

— TRAINING PROGRAM / INVESTIGATIVE PRACTICE

Science-Based Interviewing

Modern interrogation, rapport, and the strategic use of evidence, from the research that rebuilt the field.

PROGRAM

Science-Based Interviewing

EDITION

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BASIS

Peer-reviewed research, cited throughout

— THE EDGE YOU ARE TRAINING FOR

Why our training program wins

Chris Michael trains **science-based interviewing**, the rapport-based approach that decades of research have made the standard for serious, high-stakes interviews. It has a track record the older, pressure-based methods cannot match, and it is teachable. Here is what people take away from the training.

- 01 More accurate information.** When you build rapport and let someone talk, you get far more usable detail than any pressure tactic produces, and the research shows that detail holds up instead of filling with mistakes.

- 02 Grounded in research.** Every method comes from peer-reviewed studies and the programs that train federal investigators. There is no folklore here about crossed arms or shifty eyes, only techniques that have been tested in the field.

- 03 A reliable read on deception.** Trained interviewers who read the gap between a person's account and the evidence get to around 85 percent accuracy, against roughly 54 percent for anyone guessing from nerves or eye contact. That is a call you can rely on and defend.

- 04 Fewer costly mistakes.** The method is built to avoid false information and false confessions, the kind of errors that fall apart in court, wreck an internal investigation, and cost a team its trust. Getting it right the first time saves all of that.

- 05 It holds up to scrutiny.** Because the interview is honest, non-coercive, and recorded, it stands up in court and in front of any reviewer. There is nothing awkward to explain about how the information was obtained.

- 06 It works on the difficult people.** Rapport gets through to the ones who clam up the moment they feel cornered, so you make progress with the guarded, the reluctant, and the hostile, not only the people who were going to talk anyway.

- 07 The skills carry over.** The same rapport, questioning, and people-reading skills pay off in sales, in negotiations, in leadership, and in any conversation where you need the truth. What people learn here follows them into the rest of their work.

The older approach relies on pressure and on reading body language, and the research is clear that neither one works the way people assume. This program teaches methods that have been tested and proven, so people can trust what they walk away with.

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How to read this guide

The material sits under one umbrella term: **science-based interviewing (SBI)**. Everything else is a method, a research finding, or a piece of vocabulary that lives under that umbrella.

Five ideas carry the whole guide. Hold these and the rest is detail:

1. **The goal is information, not a confession.** A science-based interviewer is an information gatherer. Going in wanting a confession is a bias, and bias corrupts the interview.
2. **Rapport is the engine.** People give more, and more accurate, information to someone who treats them with honesty, empathy, and respect for their autonomy. This is measurable, not soft.
3. **Evidence is disclosed late and on purpose.** You take the person's account first, then reveal what you know, piece by piece, in a planned order. This is the Strategic Use of Evidence.
4. **Deception is not read off the body.** Demeanor, nerves, and "tells" are close to worthless. The reliable signal is the content of the account and the gap between the account and the evidence.
5. **A caught lie can be as powerful as a confession.** Research on how juries respond shows that an exposed lie can convict at nearly the same rate as a confession, without any of the false-confession risk.

The guide moves in order: why the field changed (Part 1), how you build the relationship that makes it work (Part 2), how you take an account (Part 3), how you handle evidence (Part 4), how deception actually works and fails to work (Part 5), what confessions are worth and why false ones happen (Part 6), the law and ethics that hold it all in place (Part 7), and how the same skills carry far beyond the interview room (Part 8). Reference material and a full glossary follow.

Example scripts marked "In practice" show how a science-based interviewer actually speaks. Everything else is drawn from published research, cited in the resource library.

PART 1

The paradigm shift: from getting a confession to gathering information

Two families of interviewing

Modern research splits suspect questioning into two broad approaches.

Accusatorial (confrontational). The interviewer presumes guilt, controls the conversation, confronts the suspect with real or claimed evidence, cuts off denials, and applies psychological pressure. Two levers do the work: *minimization* (offering moral excuses, implying leniency) and *maximization* (exaggerating the strength of the evidence or the seriousness of the consequences). The goal is a confession. The Reid Technique is the classic example.

Information-gathering (science-based). The interviewer builds genuine rapport, keeps an open mind about guilt, asks open questions, lets the person give a full free account before any challenge, and uses evidence strategically and late. The goal is complete, accurate information. The PEACE model is the classic example.

The move from the first toward the second is the central shift in the field over the last two decades. It was driven by wrongful-conviction scandals and by a large body of experimental evidence that rapport-based, information-gathering methods produce more true information and fewer false confessions.

IN PRACTICE

“In science-based interviewing, we consider ourselves information gatherers, so you never ever go into an interview with the intention of gaining a confession, ever. Because if you have a goal of gaining a confession, then you have a bias, and biases are not welcome.” And: “If you need to get a confession, then you don’t have evidence substantial enough to lock that up anyway.”

That last line is the whole philosophy in one sentence. If your case rests on talking someone into admitting guilt, the case is thin. Build the evidence, then let the interview test it.

The Reid Technique, and why the field is moving away from it

The **Reid Technique** was developed by John E. Reid starting around 1947 and codified with Fred Inbau in the textbook *Criminal Interrogation and Confessions*. It is a three-part process: a non-accusatory “Behavior Analysis Interview,” and then, if the interviewer infers deception, a nine-step accusatorial interrogation (direct confrontation, theme development, cutting off denials, overcoming objections, presenting an alternative question, and so on, ending in a written confession).

The criticisms, led by researchers Saul Kassin and Richard Leo, are serious:

- Its guilt-presumptive stance and its reliance on reading behavior to detect deception are built on cues that research shows are unreliable.
- Its pressure and minimization tactics can move innocent people to confess, with the highest risk for juveniles and people with intellectual or psychosocial vulnerabilities.
- It is implicated in documented wrongful convictions.

A telling industry signal: in 2017, Wicklander-Zulawski and Associates, one of the largest interrogation-training firms in the United States, publicly stopped teaching the Reid confrontational method, citing false-confession risk. Many interviewers who came up on Reid, forensic statement analysis, and voice stress analysis have since set those tools aside for the science-based approach.

The PEACE model

PEACE is the ethical, information-gathering interview framework adopted by the police service of England and Wales in 1992, developed jointly by police and psychologists after miscarriages of justice (the Guildford Four, the Birmingham Six) exposed coercive questioning as a driver of false confessions. It is non-accusatory and is used with victims, witnesses, and suspects alike.

The mnemonic:

- **P: Preparation and Planning.** Prepare your aims, review and order the evidence, and build an interview plan before you walk in. Widely described as the most important stage.
- **E: Engage and Explain.** Engage the person, build rapport, and explain the purpose and ground rules of the interview.
- **A: Account, Clarification, and Challenge.** Get a full, uninterrupted account first. Then clarify and probe it. Only then, where appropriate, challenge inconsistencies or contradictory evidence.
- **C: Closure.** Summarize the account to confirm you both understood it the same way, explain next steps, and close professionally.
- **E: Evaluation.** Afterward, evaluate the information against the investigation, and evaluate your own performance as an interviewer.

Notice how much of this maps onto the PEACE “A” stage: account first, challenge last. Part 3 unpacks how you actually run that account.

PACE: a word with two meanings

PEACE and PACE are easy to conflate, so keep them separate:

- **PACE** most precisely refers to the **Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984**, the UK law governing police powers of arrest, detention, and questioning. Its Codes of Practice require cautioning suspects, access to legal advice, protections for vulnerable detainees, and audio recording of interviews. PACE 1984 is the legal scaffolding that made PEACE-style ethical interviewing enforceable; courts can exclude confessions obtained by “oppression.” Part 7 covers this.

