

The Sensitive Interview

Understand what the person knows,
without leading them to say more.

A useful account retains its source,
its nuances and what remains to be checked.

SEPTEMBER 2026

A LucenOne publication

OPENING

Monday, 9:05 a.m. Three people, one conversation, not yet three sources.

An investigator is about to conduct three interviews. An employee says that her place on a project was made conditional on a form of personal availability she did not wish to offer. A colleague confirms that her 'availability' was discussed. The manager acknowledges using the word, but says he was referring to the project's requirements. In the preparation note, one line already seems settled: 'All three people confirm the condition imposed.'

The initial reading is reassuring. A shared term, the same conversation, three people discussing it: the case seems to have a foundation. Yet the colleague was present only at the beginning of the exchange. The investigator does not yet know which words he heard for himself, what the employee told him afterwards, or whether the word he uses comes from the conversation or from the message he received before his interview.

One question can clarify this situation. Another can make it almost impossible to disentangle. 'Can you confirm that he asked her to be available to him?' supplies the witness with the meaning to confirm. 'Describe the part of the conversation you were present for' allows him to describe his own position. The two questions apparently address the same subject. They do not produce the same information.

This fictional situation does not pit a poor investigator against an obvious trap. It illustrates an ordinary difficulty: the further a case progresses, the easier it becomes to know the account that is expected, and the less natural it becomes to listen for what might change its structure. An interview can then add to a written record without increasing what is actually known.

The exchange is never merely a matter of extracting content. The person remembers, chooses words, interprets a question and sometimes tries to protect someone else or correct an impression. The investigator, meanwhile, orders the topics, introduces information and decides what to clarify. The statement obtained also bears the imprint of that encounter. Ignoring this does not make it more objective; it makes its origins less visible.

Two requirements must therefore be held together. Let the person express what they know without providing a ready-made version for them to repeat. Then examine their account, without assuming that respect for their words requires avoiding difficult questions. Listening is neither endorsement of the substance nor a technique for obtaining a confession more discreetly.

A sound interview makes visible what the person knows, how they know it and what they learned during the exchange.

This book addresses that quality of information gathering: preparing, questioning, presenting a document, examining disagreement and recording an account whose significance remains clear. The situations illustrate investigations within organisations. They give investigators neither police powers nor a single procedure valid for every status, country and case.

CONTENTS

From an account to usable information

01 Prepare an interview without writing its conclusion.....	4
Build questions around what the person may know.	
02 Create a framework in which people can answer — and correct.....	6
Roles, uses of statements, confidentiality and recording.	
03 Let the account emerge without filling its gaps.....	8
Questions, sources of memory, detail and paraphrasing.	
04 Present a document without manufacturing confirmation.....	11
Documentary context, challenging discrepancies and recording information introduced.	
05 Address discrepancies without reading people's minds.....	13
Discrepancies, emotions, languages, admissions and limits.	
06 Write a record that does not change the nature of the account.....	16
Accuracy, corrections, signatures and protection of the written record.	
07 After the interview, identify what has actually changed.....	18
Actual contributions, useful follow-up and the role of digital assistance.	
Conclusion.....	20
Guidance and references.....	21

CHAPTER 01

Prepare an interview without writing its conclusion

Preparation should make the investigator more receptive to the unexpected, not more skilled at obtaining the anticipated answer. It starts with the person's position in relation to the events, not their place in the organisation chart.

A question for the investigation is not yet a question to ask

'Was the project allocated improperly?' is an investigative question. Putting it in those terms to a participant may elicit only their overall assessment. They may not know all the rules, the other candidates or the final decision. They may, however, be able to explain who asked them to amend a list, which version they sent and what reservations they expressed.

Preparation means moving from a concern to information this interviewee may have access to. Before asking 'Why was the assignment withdrawn?', it may be necessary to establish who announced the withdrawal, what was said, whether the announcement was a decision or a proposal, and when the person understood it to be final.

Breaking the issue down does not remove the place of explanation. It prevents the witness's explanation from being confused with the decision-maker's. An employee may offer a very useful interpretation of how their team operates; it must remain attributed to their perspective unless other evidence supports it.

Useful preparation thus sets an open expectation: this person may tell us how the list circulated. Biased preparation sets a closed task: this person must confirm that the manager imposed a name. In the second situation, an account that shifts the origin of the request may be treated as an unsatisfactory answer rather than a lead.

Interview the right person for the right reason

The person closest to the case is not necessarily the person who observed the act in question. An assistant may know how a document circulated without having taken part in the decision it concerned. A senior executive may know the decision without having seen how their instruction was implemented. An outside witness may have seen an interaction that all the internal managers describe only second-hand.

Before each interview, it is therefore useful to write down what the person is likely to know directly, indirectly or not at all. This initial view of their position is not a permanent label. The exchange may reveal that someone usually excluded from decisions was, on this occasion, present during their preparation.

The order of interviews should follow this reasoning. A witness whose information may be lost or influenced by a group discussion may warrant priority. Conversely, someone who explains the process may help clarify the questions before a more targeted interview. Protection needs and applicable safeguards also matter. Neither a hierarchy-based order nor the rule 'always interview witnesses before the person subject to allegations' removes the need to justify the choice.

Interviewing few people is not, in itself, an improper economy; interviewing many is no guarantee of completeness. What matters is whether the important vantage points are covered. Interviewing five team members who have all read the same note does not replace interviewing the person who was present when it was written.

