
What are PRC's guidelines for probing?

A key advantage of PRC's telephone methodology is that live interviewers can probe to collect the most complete and useful information. Probing is an interviewing technique that requires specific guidelines to ensure that the interviewer does not bias the survey. These guidelines include, but are not limited to:

- Do not give opinions or definitions
- Read the question(s) as worded
- Read all points of the scale in a clear and distinct manner
- Use a neutral tone of voice

While respecting the integrity of data collection by not biasing the survey, interviewers are trained on finding a balance between collecting complete data and being courteous to the respondent. At PRC, we never want an interviewer to be perceived as aggressive or condescending.

Interviewer training for probing begins in the hiring process. All applicants are asked to conduct a mock survey, and applicants are screened based on the outcome of this survey. Once hired, interviewers are taught effective interviewing techniques. Throughout their employment at PRC, interviewers are closely monitored for quality, with special attention given to their adherence to PRC's Probing Guidelines. Common situations where probing is needed and the appropriate interviewer responses are provided on the following page.



Interview Situation	Appropriate Interviewer Response
The respondent provides two answers, such as “Part of it was excellent and part of it was very good.”	Interviewer lets the respondent know that if they would like to elaborate further there will be a place later in the survey where the interviewer can type specific comments. Then says, “For this question I can only accept one answer of excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor. So keeping that in mind...” (Reread the question with the scale.)
The respondent answers with something other than a scale response (e.g., “fine” or “ok”).	“I did hear your response of ‘fine.’ My computer will only accept one of the five choices of excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor, so with that in mind...” (Reread the question with the scale.)
After the interviewer has repeated the scale, the respondent still does not answer with one of the scale responses.	My computer will only accept one of five choices; those are excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor, so keeping that in mind... (Reread the question with the scale.)” If the respondent still does not answer with one of the five choices, the interviewer marks “Don’t Know,” and tells the respondent that they can move on to the next question.
Respondent answers with “same.”	“I heard you answer with ‘same.’ I am not allowed to assume or interpret responses, so would that be excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor?”
During the open-ended question, “What could have been done to improve your stay?” the respondent says, “They need to hire better nurses.”	The interviewer can type in comments and may ask, “Could you please be more specific?”
During the open-ended question, “Was there anything outstanding?” the respondent says, “the nurse.”	The interviewer may probe by asking, “Do you remember the nurse’s name?”
Respondent replies, “everything” to one of the open-ended questions.	Depending on the question, the interviewer responds, “I’m glad to hear that” or “I am sorry to hear that.” “When you say ‘everything,’ would you like to be more specific? This is where I can include any comments you would like me to pass along.”