- There is no widely recognized “PACE interview method” that stands as a peer to PEACE in the science-based literature. (There is a separate, unrelated “PACE” in Motivational Interviewing, meaning Partnership, Acceptance, Compassion, Evocation, covered in Part 2. Do not confuse the two.) The safe reading: PEACE is the method, PACE is the law that backs it.

Where the science lives: HIG, FLETC, and the research base

Two institutions turn this research into training, and both are worth knowing by name.

HIG, the High-Value Detainee Interrogation Group. A United States interagency body created in 2009, chaired by the FBI and including the CIA and the Department of Defense. It was set up to question high-value terrorism suspects using lawful, non-coercive methods, after the rejection of the CIA’s post-9/11 “enhanced interrogation” program. For our purposes, the important part is its **research program**: the HIG has funded and translated well over a hundred peer-reviewed studies on rapport-building, the Strategic Use of Evidence, cognitive interviewing, and credibility assessment. That research produced the first science-based interviewing curriculum for US law enforcement, military, and intelligence personnel. Its flagship synthesis, *Interrogation: A Review of the Science* (2016), is hosted publicly on the FBI’s website.

FLETC, the Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers. A Department of Homeland Security organization (main campus in Glynco, Georgia) that trains personnel from dozens of federal agencies. FLETC teaches science-based interviewing to federal agents, with content including Motivational Interviewing, the ORBIT rapport model, the Strategic Use of Evidence, the Cognitive Interview, and Cialdini’s principles of persuasion, practiced in videotaped mock interviews. It is a concrete channel by which the research reaches working investigators.

The evidence base in one paragraph. Confession evidence is powerful with juries, but accusatorial pressure can cause innocent people to confess, and false confessions are a leading contributor to documented wrongful convictions. The foundational meta-analysis (Christian Meissner and colleagues, a Campbell Collaboration systematic review, 2012 and 2014) found that in controlled experiments where the truth is known, information-gathering methods increased true confessions while reducing false confessions relative to accusatorial methods. An updated Campbell review (Catlin and colleagues, 2024, using network meta-analysis across 29 experimental studies) reached the same conclusion more sharply: accusatorial methods produced far more false confessions than either direct questioning or information-gathering (odds ratio about 4.4 versus information-gathering), while information-gathering produced more true confessions than plain direct questioning (odds ratio about 2.4). The authors explicitly called for reforming policy to prohibit accusatorial approaches and require science-based ones. One honest caveat for any trainer: much of this experimental work uses university students in lab paradigms, so it is the convergence of lab experiments, field studies, and wrongful-conviction case analysis, not any single study, that makes the conclusion solid.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Two families: accusatorial (presume guilt, seek a confession) and information-gathering (build rapport, seek accurate information). The science favors the second.
- Reid is the accusatorial archetype and carries real false-confession risk. PEACE is the information-gathering archetype.
- The goal is never a confession. If you need one, your evidence is too thin.
- The research base is institutional now (HIG, FLETC) and consistent across labs, field studies, and exoneration records.

— PART 2

Rapport is the engine: ORBIT and the HEAR principles

If Part 1 is about *why* the field changed, Part 2 is about the skill that makes the new approach work. You cannot gather information from someone who has shut down. Rapport is how you keep them talking, and the research shows it is the single biggest lever on how much useful information an interview produces.

| ORBIT: the science of rapport-based interviewing

ORBIT stands for **Observing Rapport-Based Interpersonal Techniques**. It was developed by Professor Laurence Alison and Emily Alison and colleagues at the University of Liverpool. It is two things at once: a coding system that scores the moment-to-moment behavior of both the interviewer and the suspect, and a training model built on what that coding revealed.

What makes ORBIT unusually credible is its evidence base. Starting in 2012, the Liverpool team was given access to real recorded interviews with terrorism suspects held by UK Counter Terrorism Police. The corpus grew to more than 2,000 hours of real interrogations, described as the largest sample of real-world suspect interviews ever studied. This is not a lab with undergraduates. It is footage of trained interrogators questioning genuine high-stakes suspects.

The foundational study (Alison, Alison, Noone, Elntib, and Christiansen, 2013, in *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*) coded 181 of these interviews and found a clean, repeatable chain:

- When the interviewer used adaptive, rapport-based behavior, the suspect responded with more adaptive behavior, and the interview produced more useful information.
- Even a small amount of maladaptive interviewer behavior triggered more maladaptive suspect behavior and directly reduced the useful information obtained.
- Rapport-based behavior also lowered the suspect's use of counter-interrogation tactics (silence, “no comment,” refusing to engage).

The headline the Alisons repeat: rapport gets results, and tough tactics fail. The team now trains the UK Counter-Terrorism Police, the US High-Value Detainee Interrogation Group, and allied military and intelligence groups. Their academic book is *ORBIT: The Science of Rapport-Based Interviewing* (Oxford University Press, 2020), and the popular version is *Rapport: The Four Ways to Read People* (Emily and Laurence Alison, 2020).

| What “yield” means

Yield is a term worth memorizing.

Yield is the amount of investigatively useful information an interview produces. It is the outcome ORBIT measures everything against. In the terrorism studies, yield captured how much the suspect revealed about capability, opportunity, and motive. In a later study of suspects in child-abuse cases, yield was scored as a count across concrete categories: evidence of involvement, passwords and PINs, device and location information, knowledge of other suspects or victims, and so on. That study put concrete numbers on it: a one-unit increase in adaptive interviewing raised the likelihood of case-strengthening yield by around 35 percent (more for adaptive cooperative behavior), while maladaptive, passive interviewing cut it by roughly half.

The core finding restated in terms of yield: adaptive, rapport-based interviewer behavior raises yield; maladaptive, confrontational behavior lowers it. Yield is also how ORBIT defines an “elite” interviewer.

Elite interviewers are versatile, not tough

The best interviewers are not the most intimidating or the most relentlessly friendly. They are the most **interpersonally skilled and adaptive**. The Alisons describe three qualities that separate the effective from the average:

1. **Sensitivity.** Reading the suspect’s interpersonal signals and responding to them.
2. **Competence.** Avoiding maladaptive behaviors that poison the interaction.
3. **Versatility.** Being able to move across the whole range of interpersonal styles rather than being stuck in one.

Independent research on 42 highly experienced military and federal interrogators reached the same conclusion: the interrogators rated most effective were the ones who were both highly skilled interpersonally and able to adapt. Coercion did not distinguish the best. Adaptability did.

The interpersonal wheel: four styles you can choose

Rapport teaches interpersonal behavior as a wheel built on two axes, adapted from Timothy Leary’s interpersonal circumplex:

- **The vertical axis is control**, running from authoritative and dominant at the top to passive and yielding at the bottom.
- **The horizontal axis is warmth**, running from confrontational and hostile on one side to cooperative and warm on the other.

Cross those two axes and you get four styles, taught as four animals. The point of the model is that all four are useful in the right moment. Skill is choosing the right one and flexing between them, not defaulting to a favorite. Each animal has a healthy (adaptive) form and a destructive (maladaptive) form:

Animal	Style	Used well	Used badly
Lion	Control (dominant + purposeful)	Clear, in charge, sets direction, still supportive	Dictatorial, bullying, dogmatic
T-Rex	Confront (frank + challenging)	Direct and honest about the problem	Attacking, sarcastic, punishing
Mouse	Capitulate (deferential + yielding)	Humble, patient, gives ground; often the strongest position	Weak, appeasing, spineless
Monkey	Cooperate (warm + connecting)	Warm, builds connection and trust	Over-familiar, clingy, inappropriate

A practical rule from the book: read the *other* person’s animal, and do not mirror their bad behavior. Meeting a T-Rex with a T-Rex escalates. The goal is to pull the interaction toward the cooperative side of the wheel.