Know the documents without letting them dictate the dialogue

The investigator should prepare useful documents, but also identify what should not be introduced too early. A preparation table can distinguish open questions, information that may clarify them and documents to be shown only if examining them becomes useful. This table remains an aid for the investigator, not a series of boxes the interviewee must fill.

For anti-corruption investigations, the AFA–PNF guide recommends an interview outline linked to the investigation plan, covering facts to be checked, important questions and documents that may be presented. This guidance does not turn the outline into a rigid questionnaire. ^[1]

Preparing a challenge to one's own reasoning is equally useful. If the investigator believes someone received an explicit instruction, what plausible answer would instead suggest that they anticipated an expectation? If agreement is believed to have been given in a meeting, what information would distinguish assent, absence of objection and a formal decision?

The investigator is not looking for imaginary alternatives to neutralise the report. They identify points where the wording of their questions may already select one of several interpretations. An adverse explanation remains a possibility to examine; it must not become the interview's invisible framework.

Preparation includes the conditions of the encounter

The location, participants, working languages and form of the record are not mere logistical details. They determine what the person can understand and how they can participate. A meeting in their manager's office, an invitation whose subject line reveals the case or an interpreter from the team concerned may alter the conditions of the exchange before the first question.

Working in a pair can allow one investigator to lead while the other notes points to revisit. But it can also become a barrage of successive questions. Roles must therefore be explicit: who leads, who takes notes, how follow-up questions are introduced and who can request a break. The presence of a second investigator does not make their observation independent of the same interview.

Good preparation ultimately produces less a script than a structured readiness: the investigator knows what they are looking for, what they do not know, what they are authorised to disclose and what would lead them to change the question. That framework must now be made understandable to the interviewee.

CHAPTER 02

Create a framework in which people can answer — and correct

A person may agree to speak without understanding how their words will be used. The quality of the framework is measured, in particular, by their ability to request clarification, challenge a paraphrase and state a limitation.

Explain who is speaking to whom

The word ‘interview’ does not, by itself, explain what is happening. Information gathering, a supportive conversation, mediation and an interview preceding a disciplinary sanction serve different purposes. A person should not discover the distinction only when their words are already being used in another context.

The questioner’s mandate, the purpose of the exchange and the roles of other participants must be explained. When a lawyer conducts an investigation for an organisation, this does not mean that they become the lawyer of everyone interviewed. Advice, assistance and professional confidentiality must be explained under the rules applicable to that mandate. One standard formulation cannot cover every interview. ^[1]

The person’s status can also change during the exchange. Someone initially interviewed about a process may describe an act that directly involves them. Continuing as though nothing had changed may be convenient for the interviewer, but may become inappropriate in light of the mandate and applicable safeguards. The need to clarify the framework, obtain competent advice or pause before resuming must then be considered.

Rules specific to public service, disciplinary proceedings, judicial investigations or a particular country are not interchangeable. The possibilities for accompaniment, duties to cooperate and the person’s rights must be checked, not inferred from the label ‘internal investigation’.

A relationship of trust is not a promise of an outcome

A respectful exchange allows the person to speak without having to satisfy the investigator. It does not require promising that they will never face allegations, will keep their job or that no information will leave the room. An assurance the interviewer has no authority to give may obtain an account whose conditions of collection are later challenged.

The Méndez Principles favour the search for reliable information through a non-coercive relationship rather than the pursuit of confessions. Developed for investigations and information gathering, particularly in criminal justice systems, they provide methodological guidance here. They give employers no police powers and do not replace the law applicable to the interview. ^[2]

The investigator can explain: ‘I will try to distinguish what you observed from what you learned afterwards. Please correct me if I paraphrase you inaccurately.’ This announces a requirement for precision, not a doubt directed at the person. It also makes room for a useful response such as ‘That is not exactly what I said.’

The explanation must be reflected in conduct. If every correction meets an objection or every silence an accusatory follow-up, the permission offered at the outset remains theoretical. The framework depends on what is allowed during the exchange, not merely on a well-written introduction.

Confidentiality: explain uses rather than promise invisibility

The person needs to understand who may access their statements, in what form and for what purpose. A discreet conversation does not guarantee that its written record will never be disclosed. The limits vary with the investigation's needs, people's rights and disclosure obligations.

The French Defender of Rights' framework decision of 5 February 2025 places investigations into discrimination and sexual harassment in employment within requirements of confidentiality, impartiality, objectivity and rigour. That specific scope matters: professional guidance is not a universal judicial procedure. ^[3]

Asking people not to compare their accounts collectively can protect the quality of information. This must not become a general prohibition on seeking advice, support or protection. The risk of information circulating must be addressed without arbitrarily isolating the person from legitimate advisers and sources of support.

Confidentiality must also be practical. A meeting title, its participant list or a shared link may reveal the subject to third parties. The exchange can be discreet while its organisation is indiscreet. That gap deserves attention before invitations are sent.

Recording is neither inherently mandatory nor neutral

A recording can preserve questions, answers and their sequence. It can help verify disputed wording. It does not resolve how the words should be understood and may affect willingness to speak. The choice between notes, audio and video must therefore address an identified need.

