee able to give an uninterrupted account				
Open prompts exhausted				
Open prompt follow up's used when applicable				
Use of focussed open prompts when applicable				
Interviewee able to give an uninterrupted account				
Return to top of question hierarchy when possible				
Witness compatible questioning used (witness's own words)				
Witness compatible questioning used (question order)				
Open and focussed open prompts exhausted				
Appropriate non-leading directives used				
Witness compatible questioning used (witness' own words)				
Witness compatible questioning used (question order)				
Appropriate non-leading option posing questions used				

Prompt type	Frequency	Notes (e.g., appropriately or inappropriately used)
Open prompts (for breadth of info.)		
Open prompts (for depth of info., TED)		
Wh- questions		
Option posing, closed, forced-choice questions		
Facilitators		
Echo statements		
Interruptions		
Multi-question instances		
Repeated questions		
Opinion statements		
Leading/suggestive utterances		

2.2 Enquiries, Clarifications, & Challenges

Number of challenges made of each type:	Frequency	Notes:
Problem solving (appropriate)		
Information gathering (appropriate)		
Confrontational (inappropriate)		
Accusatory (Inappropriate)		

3. Closure

	Yes	No	Other	Notes
Encouragement to add any more info.				
Encouragement to ask questions				
Summary of events provided				
Summary of future processes				
Official ending of discussion				
Thanks extended				

4. Definitions of coding categories

Open questions (for breadth of info.) e.g., Tell me what happened; What happened next?

Open questions (for breadth of info.) e.g., Tell, Explain, Describe (TED) questions.

Wh- questions, e.g., Who, Where, When, Why, etc. questions.

Option posing / forced-choice questions, e.g., Was that before or after x?, Was he left or right handed?, Did you see the gun?

Facilitators, e.g., Uh huh; Yeah; Okay; etc.

Echo statements, e.g., the exact wording of the witness and is repeated directly after the interviewee has said it, in an attempt to prompt more information.

Multiple questions, e.g., a number of questions asked at one time.

Repeated questions, e.g., asking the same question on two (or more) occasions.

Leading/ suggestive questions, e.g., the introduction of new information by the interviewer not discussed by the interviewee.

Clarification questions - when questions are aiming to clarify a previous response e.g., You said he was shouting, which person was that?

Summaries - when the interviewer summarises multiple parts of the event together. If a confirmation question is asked at the end of a summary, this should not be coded as a question (as it is the function of the summary itself) e.g., So you said he came in, went to the back of the shop then towards the till, is that right?

Interviewee/interviewer led - was the question pre-empted by anything the witness has said or a new topic introduced by the interviewer?