HEAR: the four cornerstones of rapport

HEAR is the four-part foundation the whole ORBIT approach rests on. The letters stand for **Honesty, Empathy, Autonomy, and Reflection**. (You will occasionally see the R mislabeled as “Respect” in secondary write-ups. The Alisons’ own term is Reflection.)

- **Honesty.** Be direct and objective about your intentions. Do not deceive, and do not be so vague that the person cannot trust you. Pair directness with empathy so the message can actually land, what Emily Alison calls walking a tightrope between too vague and too harsh. In the room this sounds like a simple promise: *“I’m not going to lie to you, I’m not going to trick you, I’m going to be 100 percent honest with you.”*
- **Empathy.** Understand the person from inside their own beliefs and values. This is a thinking act, “active imagination,” not a feeling of pity or agreement. You are trying to see the world as they see it so you can speak to it.
- **Autonomy.** Emphasize the person’s free will and right to choose whether to cooperate. This is the one people underrate. Pressure and control trigger reactance, the instinct to push back. Genuine choice lowers resistance. Only offer choices you can actually honor.
- **Reflection.** Reflective listening. Catch the meaningful words a person uses and feed them back, guiding the conversation instead of arguing or advising. This is drawn straight from Motivational Interviewing, the subject of the next section.

Motivational Interviewing: the engine underneath the engine

ORBIT’s rapport is built on **Motivational Interviewing (MI)**, a collaborative, person-centered method developed by William Miller and Stephen Rollnick. It began in addiction counseling and is now one of the most heavily researched conversation methods in the world. ORBIT scores interviewers on MI-consistent

behavior, and HEAR is essentially MI translated for the interview room. It is worth understanding in its own right, because it is the deep structure under everything in Part 2.

The spirit of MI: PACE

Miller and Rollnick insist the underlying stance matters more than any technique. They call it the “spirit” of MI, and give it the acronym **PACE** (not to be confused with the UK law):

- **Partnership.** You work alongside the person, a companion and guide, not an expert delivering a verdict. They are the expert on their own life.
- **Acceptance.** Respect made of four parts: absolute worth, accurate empathy, autonomy support, and affirmation of real strengths.
- **Compassion.** You act for the other person’s welfare, not your own agenda.
- **Evocation.** You draw out what is already there. The most powerful arguments come from the person’s own mouth, not from you installing them.

The core skills: OARS

The observable micro-skills of MI are remembered as **OARS**:

- **Open questions** that invite reflection and elaboration, not yes/no answers. “What worries you about this?” rather than “Are you worried?”
- **Affirmations** that recognize specific, true strengths or efforts. They build confidence and lower defensiveness. Generic flattery reads as manipulation and backfires.
- **Reflections**, the key skill: statements, not questions, that mirror back what the person means. A *simple* reflection stays close to what was said. A *complex* reflection adds the unspoken half (“It matters to you to make your own call, and right now it feels like nobody is letting you”). Complex reflection is how a skilled interviewer steers without interrogating.
- **Summaries** that tie threads together, show the person they were heard, and let you gather up their own most useful statements before moving on.

Change talk, sustain talk, and reactance

MI listens for the direction of a person’s own language: **change talk** (statements favoring change or disclosure) and **sustain talk** (statements defending the status quo). Most people hold both at once. The interviewer’s job is not to argue, but to evoke and reflect the change talk and to soften the sustain talk. When a person pushes back, you do not meet it head-on; you reflect it, reframe it, and emphasize their autonomy. (Miller and Rollnick retired the old word “resistance” because it blamed the person and let the interviewer off the hook. They split it into normal sustain talk and “discord,” strain in the relationship that is usually a signal the interviewer pushed too hard.)

Underneath all of this is **psychological reactance** (Jack Brehm, 1966): when people feel their freedom threatened, they are driven to reassert it, so pressure produces the opposite of compliance. Telling someone what to do, warning, or cornering them tends to *increase* their defense of the thing you oppose. Making their freedom explicit (“It is completely your call what you tell me”) removes what reactance is defending against, and resistance drops. This is the mechanism that makes coercion fail and rapport succeed. It is why

a frightened suspect is, in Laurence Alison’s words, quite likely to feel compelled to make something up: fear does not produce truth, it produces compliance.

What rapport actually is, and how to build it

Rapport is not small talk bolted onto the front of an interview. The standard research model (Tickle-Degnen and Rosenthal; applied to interviewing by Abbe and Brandon) defines it through three parts: **mutual attention** (genuine engagement), **positivity** (in an interview, better understood as mutual respect than warmth), and **coordination** (the two people falling into sync). A fourth, **shared understanding**, is a common picture of the situation and each person’s role in it.

Concrete, evidence-based tactics:

- **Reflective listening.** Feed the account back to show you understood it. “So, let me check I have this right: you left about six, and then...” This is the R in HEAR and a core MI skill.
- **Genuine interest and empathy.** Try honestly to see it from their side. “That sounds like it was a really stressful day.”
- **Self-disclosure and common ground, used lightly.** A small, true piece of yourself signals you are a person, not just an authority. “I know that street, I grew up nearby.”
- **The person’s name, used naturally,** not as a pressure device.
- **Subtle coordination.** Matching pace and tone builds sync. Obvious mimicry backfires.
- **Autonomy-supportive framing.** “It is your call what you tell me. I am just trying to understand what happened from your side.”

One finding is worth pinning up. In a study titled *Rapport building and witness memory: actions may speak louder than words*, **behavioral** rapport (a relaxed, open posture, eye contact, nodding, attentive listening) produced significantly more correct information, about 12 percent more accurate detail, with no rise in errors, while a scripted burst of **verbal** rapport used on its own actually *reduced* recall accuracy. The lesson: rapport that helps is mostly in how you attend, sit, and listen, not in a set piece of small talk at the start. And it must be maintained across the whole interview, not spent in the opening minute.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ORBIT is the real-world evidence that rapport raises “yield,” the useful information an interview produces, and that even small coercive moves lower it.
- HEAR (Honesty, Empathy, Autonomy, Reflection) is the working model of rapport. Autonomy is the underrated one: choice lowers resistance.
- Motivational Interviewing is the engine underneath. Its spirit is PACE, its skills are OARS, and its mechanism is reactance: pressure backfires, autonomy support works.
- Rapport is behavioral and sustained, not a scripted opening. How you listen beats what you say.

PART 3

Getting the account: the interviewing methods

Rapport opens the door. Now you have to walk a person through what they know without leading them, contaminating their memory, or shutting them down. The PEACE “Account” stage has two main methods for this, chosen by how cooperative the person is, plus a discipline of questioning that runs through both.

| The Cognitive Interview

The **Cognitive Interview (CI)** was developed in the mid-1980s by psychologists Ronald Fisher and Edward Geiselman, in response to police asking for a better way to interview witnesses. It is the method for **cooperative** people, victims, witnesses, and cooperative suspects. Its purpose is to pull the maximum amount of accurate detail out of memory without leading or contaminating it.

It rests on two settled facts about memory. First, **encoding specificity**: a memory is easier to reach when the conditions at recall match the conditions when it was formed, which is why mentally returning to the scene helps. Second, **multiple retrieval paths**: a single event can be reached by more than one route, so varying the route recovers detail a single pass misses.