Under French law, capturing words spoken privately or confidentially falls, in particular, within Article 226-1 of the Criminal Code, subject to the conditions it sets. Consent to that recording and the legal basis for processing personal data are not a single question. Ticking a box does not remove the need to examine purpose, information, security and retention. ^{[4][5]}

The person must know whether a recording or transcription is being made, for what purpose and for which recipients. A meeting assistant should not join silently. Refusal to be recorded calls for consideration of a suitable alternative and the applicable framework; it is not, in itself, a reason to suspect the substance of the account.

In a video interview, the participants must also establish whether the person can speak freely, how interruptions will be handled and who is authorised to attend. A poor connection is not a meaningful hesitation. A camera switched off does not prove that a third party is prompting answers. The investigator must distinguish a technical condition requiring clarification from an inference they have no basis to draw.

CHAPTER 03

Let the account emerge without filling its gaps

The initial account is not necessarily the most accurate, but it shows what the person contributes before the investigator's clarifications. Gathering it means neither abandoning guidance nor assuming that all its claims have the same origin.

An opening question needs a focus, not a built-in answer

'Tell me what happened' may free someone to speak or leave them without a point of reference. When several months and many events are involved, they may not know which episode to describe. The opening can therefore define a focus: 'Tell me about the conversation concerning your participation in the project, as you experienced it.' It does not need to impose an interpretation.

The opening continues by picking up the person's words rather than replacing them with the case's vocabulary. 'You said the discussion changed tone; what happened at that point?' explores wording supplied by the interviewee. 'When did the threats begin?' introduces a characterisation and the existence of conduct that may still need to be examined.

College of Policing guidance distinguishes the initial account, clarification and the examination of discrepancies. It draws attention, in particular, to multiple questions, forced choices and questions that suggest an answer. Its context is British police investigations; the interest here is question construction, not police powers or procedural rules. ^[6]

A grammatically open question can nevertheless be highly leading. 'Why did you accept this favour?' leaves freedom to explain while treating both acceptance and the favour as established. A question must be examined for what it presupposes, not just its first word.

Make 'I don't know' possible without abandoning the enquiry

An investigator's silence may give someone time to remember. It may also become pressure if the person understands that the topic will not end until they supply an exact date. Duration alone does not determine what silence is doing. What matters is whether the interviewee can maintain a limitation without being led to fill it.

It is useful to explain that an estimate should be presented as such. 'Early in the afternoon' may be more faithful than a time reconstructed from someone else's diary. The investigator can then seek a reference point: a departure, a call or the end of a meeting. They must distinguish a reference point recovered in this way from the precision the person could provide spontaneously.

However, 'I don't know' does not always end the topic. It may mean 'I did not observe it', 'I no longer remember', 'I do not understand the question' or 'I do not wish to answer'. Respectful clarification can establish which limitation is involved. It must not force a substantive answer that no clarification can make accessible.

Someone may also know an outcome without knowing its cause. Asking why again does not increase their knowledge. Sometimes the question must change: how was the outcome communicated to you?

Who could explain the decision? What document did you receive? The interview then produces a route for verification rather than an improvised cause.

A closed question can clarify without suggesting

A question is not poor merely because it invites a short answer. After a free account, ‘Did you receive this message before the meeting?’ can isolate a useful issue. But answers outside that alternative must remain possible: the person no longer knows, had access to the mailbox without reading the message, or can place their reading only within a time interval.

The aim is not to obtain precision whose nature is unknown. ‘Yes, probably’ does not become ‘yes’ because a form offers only two boxes. Nor does an affirmative answer to ‘You received the message and gave your agreement?’ reveal which of the two propositions is being confirmed. The issues must be separated, and the basis for the answer clarified.

Open and targeted questions therefore serve complementary functions. The first reveals how the account is organised; the second tests a particular detail. Neither is neutral simply because of its form. Their order, the information already shared and the possibility of correction matter as much as their wording.

The investigator must also distinguish an unanswered question from an answer they dislike. In the first case, a follow-up can ask for the missing point. In the second, the answer must be examined and, if necessary, tested against other evidence. Repeating the question until the answer changes does not prove that the last answer is the most accurate.

Distinguish memory, reported information and interpretation

In the opening example, the colleague may say confidently: ‘He asked her to be available in the evening.’ This seems to describe something perceived directly. To understand its origin, the investigator must ask what he heard in the room, what he was told afterwards and what he relies on now.

That clarification does not disqualify second-hand information. The colleague may be a direct source for the disclosure he received, its date and the words used then. He does not thereby become a direct witness to the entire scene described. His contribution may be important without bearing on the proposition initially attributed to him.

The same sentence changes significance depending on its origin: ‘She was afraid’ may describe words heard, an appearance observed, a personal impression or information acquired after the interview. The investigator must clarify what supports the wording. They do not replace this exploration with a diagnosis of someone else’s inner state.

The same statement may rest on different sources of knowledge

Basis of the account	A useful follow-up	What the record must preserve
Direct observation	‘Which part of the exchange did you personally hear?’	The person’s position, what they perceived and the limits of that observation.
Reported information	‘Who told you, when and in what words?’	The source of the account and how it circulated, without turning it into direct observation.

Basis of the account	A useful follow-up	What the record must preserve
Understanding or inference	'What led you to understand it that way?'	The indicators relied on and the person's interpretation, distinguished from the words reported.
Information reread or learned later	'What document or exchange enables you to be more specific today?'	When and where the clarification came from; the initial memory is not reconstructed retrospectively.

These positions do not rank people from the best to the worst source. An interviewee may move between them within a single sentence. The aim is to preserve the nature of their information without requiring them to use investigative terminology.

