

When interviewing a stakeholder, it is possible that an answer provided might be incomplete or require further explanation. Probing is a verbal or nonverbal prompt made by the interviewer when the respondent needs to communicate his or her answer more fully or clearly. Probing can also be used to get respondents “back on track” if they begin to ramble or lose track of the question.

There are several probing tactics to consider depending on the situation:

- ❑ **Repeating the question:** Simply repeating the question may encourage a respondent to provide an answer if he or she has been completely silent, not understood the question or is deciding how to answer the question. Example: if the question is “What do you like about smoke-free environments?” and the respondent does not answer, you can probe: “Just to check, what do you consider to be some of the benefits of smoke-free environments?”
- ❑ **Silent probe:** Providing a pause and waiting to ask the next question can be a useful way to motivate respondents to complete or gather their thoughts and give a more complete response. One word of caution with silent probes is to be mindful of “embarrassing silence.”
- ❑ **Repeating the Answer:** Repeating an answer verbatim provides the opportunity for the respondent to confirm the response and/or it can stimulate further explanation. Example: “So what I hear you saying is...”
- ❑ **Ask a neutral question:** Asking a neutral question may indicate the type of information you are seeking. Examples of neutral questions are “Why do you feel that way about _____,” “What do you mean by (word or phrase),” or “Anything else?” It is important that your probing question not be leading or biased.
Other examples:

Anything else?
Any other reason?
Any others?
How do you mean?
Could you tell me more about your thinking on that?
Would you tell me what you have in mind?
What do you mean?
Why do you feel that way?

When you use a probe, it is recommended that you indicate it was used in your notes.

Adapted from the text: *Exploring Marketing Research*,
Zickmund, William G., 2003