The four core techniques:

1. **Report everything.** Ask for every detail, even partial or seemingly trivial ones, and tell the person not to edit. Small fragments trigger larger memories.
2. **Mental reinstatement of context.** Have the person mentally rebuild the scene: the place, the sounds and smells, what they were thinking and feeling at the time. This is encoding specificity in action and is usually the single most powerful component.
3. **Recall in a different order.** Ask for the account again from the end backward, or from the middle. Reverse order breaks the tendency to tell a smooth, expectation-driven story and surfaces new detail.
4. **Change perspective.** Ask the person to recall from another vantage point. This exploits the multiple-paths principle.

The **Enhanced Cognitive Interview (ECI)** wraps these four inside a rapport-and-communication frame: build rapport first, transfer control of the conversation to the witness (they are the expert on what happened and should do most of the talking), use open questions and a free narrative, follow the witness’s own train of thought rather than imposing your order, do not interrupt, use silence, and explicitly tell the person not to guess and to say so when they do not know.

The evidence is strong. Meta-analysis (Memon, Meissner, and Fraser, 2010, 57 effect sizes) found the CI produced a large increase in correct details (effect size around 1.2) with only a small rise in errors and no significant rise in made-up detail. It helps across event types and mediums, and it helps older adults even more than younger ones.

Two cautions. The output gain comes with a small, reliable rise in incorrect details, which is exactly why the “do not guess, say I do not know” instruction is treated as essential. And the CI is demanding and training-dependent: officers reliably use “report everything” but often drop “reverse order” and “change perspective,” and stripped-down versions cost accuracy. The two harder techniques are the first to be adapted or removed for children and vulnerable interviewees, and must never be delivered in a way that invites guessing.

Conversation Management

Not everyone wants to hand over information. For **less cooperative, resistant, or hostile** interviewees, most often suspects, the PEACE method is **Conversation Management (CM)**, devised by Professor Eric Shepherd. Shepherd describes it as an ethical, open-minded approach aimed at maximum disclosure through a mindful, managed conversation. It is the deliberate opposite of confession-focused interrogation.

The difference from the Cognitive Interview is who steers. In the CI, control is handed to a willing rememberer. In CM, the interviewer manages a reluctant one: setting out the format and ground rules openly, working systematically through topics, and, where the evidence justifies it, challenging inconsistencies. The challenge is delivered without aggression or accusation. Both methods share the same architecture, a free uninterrupted account first, then structured probing, then challenge, but CM keeps the interviewer transparently in charge rather than surrendering the floor to someone unwilling to use it.

The questioning discipline: the funnel, good questions, and bad ones

Within either method, the quality of the questions decides the quality of the account.

The funnel. Move from broad and open at the top to specific and closed at the bottom. Start with an open invitation and let the free account run. Then narrow with focused probes. Use closed questions only at the end, to pin down specifics. The **T-funnel** applies this topic by topic: one open question opens a topic (the wide bar of the T), then you work down the stem with probes until that topic is exhausted, then move on. (Mapping which question types an interviewer actually used, productive open questions versus unproductive leading ones, is the basis of the Griffiths Question Map, a training feedback tool.)

Good questions. Open questions carry the account. A useful prompt is **TED**: “Tell me everything that happened,” “Explain what you meant,” “Describe the room.” Some trainers add “Show me” (TEDS). To make sure every corner of a topic is covered, use the **5WH** probes: who, what, where, when, why, how. (“Why” is used with care on suspects and vulnerable people, since it can feel accusatory or invite justification instead of fact.)

Questions to avoid, or to hold until late:

- **Leading questions** that plant their own answer (“The car was red, wasn’t it?”). These contaminate memory.
- **Multiple questions** bundled into one, which confuse and muddy which part is being answered.
- **Forced-choice questions** (“Was he tall or short?”) that limit the answer to options that may fit neither reality.

- **Closed yes/no questions asked too early**, which shut the free narrative down before the person has produced their own account.

Covering the whole account: PLAT, PLATO, PLATCOM. To make sure no part of an account is left unprobed, trainers use topic-checklist mnemonics. The common forms:

- **PLAT:** People, Locations, Actions, Times.
- **PLATO:** the above plus Objects.
- **PLATCOM:** People, Locations, Actions, Times, Communications, Objects, Motives.

Each letter is a topic to open up and then probe to exhaustion before moving on. The exact letters vary by trainer, so treat the mnemonic as a coverage aid, not a fixed script. It is a PEACE-model account tool, not an ORBIT term.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Cooperative interviewee: use the Cognitive Interview (report everything, reinstate context, change order, change perspective), and always tell them not to guess.
- Resistant interviewee: use Conversation Management, structured and transparent, the interviewer stays in charge but never coercive.
- Question shape is a funnel: open first, closed last. TED and 5WH open and cover; leading, multiple, forced-choice, and early yes/no questions damage the account.
- PLAT / PLATO / PLATCOM is a coverage checklist for an account, not a rigid formula.

PART 4

The Strategic Use of Evidence and the Evidence Framing Matrix

This is the technical core of the whole method. It answers a single question: once you have evidence, what do you do with it in the room?

The wrong answer, and the old habit, is to lead with your strongest evidence to “hit them with it.” The science-based answer is the opposite. You hold the evidence, take the account first, and reveal what you know late and in a planned order.

| The Strategic Use of Evidence (SUE)

SUE stands for the **Strategic Use of Evidence**. It was developed by Pär Anders Granhag and Maria Hartwig (with Leif Strömwall and, in the US, Timothy Luke) starting at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden. It is an information-gathering technique, not a confrontation. The whole thing rests on one insight about how guilty and innocent people behave differently.

- **Guilty suspects come in with a strategy.** They want to avoid the incriminating topic. When avoidance gets blocked, they deny. They do not know exactly what you hold, so they are guessing.
- **Innocent suspects tend to be forthcoming.** The research calls this the phenomenology of innocence: they believe the truth will set them free, and they assume their innocence is obvious. So they talk freely and their account tends to match the evidence.

Here is why the timing matters. If you get a suspect to commit to a full account *before* revealing what you know, a guilty person’s account tends to collide with the evidence, because they were busy avoiding the very things you can prove. An innocent person’s account lines up. The disclosure schedule, withhold then reveal, manufactures a signal that a confrontational interview never produces: **statement-evidence inconsistency**. That gap, not body language, is the reliable cue to deception.

The order of operations:

1. **Free recall first.** “Tell me everything, in as much detail as you can, leave nothing out.” Do not interrupt. This protects a clean account and gives an innocent person room to be forthcoming.
2. **Probe the evidence without revealing it.** Ask about the specific points your evidence touches, without letting on that you have evidence or even that the topic matters.
3. **Lock in the account.** Summarize it back. “So you said X and Y. Did I miss anything?” Now they are committed.
4. **Disclose the evidence late, and framed on purpose** (see the Evidence Framing Matrix below).

The research shows this works. In a 2006 Swedish training study, interviewers trained in SUE reached 85 percent deception-detection accuracy versus 56 percent for untrained interviewers. In a 2016 study of US

officers on a harder, more realistic sample, SUE-trained officers reached about 65 percent versus 43 percent untrained. Both are large gains over the roughly 54 percent chance ceiling of unaided human lie detection.

In practice, it sounds like this:

IN PRACTICE

“We get their opening. We deliver an opening line. We hear their account. Then we start to challenge the things they say with the strategic use of evidence. They’re not going for it, or they change their stories many times, but they stick to the lie. Then we present the evidence.”

One fairness caveat worth teaching: SUE can misfire on an innocent person who did something else wrong. Someone innocent of the crime under investigation but guilty of an unrelated secret may adopt guilty-like avoidance and produce inconsistencies. Good interviewers hold this possibility open rather than treating every inconsistency as proof.