Memory does not stop at the door

Someone may have discussed the events, consulted a message or prepared a chronology. Those steps need to be understood without treating them as wrongdoing. Asking what they reread and whom they spoke to helps locate the origin of certain details. It gives no general right to explore confidential advice or their private life.

Gabbert, Memon and Allan's study of memory conformity shows, in an experimental setting, that discussions between witnesses can introduce into their recall details seen by the other person. This finding illuminates a risk; it does not allow contamination to be diagnosed in a particular case or an error rate to be assigned to its witnesses. ^[7]

The practical consequence is to establish the important paths of information. Two people may contribute distinct observations about part of a scene and subsequently share the same interpretation of its ending. Treating their accounts as wholly independent or wholly dependent would erase that structure.

Repeated episodes also need care. 'It was always like that' may express a perceived practice without recalling every occurrence. The investigator can ask for a specific, situated episode, then explore the basis for describing repetition and any exceptions. Combining several memories into one event, more precise than any event the person remembers, would be misleading.

A paraphrase must be open to rejection

Paraphrasing is useful for checking understanding, but agreement may concern only the general idea. 'So he threatened you' is not a neutral rendering of 'I understood that my place might become uncertain.' The first sentence turns a perceived effect into a characterisation of an act.

The investigator can separate the questions: what words did you hear? What meaning did you give them in that context? Personal interpretation retains its place without replacing the reported words. A paraphrase is not placed in quotation marks as though it were an exact quotation.

When the investigator gets something wrong, the correction must be visible: 'I referred to a decision; you were describing a proposal. I will proceed on that basis.' Continuing to use the mistaken term after acknowledging it would preserve the error in all subsequent answers. Permission to correct means something only if the correction actually changes how the interview is conducted.

CHAPTER 04

Present a document without manufacturing confirmation

Showing a document can help someone orient themselves. It can also teach them something they did not know. The value of their answer then depends on the purpose of presenting it and the point at which this happens.

Before showing it, know what you are looking for

A document may be shown to identify its author, explain a term, reconstruct a sequence or examine a discrepancy. These aims are not equivalent. Asking the author what they meant in a message seeks an explanation. Asking a witness, after reading it, to confirm that they remember its words is a different operation.

‘Does this document remind you of anything?’ can produce a very useful answer, but that answer must be located after the document was shown. The investigator cannot later reconstruct a supposedly spontaneous account by incorporating details recovered or learned in this way.

Suppose the colleague in the opening example initially mentions ‘a discussion about workload’. He is then shown the employee’s screenshot, containing ‘personal availability’. He repeats the phrase, saying ‘Yes, that’s it.’ This may mean he recognises the words, recognises the general idea or agrees with his colleague’s interpretation. The answer cannot be used without clarifying which.

Conversely, the initial account must not be treated as untouchable. A document may correct a genuinely misremembered date or reveal that two episodes were confused. The correction has value. It must retain its origin: what the person can now place using the document is not exactly what they remembered without it.

An incomplete document can become a leading question

An extract from a message may omit a qualification, a recipient or the question being answered. Showing it as a standalone statement changes the issue. ‘I agree’ may approve a meeting, not the withdrawal of an assignment discussed elsewhere in the thread.

The document must be identified precisely enough to understand its version, origin and the limits of the extract. Where confidentiality requires redaction, the effect on the ability to answer must be considered. An interviewee may need to know the professional context without needing access to all the personal data in the thread.

Minimum disclosure therefore does not mean the shortest possible fragment. It means the level of information necessary for the purpose, consistent with applicable rights and restrictions. A question so vague that it can elicit only a general denial does not protect the quality of the investigation.

In some cases, no presentation adequately reconciles these needs. Another source, another means of verification or an authorised person must be sought. The difficulty is not resolved by discreetly revealing restricted content in the wording of the question.

Challenge a discrepancy, not a person's reputation

A useful challenge starts from two precise propositions. 'You say you left the meeting before the individual exchange. The minutes attribute a contribution to you during that exchange. How do you understand the difference?' offers something to explain. 'Your colleagues tell a different story' imposes a collective disagreement without making clear what it concerns.

The strength of the discrepancy itself must be checked. The minutes may group contributions by topic rather than chronology. The word 'during' may come from the author, not the source. Before eliciting a defensive explanation, the investigator must check that they are not requiring the person to resolve the investigator's own reading error.

An explanation does not, however, make the contradiction disappear. 'The person taking the minutes must have made a mistake' is a hypothesis to examine. The investigator can ask what supports it, which document helps establish the departure time and who saw the person leave. The challenge thus opens a verification rather than ending in an intuitive choice of whoever sounds most convincing.

Persistence may be legitimate where an important question remains unanswered. It becomes something else when the investigator successively rejects every answer except the expected one. They must be able to explain what detail is still missing, rather than indefinitely rephrasing the same accusation.

A good record also preserves exposure to information

A usable interview record distinguishes the initial account, the document shown and subsequent clarifications. There is no need to note every movement of paper. But the introduction of something that may change an important answer must be traceable.

An answer must retain a record of what preceded it

Stage of the interview	Information preserved	Significance and limit
Before presentation	The witness describes a discussion about workload.	Describes the account obtained before this document, without assuming it was free of all prior influence.
Document introduced	A screenshot containing 'personal availability' is shown and identified.	Makes it possible to trace the information that may have shaped or clarified the next answer.
After presentation	The witness repeats the words, then clarifies that he learned them from the employee.	Provides information about the disclosure received; does not create direct testimony about the end of the conversation.

