



INTERVIEW TACTICS: THE VERIFIABILITY APPROACH

A simple technique for eliciting maximum verifiable detail from cooperative interviewees, and for using the quantity of verifiable details to help establish whether the account is true and accurate.

HOW DOES IT WORK

“ Liars often provide rich details to make their story seem more genuine, but research has found that liars tend to report fewer checkable details than truth tellers. The verifiability approach exploits this difference. ”

THE LIAR'S DILEMMA

Liars often provide rich details to make their story seem more genuine. But providing details that can be checked by investigators will reveal their lies. One way for liars to solve this dilemma is to provide a story that includes lots of detail – but only details that cannot easily be checked by the investigator.

Research has found that liars tend to report fewer checkable details than truth tellers. The difference between truth tellers and liars in reporting verifiable detail becomes larger when the investigator asks an interviewee at the beginning of the interview 'to try to include detail that the investigator can check'. This inspires truth tellers to provide more verifiable detail, but not liars.



USEFUL FOR

- Eliciting maximum verifiable details in genuine accounts about events and activities
- Differentiating between lies and truth
- Evidential accounts – points to opportunities to gather corroborative evidence



VERIFIABLE DETAILS INCLUDE:

1

Activities with identifiable or named persons who the investigator can consult

2

Activities that have been witnessed by identifiable or named persons who the investigator can consult

3

Activities that the interviewee believes may have been captured on CCTV

4

Activities that may have been recorded through technology, such as using debit cards, mobile phones, or computers

HOW TO USE IT

At the beginning of the interview ask the interviewee to give as much detail as possible about what happened, and in particular to include as many details as possible that the interviewee thinks the investigator can check. Interviewees who are fabricating some or all of an account will struggle to provide detail about what can be verified.

Based on the amount of verifiable detail in the interviewee's account, investigators may form an initial

impression about the likelihood that they are being deceptive.

Investigators can also corroborate checkable details the interviewee provides to help establish whether these parts of their statement are truthful.



BEAR IN MIND...

THE APPROACH WORKS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE INTERVIEWEE AND WHAT THEY THINK CAN BE CHECKED, RATHER THAN FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE INTERVIEWER.

When thinking of verifiable detail investigators typically take their own perspective into account rather than the perspective of the interviewee. But the interviewee's perspective about what can be verified is not necessarily the same as what can actually be verified.

Take CCTV footage for example. Only count something as a verifiable detail if the interviewee refers to CCTV being present: "I was in the library between 3 and 4pm and you can check the CCTV camera which is there". If the interviewee just says: "I was in the library between 3 and 4pm" this does not count as a verifiable detail even when a CCTV camera was present, because the interviewee may not know this.

BE CAREFUL WHEN THE INTERVIEWEE NAMES PEOPLE WHO MIGHT BE ASSOCIATED WITH THE INTERVIEWEE OR INVOLVED IN THEIR ACTIVITIES.

If the interviewee is trying to hide something their associates may try to protect them or could be complicit in those activities.

INABILITY TO PROVIDE CHECKABLE DETAIL IS NOT PROOF THAT THE ACCOUNT IS FABRICATED.

Some activities take place in a context where corroborative information is simply unavailable (e.g. in a geographical location where technology is less developed or the activities were carried out completely alone).

Some interviewees are less able than others to report how activities might be checked. For instance, they may not have noticed or are not aware of the ways in which their activities might be tracked or recorded (e.g. by CCTV or phone location).

BE CAREFUL OF DETAILS THAT ARE CHECKABLE BUT DO NOT PROVE THAT AN ACCOUNT IS TRUE.

For instance if the interviewee names a person 'A' as being present at an event, the fact that 'A' exists is not proof that the account is true unless there is a way of verifying that 'A' was at the specific event.



IF INVESTIGATORS WANT TO GIVE THE IMPRESSION THAT THEY KNOW MORE THAN THEY ACTUALLY DO THEN THIS TECHNIQUE SHOULD NOT BE USED.

READ MORE

Galit Nahari, Aldert Vrij, & Ronald P. Fisher. 2014. 'The Verifiability Approach: Countermeasures facilitate its ability to discriminate between truths and lies'. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 28, 122-128.