The Evidence Framing Matrix (EFM)

SUE and the Evidence Framing Matrix go hand in hand, both developed by Maria Hartwig. If SUE tells you *when* to disclose (late), the **Evidence Framing Matrix** tells you *how* to disclose. It was first tested by Granhag, Strömwall, Willén, and Hartwig in 2013.

The matrix takes a single piece of evidence and lays out how you could present it along two axes:

- **Strength of the source**, from weak framing to strong framing. Weak is hedged and tentative (“we have some information suggesting...”). Strong names a hard source (“we have you on video...”).
- **Specificity of the evidence**, from general to exact. General is broad (“you were in the area”). Specific is precise (“you were inside the store at 9:47”).

Cross the two and you get four ways to disclose the same fact, from most indirect to most direct:

	General	Specific
Weak source	Most indirect. “We have information you were near there that night.”	“We have information you were at the store that night.”
Strong source	“We have you on camera near there.”	Most direct. “We have you on video inside the store at 9:47 pointing a gun.”

The power move is to start weak and general, then step up strength and specificity only as needed. Running the same evidence up the matrix is called SUE-Incremental, and in the 2013 test it produced the strongest cues to deception, stronger than dumping the evidence in its strongest form all at once. Each step gives a guilty person another chance to adjust a story that is already contradicting itself, which is what practitioners mean when they say it makes a guilty suspect “stick out like a sore thumb.”

IN PRACTICE

“When you put someone into this strategic use of evidence funnel and show them the evidence framing matrix, when you put them through that, it just makes them stick out like a sore thumb.”

The funnel, prioritizing evidence, and staying in it

The SUE funnel is the questioning funnel from Part 3 doing an extra job: you structure the narrowing so it walks the suspect toward the evidence without revealing it, getting them to commit to an account on the exact points your evidence touches before they know evidence exists. For example, before disclosing that a witness places the suspect with the victim: “Where did you go after work?” then “Did you spend time with anyone after work?” then “Did you spend time with [the victim]?” Then lock it in, then disclose.

Two ideas are really one rule: prioritize your evidence, and do not burn your best piece early. In practice:

IN PRACTICE

“That’s why prioritizing the evidence is important, because then you don’t give your highest priority evidence out front... if they call it off, or lawyer up, you can still have a secondary interview. You still have a chance, and you haven’t given up your best stuff yet.”

And the move when a suspect stumbles onto your best evidence before you are ready to use it:

IN PRACTICE

“You jump out of that funnel and go to a different one, because there’s still more information I could gather before I tip this off. Let me get all the information I can before I give them the good stuff.”

That is what “staying in the funnel” and “don’t continue down that funnel when you’re getting nos” mean. A run of “no” answers means you have reached the bottom of that line for now. Pushing harder turns an information-gathering interview into a confrontation. It tells the suspect what you are fishing for, raises their resistance, and is the documented path to coercion and false confessions. The disciplined move is to note the denial, stop pressing, and open a different funnel or hold the point for strategic disclosure later.

Planning: closing the escape routes before you ever show evidence

Planning is not a warm-up. In science-based interviewing it is a discipline of its own, and it is where the interview is really won. The signature planning move is to ask questions that quietly close off innocent explanations *before* the relevant evidence is ever mentioned, so the suspect cannot invent a tailored excuse later.

The canonical example. You have phone-location records placing the suspect’s phone at the scene. Before revealing that, you ask: “Have you ever let anyone else use your phone? Does anyone else ever have access to your phone?” If they say no, you have pre-emptively closed the “someone must have borrowed my phone”

exit. Only then do you disclose the location evidence. The point is to ask questions that leave no room for an excuse once the evidence is on the table. The same logic closes other exits: “Would that person have any reason to lie about you?” asked before you reveal you have that witness.

Good planning has three parts:

1. **Inventory and rank the evidence.** Order it by quality and by how sure the suspect is that you have it. Your prized item is a strong piece the suspect is least likely to know you hold, because it lands with maximum surprise.
2. **Red-team every item.** Know what each piece actually proves and what it does not, and generate the most innocent plausible explanation for each. This both guards you against over-reading thin evidence and hands you the exact excuses a guilty person will reach for, so you can close them in advance.
3. **Pre-run the Evidence Framing Matrix.** Write out the weak-to-strong framings for each item before the interview, so disclosure is deliberate, not improvised.

Honesty as a rapport tool: the “why you and not someone else” opening

Planning and rapport come together in the opening sequence. The science-based interviewer explains, honestly, why this conversation is happening, and gives the person something true about the case to earn trust. When the suspect demands to see the evidence, the interviewer declines, honestly, and explains why:

IN PRACTICE

“Listen, I don’t want to influence your account whatsoever, because if I was to tell you something, it literally could alter your memory. It’s important for me to have your memory, not something I’ve influenced. So I’m going to promise you this: I’m not going to lie to you, and I’m not going to trick you. I want to hear your account first, and after I hear your account, then we can move toward that evidence.”

This is not a trick. It is true (revealing evidence really can contaminate memory), it respects the person’s autonomy, and it is the honesty in HEAR doing real work. A useful line is: “I’m not saying you’re going to lie, but do you agree it could alter your account?” You are inviting agreement to a fair, true premise, which builds the trust the rest of the interview runs on.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- SUE: take the account first, probe the evidence without revealing it, lock in the account, then disclose late. The signal you are after is statement-evidence inconsistency, not demeanor.
- The Evidence Framing Matrix frames one fact along strength of source and specificity. Disclose weak and general first, strong and specific last.
- Prioritize evidence, never spend your best piece early, and stop pushing when you hit a wall of denials.
- Planning wins the interview: rank the evidence, red-team it, and script questions that close innocent explanations before you reveal anything.

PART 5

Reading deception: what fails, and what actually works

This is where the myths are strongest. The through-line: **stress is not deception, the body is not a lie detector, and the real signal is in the content and the evidence.**

Why demeanor fails

Start with the uncomfortable base rate. Across more than 200 studies and some 24,000 judges (Bond and DePaulo, 2006), average human accuracy at detecting lies is about **54 percent**, barely above a coin flip. Professionals, police, judges, customs officers, do no better than laypeople; training raises confidence but not accuracy.

IN PRACTICE

“Every human being has what’s called chance level of detecting deception. It’s 54 percent.”

Why so low? Because the “tells” people trust do not exist. The foundational meta-analysis of behavioral cues to deception (DePaulo and colleagues, 2003, covering around 158 cues) found that the large majority have essentially no relationship to lying, and the few that reach significance are weak. Fidgeting, gaze aversion, touching the face, shifting in the seat, “closed” posture, all non-diagnostic. The single most common belief worldwide, that liars avoid eye contact, is both nearly universal and wrong. Microexpressions do not rescue it either: in real high-stakes footage they are rare, ambiguous, controllable, and the training tools built on them do not deliver real accuracy. Reading anxiety as guilt is a named error, the Othello error: punishing a truthful person for looking nervous.

There is a deeper reason we are bad at this, and it is mostly a feature, not a bug. Timothy Levine’s **Truth-Default Theory** holds that people operate in a “truth default,” passively presuming honesty unless a specific trigger says otherwise. That default is adaptive: most communication most of the time is honest, so believing by default is usually right and lets conversation function. We leave the truth default when evidence, a coincidence, a witness, or an internal contradiction accumulates, not when we scrutinize someone’s hands. The practical upshot of the theory is the same as the practical upshot of the whole field: accuracy improves when you can check content against evidence, not when you watch behavior.