This distinction becomes essential when several people are interviewed. If every witness has been shown the same screenshot, their subsequent use of the same vocabulary cannot simply be counted as spontaneous convergence. Recording exposure prevents the event from being credited with information introduced by the interview itself.

Showing a document may also reveal a new one: 'That isn't the version I received.' That version must then be sought, rather than reducing the answer to a refusal to recognise the one shown. The quality of the case improves when the person can challenge the very object of the question.

CHAPTER 05

Address discrepancies without reading people's minds

Disagreement is not proof of a lie. Emotion is not a measure of truthfulness. Yet neither prevents close examination of what is being asserted or the search for ways to verify it.

Describing a reaction does not justify choosing its cause

Someone falls silent after a message is shown. That observation may be accurate. Attributing it to a realisation of guilt adds an explanation the investigator does not possess. The person may be reading, searching their memory, hesitating over the meaning of a term or fearing disclosure of the document.

It is not necessary to know their inner reason to respond appropriately. The investigator can offer a break, check that the question is understood or ask whether the person wants to clarify a point. A reaction does not become new adverse evidence simply because it accompanies a sensitive question.

The same caution applies to fluency. A well-ordered account may be accurate, prepared, rehearsed or based on a document reread. A disjointed account may result from several difficulties. Treating every emotion as proof of sincerity would be as mistaken as treating every display of composure as a sign of calculation.

Where health, comprehension or accessibility needs emerge, they call for adjustments and, if necessary, a qualified professional. An investigative interview is not a clinical examination. It is not the interviewer's role to diagnose trauma to explain a discrepancy, or to dismiss it because the person expresses themselves in an unexpected way.

An expectation of guilt can change the exchange

In their experiment on behavioural confirmation, Kassin, Goldstein and Savitsky studied how an initial presumption of guilt can influence the conduct of an interrogation and perceptions of it. This was an experimental protocol, not an estimate of every professional's behaviour. Its value is to make visible a risk that also concerns question preparation. ^[8]

Consider a manager who disputes the interpretation of a sentence. If every denial brings a more accusatory tone, the exchange may become defensive. Subsequently using that defensiveness to confirm concealment means counting, as an independent observation, an effect to which the conduct of the interview may have contributed.

Prevention does not mean automatically believing the manager. It means returning to verifiable issues: which words does he acknowledge, what requirement does he connect them to, and what contemporaneous documents or actions support that explanation? If his version keeps changing, those changes must be specified. The case must not rest solely on an impression of 'poor behaviour' during the interview.

This discipline applies to everyone. A reporting person should not have to offer an unhesitating account to be taken seriously. A witness should not be considered reliable merely because they are cooperative. Willingness to participate and the quality of information are different matters.

A change may correct, narrow or contradict

‘It was Tuesday’, followed by ‘Having checked my diary, I now place that exchange on Wednesday’: the change must neither be erased nor automatically penalised. The basis for the correction must be understood, along with whether it affects anything beyond the date.

‘I heard the whole conversation’, followed by ‘I left before the final exchange’, changes the witness’s vantage point more substantially. The meaning of the initial ‘whole’, the questions asked and the reason for the clarification still need examination. The significance of a change cannot be judged solely by its apparent size.

A subtler example concerns verbs. ‘I approved it’ may initially mean clicking in an application. Asked what was checked, the person explains that they checked only the availability of funds. The account does not necessarily become contradictory. The scope of the original word narrows. This clarification can materially change the analysis of responsibility without, in itself, proving a lie.

When an important change occurs, the investigator can present both formulations, ask whether they concern the same thing, obtain an explanation for the change and seek possible supporting evidence. If the disagreement persists, it remains in the case. The aim is not to force a reconciliatory sentence that artificially removes the discrepancy.

Accompaniment and language change the conditions, not a person’s worth

An interpreter must make the exchange understandable without selecting an explanation. Their translation, the clarifications they request and information they supply in their own right must be distinguished. An accompanying person who supplements an answer may introduce a useful observation, but it must be attributed to them rather than merged with the interviewee’s account.

Some professional terms do not align across languages. The French word ‘valider’ may mean approve, check or simply receive, depending on an organisation’s practices. Asking what the act involved in concrete terms is often better than imposing a translation whose precision is only apparent.

Adjustments to duration, pace, format or support should enable participation. A shorter question may be more rigorous than a legally sophisticated but poorly understood one. The investigator checks understanding without turning the exchange into a test of educational attainment or proficiency in French.

Very sensitive questions may require a break or a focused follow-up interview. These adjustments do not remove the need for useful clarifications; they prevent a temporary inability to answer from being mistaken for an absence of information or a definitive refusal.

Neither an admission nor a denial removes the need to investigate

Someone may acknowledge words without acknowledging the meaning the case attributes to them. 'I said that availability was necessary' does not mean 'I made the assignment conditional on a personal relationship.' The distinction must be examined without stripping the acknowledged words of their significance.

Likewise, 'I made a mistake' may express regret, acknowledge inadequate documentation or accept a limited factual description. A summary replacing that sentence with 'admits the facts' may add everything still disputed. The investigator must clarify what is being acknowledged rather than exploit its ambiguity.