Body language: use it for rapport, never for judgment

Science-based interviewing does not throw body language out. It changes what body language is *for*. You watch for signs of discomfort so you can check in and keep rapport, not so you can decide someone is lying.

IN PRACTICE

“In science-based interviewing, we do pay attention to body language because we’re going to call it out, but we’re never going to use it for deception. So if you see someone that’s uncomfortable, I might say, ‘Chris, I can see you’re a little uncomfortable about what I just said. Tell me about that.’”

The contrast is exact. The thing you must never do:

IN PRACTICE

“What I’m not going to do is say, ‘When I asked Chris a question, I noticed he looked to the lower left, which means he’s conjuring up his answer.’ I’m certainly not going to write that in a police report, and I’m certainly not going to go to court and testify that I based my arrest because I knew he was lying because he looked lower left.” The thing you do instead: “I noticed he was exhibiting some signs of anxiety, and I checked in with him to make sure he was okay.”

There is a legitimate reason to read discomfort in a negotiation or sales setting: a person may not tell you why they are objecting, and it may not be in their interest to. Spotting discomfort lets you *reframe and invite*, not accuse: “I can see this term makes you uncomfortable. We are happy to talk about it and find what works for you.” Reading discomfort to serve the other person is legitimate. Reading it to brand them a liar is not.

Why “is there any reason...” gives away your hand

A common interrogator habit is worth flagging, the “Is there any reason I might find your DNA at the scene?” framing. The science-based view: avoid it.

IN PRACTICE

“That framing just gives them an out. In the HEAR principles, the H stands for honesty, so we never lie, we never trick someone, and we never want them to feel deceived.”

The move telegraphs the evidence and lets a guilty person pre-build an innocent explanation, the exact opposite of the SUE planning logic in Part 4. It also sits badly with an honesty-first stance. Better to hold the evidence, take the account, and let the account meet the evidence later.

The polygraph and voice stress analysis: stress detectors, not lie detectors

The assessment from interviewers trained on both a polygraph and a voice stress analysis (VSA) device is blunt and correct:

IN PRACTICE

“Neither one of them have been validated by science.” Both “measure stress. Now we both know stress could mean they’re also lying, but it doesn’t necessarily mean that.” Their real function: “Polygraph and VSA are both tools designed to convince somebody that you know what the truth is.”

Two consequences follow. **Stress is ambiguous and has to be interpreted.** The classic training example is the woman interviewed at a police station who showed strong stress signals. Officers nearly read it as deception. She was actually worried about an expired parking meter and a ticket. The stress was real; the inference would have been wrong. **And the legal status makes the point.** These devices contrast with a breathalyzer, which has “judicial notice,” meaning both sides accept it as scientifically sound when calibration and operator conditions are met. Polygraph and VSA have no such agreement, because “both sides don’t agree on what the squiggly lines mean.” In several states their use is barred, and in court the word “polygraph” can trigger a mistrial, producing an odd situation: a confession obtained via polygraph gets shown to a jury while the method that produced it is hidden. It is a clean argument for methods that do not depend on a black box.

What actually works: the cognitive approach

If demeanor fails, what is left? The answer, from Aldert Vrij, Pär Anders Granhag, Maria Hartwig, and colleagues, is to stop watching the person and start structuring the interview so that lying becomes harder to sustain, or so that liars and truth-tellers behave differently by design. The premise: lying is more cognitively demanding than telling the truth. A liar has to invent, stay consistent, monitor you, and suppress the truth all at once. Load that further, or ask for something they did not prepare, and the liar’s performance diverges from the truth-teller’s. A meta-analysis put cognitive-approach interviews around 71 percent accurate versus 56 percent for standard interviews (a figure some researchers argue is optimistic, so treat it as promising, not a guarantee). The main techniques:

- **Ask unanticipated questions.** Liars rehearse the expected questions, not the oblique ones. For an alibi lunch, do not ask “what did you do,” ask “where were you sitting relative to the door,” “draw the layout,” “who was closest to the entrance.” Truth-tellers reconstruct from a real memory; liars invent on the spot and contradict themselves. Ask two suspects the same unexpected question and compare, truth-telling pairs converge, lying pairs diverge. Drawings are especially revealing. This is the most usable idea in the whole literature, and it needs no equipment.
- **Impose cognitive load.** Ask for the account in reverse order, or have the person hold eye contact while recounting. The extra load degrades a liar (already loaded) more than a truth-teller. Use this for accounts of past events; it can backfire on questions about future intentions.
- **Encourage more detail (the model statement).** Play an example of a richly detailed, unrelated account first, so everyone knows how much detail is expected. Truth-tellers, who have the raw material, rise to it; liars, who ration detail to avoid getting caught, mostly cannot.
- **The verifiability approach.** Liars want to sound detailed but avoid detail you can check. So count the *verifiable* details (named witnesses, transactions, timestamps, CCTV) against the unverifiable, and tell

the person up front you will check. It pushes truth-tellers to give checkable detail and gives liars a harder problem.

- **The Strategic Use of Evidence**, from Part 4, is the fifth member of this family: engineer statement-evidence inconsistency and read that, not the person.

Statement-content methods (Criteria-Based Content Analysis and Reality Monitoring) sit alongside these. Their logic is the same, real memories are richer and more specific than invented ones, and they discriminate truth from fiction above chance (roughly the high 60s to low 70s percent). But they are confounded by age and verbal skill, and no content score is a verdict. Treat all of these as structured ways to elicit and probe content, feeding an investigation, never as a machine that outputs guilt.

| The honest bottom line

Rely on **content, checkable detail, consistency with independent evidence, and questioning strategy**. Avoid reading guilt from nerves, gaze, fidgeting, or microexpressions, and distrust your own confidence, since it rises without accuracy. Remember base rates: if almost everyone you interview is telling the truth, even a good method produces many false accusations, so ask what fraction of your population is actually lying before you trust any hit. And hold the ethical point clearly: demeanor-based judgment does not just fail, it is unfair. It penalizes the anxious, the neurodivergent, the culturally different, the young, and the inarticulate, and it rewards the calm, fluent liar. “I can read people” is a liability to be trained out, not a skill to lean on.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Human lie detection from demeanor runs at about 54 percent, chance level. The classic “tells” have near-zero validity, and confidence is not accuracy.
- Use body language to check in and keep rapport, never to decide someone is lying.
- Polygraph and VSA measure stress, not lies, and stress is ambiguous.
- What works: unanticipated questions, cognitive load, model statements, verifiability, and the Strategic Use of Evidence. Read the content and the evidence, not the person.

PART 6

Confessions: why you do not need one, and why false ones happen

This part carries the payoff that justifies the whole ethical method, and the warning that explains why the old way is dangerous.

Why you do not need a confession: the exposed-lie research

The natural objection to doing interviews the fair way is: if I run this process and never squeeze a confession, do I lose cases? The research answer is no. A suspect caught in a provable lie can convict at nearly the same rate as one who confesses, without any of the false-confession risk.

The key study is **Brimbal and Jones (2018)**, “**Perceptions of Suspect Statements: a comparison of exposed lies and confessions**” (*Psychology, Crime and Law*). They showed mock jurors a serious case and varied whether the defendant’s statement contained a lie that evidence later exposed, a confession, both, or neither. Jurors then voted.

IN PRACTICE

“No lies, no confession: 15 percent conviction rate. Confession only: 63 percent. Lies only: 63 percent. The exact same.”

The published finding matches the direction exactly: an exposed lie carried persuasive weight comparable to a confession. The reason is the interesting part:

IN PRACTICE

“When we watched the video, we could clearly see that he was lying, and we had to scrutinize the evidence. When the person confessed, they did not scrutinize the evidence. They said, ‘He said it, so we believe it.’”

A confession makes jurors stop thinking. A caught lie makes them lean in and study the evidence, and the evidence is what convicts. So the science-based interviewer does not need to break anyone. If a guilty person lies through a well-planned interview and the evidence contradicts the lie on video, the case is strong, and the defendant is left with two bad options: take the stand and get caught, or stay silent while the prosecution plays the recording. There is a second payoff, and it is about fairness: because you gave the person every chance to tell the truth before and after showing the evidence, the process tilts toward the truthful. In short, the process sits on the side of the truth teller.

Why chasing a confession backfires: the cheating paradigm

The exposed-lie research explains why you do not *need* a confession. A second line of research, associated with Russano and Meissner, explains why *chasing* one is dangerous.

Dr. Melissa Russano (Roger Williams University), with Christian Meissner and colleagues, built the **cheating paradigm** (Russano, Meissner, Narchet, and Kassin, 2005), an ethical way to study true and false confessions in the lab. A participant is tempted by a confederate into breaking a rule (guilty) or left alone (innocent), then accused and pressed to sign an admission, with the interrogator's tactics varied: minimization and an explicit offer of a deal. The finding that matters: minimization and offering a deal both **increased true confessions and false confessions**, and both **reduced diagnosticity**, the ratio of true to false confessions. In plain terms, a confession pulled out with pressure is worth less as evidence, because more innocent people gave one. The authors' conclusion is a direct warning: avoid techniques that imply or promise leniency, because they lower the value of any confession you get.

How powerful, and how contaminating, a confession is

Understanding why false confessions are so damaging starts with how much weight a confession carries. The US Supreme Court has called a confession “probably the most probative and damaging evidence that can be admitted against a defendant.” Juries treat it as a trump card, and, disturbingly, they keep being influenced by it even after they themselves judge it coerced or see it contradicted. Worse, a confession does not merely sit alongside other evidence, it **corrupts** it. Kassin's “Confessions That Corrupt” analysis of DNA-exoneration files found that once investigators, forensic analysts, and witnesses learn a suspect confessed, their later judgments bend toward guilt, producing false-looking corroboration. In most multi-error cases the confession came first and drove the rest. A confession should never be treated as self-corroborating.

The three kinds of false confession

Saul Kassin's typology, the standard in the field, sorts false confessions into three:

- **Voluntary.** Given without police pressure, out of a desire for notoriety, to protect the real perpetrator, from guilt over something else, or from mental illness or delusion. (The 1932 Lindbergh kidnapping drew some 200 volunteered confessions.)
- **Compliant.** The person knowingly confesses to something they did not do, while privately knowing they are innocent, to escape an unbearable interrogation, gain a promised benefit, or avoid a threat. It is public compliance, not belief. The Central Park Five are the paradigm case: teenagers who confessed after many hours believing they could then go home.
- **Internalized.** The most unsettling. Through suggestive tactics, and especially the false-evidence ploy (“we have your prints, we have you on camera”), an innocent person comes to genuinely, if temporarily, believe they did it, sometimes generating a false memory. The belief usually retracts once the pressure and the false “evidence” are removed.

What produces them

Richard Leo frames the pathway as three police errors: **misclassification** (deciding an innocent person is guilty, often on the strength of unreliable behavioral lie-detection), **coercion** (an interrogation built to break resistance), and **contamination** (leaking non-public case details so the confession looks informed). The tactics that drive false confessions are the accusatorial ones: guilt-presumptive interrogation, long duration (proven false-confession cases averaged over 16 hours, against a recommended cap near 4), isolation, minimization, maximization, sleep deprivation, and above all the **false-evidence ploy**, which is legal in the US (*Frazier v. Cupp*) and is the single strongest driver of internalized false confessions. The risk multiplies for the vulnerable: juveniles (two to three times more likely to confess falsely), people with intellectual or developmental disabilities, the mentally ill, and the highly suggestible or compliant. Among the Innocence Project's DNA exonerations, roughly **29 percent** involved a false confession, rising to about **61 percent** of the murder cases.

The safeguards

The reforms follow directly from the causes: **record interrogations in full** (the single most important reform, since it deters coercion and exposes contamination), **cap duration, restrict deception**, especially with minors (Illinois and Oregon led a wave of state laws banning police from lying to juveniles), guarantee **counsel and an appropriate adult** for juveniles and vulnerable suspects, and above all **use science-based, information-gathering methods**, which gather more accurate detail from the guilty while sharply lowering the risk of breaking the innocent. Part 7 covers the legal frame in more detail.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- You do not need a confession. A provable lie convicts about as well, because jurors scrutinize the evidence instead of taking a confession on faith.
- Chasing confessions with minimization and deals produces more false confessions and makes every confession worth less (lower diagnosticity).
- Confessions are powerful and contaminating: they bend other evidence toward guilt, so they are never self-corroborating.
- False confessions come in three kinds (voluntary, compliant, internalized), are driven by accusatorial tactics and the false-evidence ploy, and hit the vulnerable hardest. Recording and science-based methods are the fix.

— PART 7

Ethics, law, and professional standards

The science-based approach is not only more effective. It is built to satisfy and exceed the law, and to carry an ethical standard that the old methods failed. This part covers the rules of the road.

| The Méndez Principles

The **Principles on Effective Interviewing for Investigations and Information Gathering**, known as the **Méndez Principles** (2021), are the closest thing the world has to a global standard for lawful, non-coercive, science-based interviewing. They were led by Juan Méndez, former UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, and drafted over about four years by a steering committee of roughly 15 experts with an advisory network of more than 80 across 40-plus countries, spanning policing, law, psychology, the military, and human rights. They are not a binding treaty; they are an authoritative reference that fuses law, ethics, and behavioral science into one operational standard, and a positive tool for implementing the anti-torture obligations of the UN Convention against Torture.

They were created to solve two problems: coercive and manipulative interrogation produces unreliable information, including false confessions, and no single global standard existed for what effective, lawful interviewing should look like. The six principles:

1. **Foundations.** Effective interviewing is grounded in science, law, and ethics, and rejects coercion.
2. **Practice.** It is a structured, comprehensive information-gathering process (planning, rapport, free recall, questioning, evaluation), carried out with legal protections in place, not a contest to extract a confession.
3. **Vulnerability.** Interviewers must identify and respond to the heightened risks of vulnerable interviewees, and adapt.
4. **Training.** It is a professional skill that must be developed and maintained through specialized, ongoing training and supervision.
5. **Accountability.** It depends on transparent institutions, oversight, documentation, and audiovisual recording.
6. **Implementation.** It must be embedded through law, policy, and institutional reform, so the standard is real in practice, not just on paper.

Everything in this guide, PEACE, ORBIT, SUE, the Cognitive Interview, is the practical content the Méndez Principles are pointing at.

| The legal frame, at a working level

The law sets a floor: what makes evidence inadmissible. Science-based interviewing aims higher, at what actually produces reliable, defensible evidence.

United States. Under **Miranda v. Arizona (1966)**, before custodial interrogation a suspect must be warned of the right to silence, that anything said can be used against them, and the right to counsel (appointed if they cannot afford one). A waiver must be voluntary, knowing, and intelligent. Separately, the older **voluntariness** standard asks, on the totality of the circumstances, whether a confession was the product of free will or coercion; a coerced confession is inadmissible regardless of Miranda. Police deception about evidence is currently permitted (**Frazier v. Cupp, 1969**), but that holding is narrow, is routinely over-read as a blanket license to lie, and points at exactly the false-evidence ploy that drives internalized false confessions. Reform is moving against it, and full **electronic recording** of interrogations has spread from a few states to a large and growing number, widely regarded as the single most effective safeguard.