A blanket denial also calls for precise questions. A person may dispute the conversation, a sentence, an intention or the link between two decisions. Those disputes generate different verification needs. A good end to an interview may leave some points opposed while substantially narrowing the area of disagreement.

End the exchange without closing the possibility of learning

The ending should be more than an announcement that the written record will be sent for review. A short recap of the main points allows the person to correct the investigator's understanding before it becomes embedded in the case. They may confirm some points, reject a paraphrase and maintain an uncertainty. All three responses are useful; they must not be reduced to blanket agreement with a summary.

A question such as 'What important point have we not addressed, or misunderstood?' creates one last opportunity to shift the focus. An investigator who has spent an hour on a meeting may then learn that a decisive instruction was given the day before. The interview should neither continue indefinitely nor ignore that information because the outline is complete. The point should be recorded and an appropriate check or further interview arranged.

The person should know how to add information and report a difficulty related to their participation. Next steps can be explained without promising a conclusion date, an outcome or access to the case that the investigator cannot control. Where the exchange reveals a need for protection, referral to the competent person is distinct from continuing factual questions.

The close can also distinguish documents promised from documents actually provided. 'I should be able to find the message' is not yet evidence in the case. Assigning follow-up responsibility and retaining the date of the later contribution prevents a promised source from being treated as confirmation already obtained. The written record will extend that discipline.

CHAPTER 06

Write a record that does not change the nature of the account

Faithfulness does not mean reproducing every hesitation. It means preserving what gives an answer its meaning: its subject, the source of knowledge, qualifications and the important conditions in which it was obtained.

Four documents, four functions

Interview notes may remind the investigator of a follow-up question. A transcript aims to reproduce recorded speech. An interview record organises the relevant statements. An investigation report compares those statements with other evidence and offers an analysis. Calling all of them ‘verbatim’ erases their respective transformations.

Notes may contain impressions or abbreviations that need clarification before being used as an account. A transcript may attribute words to the wrong speaker. An interview record may preserve sentences without the question that limited their meaning. A report may lose a qualification when summarising. Each transition requires an appropriate check.

In the fictional project example, ‘He told me my position would be difficult’ and ‘I understood that my position would be difficult’ are not stylistic variants. The first reports words; the second a meaning attributed to the situation. Improving the style by replacing one with the other changes the nature of the evidence.

The record must preserve important answers with the context needed to understand them. It need not reproduce the whole questionnaire, but a question must be retained when, without it, one could not understand what the person confirms, denies or estimates.

An editorial shortcut can change the information

Words obtained	Misleading shortcut	A record with clear limits
‘I understood that my place was under threat.’	‘He told her she would lose her place.’	The person describes their understanding; the exact words still need to be distinguished.
‘From memory, it was after the committee meeting.’	‘The exchange took place after the committee meeting.’	The person places the exchange after the committee meeting, subject to the stated qualification about their memory.
‘Having read it, I can see what that word might have meant.’	‘The witness confirms the meaning of the sentence.’	The person offers an interpretation after reading; they are not necessarily reporting an initial perception.
‘I checked the budget, not the choice of supplier.’	‘Acknowledges approving the transaction.’	Acknowledges a budget check and expressly limits its scope.

Correction is part of achieving precision

Offering a review can identify a wrong name, a mistranscribed date or confusion between words heard and an interpretation. It does not make the person the author of the final analysis. They are first checking whether their statements have been accurately recorded.

Acas guidance for workplace investigations in Britain provides an opportunity to check a statement, amend it and record refusal to confirm its accuracy. It offers practical guidance for managing corrections, not a universally transferable obligation to sign. ^[9]

A recording error, an added clarification and a substantive change of account must be distinguished. If the author misunderstood the subject of a sentence, retaining that error as though it were an initial statement would be unfair. A new fact added by the person must be dated as a supplement. If they retract something they actually said, the change and its explanation require examination.

This traceability must remain compatible with rectification rights and retention rules. Preserving the case's history does not justify keeping inaccurate data without correction or annotation. Handling a rights request is distinct from disagreement about the interpretation of the facts. ^[5]

A signature does not turn a statement into an established fact

A signature may attest that the person recognises a written account as their own. It does not automatically make the reported perception accurate or the second-hand information independent. The case must still examine the scope of the contribution.

Conversely, absence of a signature does not justify erasing what was obtained or concluding that the person lied. They may dispute wording, fear disclosure or not have responded to the review request. The situation must be identified: explicit refusal, a specific disagreement, no response or inability to make contact.

Silence must not be presented as definite approval. 'Record sent; no response as of this date' describes a follow-up status. 'Record approved' asserts a different act. The convenience of closing a task cannot create that act.

In French employment litigation, the judgment of 14 January 2026, no. 24-19.544, recalls that the judge must assess the value and significance of the interviews and attestations submitted, without excluding them solely because no internal investigation was conducted in the case examined. The decision makes neither a signature nor a protocol sufficient proof; nor does it relieve the organisation of its protection obligations. ^[10]

Protection continues after the record is closed

An interview record may contain data about people who were not present. Its circulation must meet defined needs, not follow a customary distribution list. Copying it into a translation tool, transcription service or external email system is also a movement of data.

The CNIL framework adopted on 6 July 2023 addresses, among other matters, purposes, recipients, retention periods and safeguards for workplace whistleblowing systems. It does not authorise indefinite retention of everything in the name of evidence. Its use must remain tied to that scope. ^[11]

Removing names does not guarantee that someone cannot be identified. A unique assignment, a precise date or recognisable wording may be enough. Producing a version adapted to the recipient's role is often more useful than sending the entire document with names merely masked.

Good protection does not mean removing all limitations from the document circulated. If a summary asserts convergence, it must preserve the information needed to understand its scope. Confidentiality does not authorise a conclusion to become more certain because the sources that qualify it cannot be shared.

CHAPTER 07

After the interview, identify what has actually changed

The length of the exchange and the number of pages produced describe work done. They do not yet say which questions have moved forward. An interview gains its value from how it changes the course of the investigation.

Resist the overall impression

A 'convincing' person may have added nothing on the decisive point. Someone difficult to follow may have identified the document that makes the sequence understandable. The post-interview assessment must therefore distinguish the interpersonal impression from the information obtained.

For each important question, it is useful to state what the interview clarified: an observation, a word, a limitation, the origin of information, an explanation to test or a new source to seek. Some questions remain unchanged. This is not necessarily a failure if the interview honestly established that the person was not in a position to answer.

Return to the three people in the opening. The colleague places his departure before the end of the conversation. He explains that the phrase 'personal availability' was given to him afterwards. He can describe the beginning of the exchange and the later disclosure; he does not directly confirm words spoken after he left. This clarification proves neither that the employee is wrong nor that the manager is right. It changes the structure of corroboration.

If a summary still announces 'three matching accounts of the condition imposed', the interviews will have produced their own refutation without the case making use of it. The correction must be followed through to the wording that depends on it.

New questions must become checks

An interview can shift the origin of a decision. 'I announced the rotation, but the list came from project management' calls for enquiries about that list and the roles of those who prepared it. Adding 'implicates management' to the summary is not enough: that wording loses the verifiable object, the document.

The need for a further interview is clarified in the same way. A second interview may be justified by a new document, an answer whose scope changes or a material contradiction. It should not merely seek a better version of the answer originally hoped for.

Before resuming, the investigator must know what has already been disclosed to the person and what has changed since. An initial statement made without documents cannot be compared with a second made after reading a summary as though the conditions were identical. Continuity of the case requires that difference to be preserved too.

Finally, the topics must be prioritised. Incidental information may justify referral elsewhere, an authorised extension or no further action within this mandate. The ease of opening a new conversation does not give the investigation unlimited scope.

When digital assistance becomes another participant

A tool can prepare topics, retrieve a passage, suggest a follow-up or help write up the interview. Its contribution is judged by the information it makes available and the quality of the checks, not the fluency of its sentences. It can also steer the interview back towards a hypothesis the investigator had begun to abandon.

A suggestion that was not spoken is not an act of interviewing. A question modified by the investigator is no longer exactly the original suggestion. An answer obtained after a document was shown cannot be linked to an earlier open question. Distinguishing proposal, actual action and written account is essential to understanding what happened.

The NIST profile on generative AI identifies, in particular, the risk of incorrect content expressed confidently. In an interview, a missing negation, misattributed speaker or paraphrase placed in quotation marks can change the analysis far more than a visible typo. Verification must focus on passages supporting important claims, not merely on the grammatical correctness of the output. ^[12]

The investigator must also be able to dismiss a suggestion without endless justification and continue listening without constantly consulting a screen. Assistance that diverts attention from the account can lose what it was meant to help collect. Digital tools are useful only if they remain subordinate to the quality of the encounter.

No sincerity score replaces this examination. Inferring a statement's truth from voice, gaze or an impression of stress resolves neither what the person knows nor the scope of their words. Intended uses must also be examined under their own applicable legal rules. Analysis of the case must not become an opaque evaluation of people.

Review the conduct of the interview too

A good evaluation considers what was learned and how the questions contributed to that learning. Was a word introduced too early and then allowed to structure every answer? Was an ambiguity left unresolved because it favoured the hypothesis? Was a document presented without preserving its context?

This review does not serve to declare every imperfect interview unusable. It identifies the points requiring clarification, another source or a qualification. A leading question cannot always be 'cancelled' by asking someone to forget it. Its possible effect must be examined without pretending it can be measured with certainty in every answer.

Professional improvement becomes possible when these difficulties can be acknowledged without concealing what they change. A good record does not make the investigator disappear behind an appearance of absolute neutrality. It allows the interventions that matter to be understood.

CONCLUSION

Interviewing is not about obtaining a version that holds together

By the end of the day, three interviews have taken place. The investigator has more information, but fewer easy certainties. The colleague is not a direct witness to the whole conversation. The manager acknowledges a word, not all the meaning attributed to it. The employee distinguishes the words she reports, what she understood and the effects she describes on her work.

The case has not gone back to square one. It has stopped asking accounts to support an overbroad conclusion. The remaining questions are more precise: what words can be recorded, what contemporaneous evidence illuminates their context, what actions followed and which explanations withstand examination? Those questions can guide the next steps without requiring people to produce the conclusion in place of the investigation.

A successful interview is therefore measured neither by the number of admissions nor by the disappearance of every disagreement. It allows statements to be used without attributing an origin, certainty or scope they do not have. It makes correction possible, preserves an important qualification and identifies what remains to be verified.

This rigour is not the opposite of respect. It protects the person giving an account from excessive paraphrasing, the person subject to allegations from a prejudged interpretation and the decision-maker from confidence without sufficient grounds. It does not guarantee that nobody lies or makes a mistake. It prevents the conduct of the investigation from adding certainty that the information does not support.

The best question is not the one that obtains agreement. It is the one that clarifies what that agreement means.

For LucenOne, this requirement gives meaning to investigative assistance: helping to prepare, retrieve, connect and re-examine, without confusing a tool's suggestion with a person's words or the organisation's decision. Responsibility for the reasoning remains visible rather than disappearing behind a well-written account.

To discuss the preparation, conduct and recording of your interviews: lucen.one/contact.

A LucenOne publication. English edition, translated from the French edition of September 2026. Sharing the complete publication is permitted provided attribution and notices are retained. Extracts must preserve their context. Errors may be reported through the contact page.

GUIDANCE AND REFERENCES

Read sources within their scope

The situations and dialogues in this book are fictional. They are used to examine reasoning, not to give a legal characterisation of a real case. The sample formulations are methodological proposals, not wording prescribed by the cited sources.

Legal texts, recommendations, experimental research and editorial analysis do not have the same status. The references below indicate the role adopted for each. Specific obligations depend, in particular, on the country, the person's status, the investigation's purpose and its relationship with other procedures. General information does not replace professional assessment of those conditions.

The cited pages and texts were consulted for the French edition on 9 September 2026. Scientific research is cited for the findings described in the abstracts or texts consulted, without claiming an exhaustive review of the field.

01 AFA and PNF — Guide pratique relatif aux enquêtes internes anticorruption

14 March 2023. Sections on interviews and their written records. Professional guidance on preparation, the investigator's mandate and useful documents. Scope: internal anti-corruption investigations; this guide does not establish a single procedure for all investigations.

[View source: AFA / PNF](#)

02 Méndez Principles — Principles on Effective Interviewing for Investigations and Information Gathering

2021. Official presentation by the Association for the Prevention of Torture. Reliable information gathering, non-coercive rapport and attention to vulnerabilities. Used methodologically; the rules and powers of criminal justice systems are not transferred to employers.

[View source: APT](#)

03 Défenseur des droits — Framework Decision 2025-019 of 5 February 2025

Discrimination and sexual harassment in private and public employment: receiving reports and internal investigations. Confidentiality, impartiality, objectivity and rigour. Recommendations to employers within this scope; their status differs from legislation or a court judgment.

[View source: Défenseur des droits](#)

04 French Criminal Code — Article 226-1

Provision covering, in particular, the capture, recording or transmission of words spoken privately or confidentially without the speaker's consent, subject to its conditions. Its examination is distinct from assessing the legal basis for processing personal data.

[View source: Légifrance](#)

05 European Union — Regulation (EU) 2016/679, the GDPR

27 April 2016. Articles 5, 6, 9, 10, 12–16 and 32: principles, legal bases, special categories, information, access, rectification and security. To be applied to the processing concerned. Retaining versions and usefulness to an investigation are not general exceptions to individuals' rights.

[View source: EUR-Lex](#)

06 College of Policing — Investigative interviewing

Professional resource: preparation, obtaining accounts, clarification, questions and evaluation. Guidance on wording is distinguished from the safeguards and powers of British police investigations. It provides neither authority to compel nor a universal questionnaire for an organisation.

[View source: College of Policing](#)

07 Gabbert, F., Memon, A. and Allan, K. — Memory conformity: can eyewitnesses influence each other's memories for an event?

Applied Cognitive Psychology, 17(5), 2003, pp. 533–543. DOI: 10.1002/acp.885. Experimental research on the effects of discussions between witnesses. The finding highlights a risk in the circulation of information; it does not allow an individual's memory to be diagnosed in a particular case.

[View source: Research article / DOI](#)

08 Kassir, S. M., Goldstein, C. C. and Savitsky, K. — Behavioral confirmation in the interrogation room: on the dangers of presuming guilt

Law and Human Behavior, 27(2), 2003, pp. 187–203. DOI: 10.1023/A:1022599230598. Study abstract consulted in PubMed. Experiment on the effects of an initial expectation of guilt; no proportion is transferred to professional interviews.

[View source: PubMed / Research article](#)

09 Acas — Investigations at work, Step 5: If there are witnesses

British recommendations on witness statements, review, amendments and refusal to sign. Used as guidance for recording accounts. British procedural and disclosure rules are not presented as French obligations.

[View source: Acas](#)

10 Cour de cassation, Social Chamber — 14 January 2026, appeal no. 24-19.544

Judgment published in the Bulletin; paragraphs 7–10. Assessment of the value and significance of interviews and attestations in employment litigation. The decision does not make an investigation protocol a substitute for that assessment and does not dispense with prevention or protection obligations.

[View source: Légifrance](#)

11 CNIL — Référentiel relatif aux dispositifs d'alertes professionnelles

Deliberation no. 2023-064 of 6 July 2023. In particular, data quality, authorised persons, retention and security. Guidance supporting compliance in data processing within this scope, not a complete regime for every investigation.

[View source: CNIL / Légifrance](#)

12 NIST — Artificial Intelligence Risk Management Framework: Generative Artificial Intelligence Profile

NIST AI 600-1, 26 July 2024. Section 2.2, Confabulation, and action MS-2.5-003 on verifying sources and citations. A voluntary framework for managing generative AI risks. The book's examples of recording errors are editorial illustrations, not LucenOne test results.

[View source: NIST](#)