United Kingdom. The **Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE)** and its Codes of Practice govern detention and questioning in England and Wales: the caution, mandatory audio and increasingly video recording (with a sealed copy), the right to legal advice, and the **appropriate adult** safeguard for juveniles and vulnerable suspects. Two provisions police confession admissibility: section 76 requires courts to exclude a confession obtained by **oppression** or in circumstances likely to render it unreliable, and section 78 gives a discretion to exclude evidence whose admission would make the trial unfair. PACE 1984 is the scaffolding that made PEACE enforceable.

Vulnerable interviewees

Some people are at far higher risk of giving unreliable information, including false confessions: juveniles, people with intellectual or developmental disabilities, the mentally ill, and the highly suggestible or compliant. The core construct is **interrogative suggestibility**, the extent to which a person accepts and acts on messages put to them under questioning, measured by the Gudjonsson Suggestibility Scales. The protections are structural rather than relying on the person to protect themselves: an appropriate adult, simplified non-leading language, avoiding repeated questions (which shift suggestible answers), adequate breaks, access to legal advice, and, in England and Wales, trained **registered intermediaries** who facilitate communication for vulnerable witnesses and, less systematically, suspects.

Trauma-informed interviewing applies to victims and witnesses of traumatic events: establish safety and respect, explain the process, go at the person's pace, and build genuine rapport, which the evidence shows elicits more correct information without more error. One honest caution: not everything labeled "trauma-informed" is memory-safe. Some branded protocols have been criticized for risking distorted or false memories. The defensible position is to be compassionate and reduce harm while keeping questioning open, non-leading, and evidentially sound. Support and reliability are complementary goals, not a trade-off.

Why the field turned: the anti-torture context

The shift to a professionalized, evidence-based model was not only academic. After September 11, 2001, the US authorized "enhanced interrogation techniques" (waterboarding, stress positions, sleep deprivation, confinement) in CIA custody. Over the following years, insiders, interrogation professionals, and eventually a bipartisan congressional study concluded these methods were both unlawful and ineffective. The 2014

Senate Intelligence Committee study found, as its first conclusion, that the techniques were “not an effective means of acquiring intelligence or gaining cooperation,” and that the case for their effectiveness rested on inaccurate claims. (The findings were contested by the CIA and a Senate minority; that dispute is part of the record.) Insider critics like Mark Fallon, who ran the Criminal Investigation Task Force at Guantanamo and later chaired the HIG Research Committee, argued from direct experience that coercion was counterproductive and that rapport-based methods from police work were more effective. That argument, the UK PEACE example, the anti-torture legal framework, and the research base converged in the Méndez Principles. The ethical case and the effectiveness case turned out to be the same case.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The Méndez Principles (2021) are the global standard: science, law, and ethics; structure; protection of the vulnerable; training; accountability through recording; and real implementation.
- Law sets a floor (Miranda, voluntariness, PACE and its exclusion rules). Science-based interviewing aims above it, at reliable, defensible evidence.
- Vulnerable interviewees need structural safeguards, not self-protection. Trauma-informed practice must stay memory-safe.
- The field turned away from coercion because coercion was found to be both wrong and ineffective. Ethics and effectiveness point the same way.

— PART 8

Beyond the interview room

The same science, autonomy support, genuine rapport, drawing information out rather than forcing it, works wherever one person is trying to understand and influence another. The Alisons wrote *Rapport* for general readers precisely to make this point. This part is the bridge to sales, negotiation, leadership, and everyday life.

| The science of persuasion: Cialdini, used honestly

Robert Cialdini's principles of influence are the most widely taught framework for ethical persuasion, and FLETC teaches them inside its interviewing curriculum alongside Motivational Interviewing and ORBIT. The seven principles:

- **Reciprocity.** People return what they receive. Give first, genuinely.
- **Commitment and Consistency.** People stay consistent with what they have freely said or done, especially small, active, public commitments.
- **Social Proof.** Uncertain people look to what others like them do.
- **Authority.** People follow credible, demonstrated expertise.
- **Liking.** People say yes to those they like, and we like those who are similar, complimentary, and cooperative.
- **Scarcity.** People value what is limited or slipping away.
- **Unity.** The strongest: a shared identity (“we”), where the other person feels not just liked but part of the same group.

Cialdini himself draws the ethical line: be a “detective” who surfaces a trigger that is genuinely present, never a “smuggler” who fabricates one. That maps exactly onto Chris’s own rule of truth in selling. For an interviewer or a seller, **liking** is real rapport and common ground, not feigned intimacy; **authority** is transparent real expertise, not implied threat or invented certainty; **consistency** is helping someone give a full, freely chosen account and letting their own words guide them, not boxing them into a compliance trap. The test is always the same: did the commitment come from the person’s own free reasoning, with autonomy preserved, or from a sequence designed to corner them?

| Sales and negotiation

Science-based practice treats a sale or a negotiation the way it treats an interview: information-gathering, plus genuine rapport, plus honest, strategic disclosure. Understand the other side’s real interests, build trust, and share what you know in a sequence that lets them reach a good decision themselves. Manipulative “closing” does the opposite, manufacturing scarcity, time pressure, and commitment traps to override judgment, which predictably triggers reactance and buyer’s remorse. The autonomy-preserving version produces durable agreements.

The best-known popular bridge is Chris Voss’s *Never Split the Difference*, from a former FBI hostage negotiator. Its core tools line up with the research: **tactical empathy** is MI’s accurate empathy and the Alisons’ cognitive empathy; **labeling** (“It seems like you’re frustrated that...”) is complex reflection; **calibrated questions** (“How am I supposed to do that?”) are open questions and evocation; **mirroring** the last few words is a form of simple reflection. Where it differs is worth naming honestly: Voss’s book is a practitioner memoir, not controlled research, and its framing is more instrumental (empathy deployed to reach *your* number), whereas MI and ORBIT anchor empathy and autonomy as genuine respect that has to be real to work. Teach Voss as an accessible on-ramp; anchor the underlying claims in the peer-reviewed work.

Leadership, management, and difficult conversations

The interrogation finding generalizes straight to the manager’s office. A confrontational, accusatorial style, blame, interruption, gotcha questioning, suppresses honest disclosure and pushes people to say what they think you want to hear, the same reliability contamination the Alisons documented in coercive interviews. If you want the truth about a failure or a safety problem, you need the HEAR and OARS stance, not cross-examination. Deliver hard feedback by pairing honesty with empathy, reflecting the person’s perspective first, and preserving their choice about how to act (“Here is what I am seeing. How do you want to handle it?”). That is autonomy support applied to management, and it lowers the reactance that makes feedback bounce off.

Everyday life, relationships, and parenting

HEAR is a full protocol for any hard conversation. The Alisons’ own domestic example: asked “Does this dress make me look fat?”, Emily reflects the feeling behind the question before offering an honest answer, so the honesty can be heard rather than triggering defensiveness. The four animals give everyone a vocabulary for reading a tense exchange: notice which animal the other person is in, notice your own default, and choose your style on purpose. Confrontation met with confrontation (T-Rex versus T-Rex) escalates; deliberately dropping to Mouse or moving to Monkey can de-escalate and reopen the conversation. With children, the same autonomy principle applies: offer real choice within firm boundaries and hand responsibility back (“What are you going to do to fix this?”) rather than issuing commands that provoke the reactance which makes coercion fail everywhere else.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Cialdini’s seven principles are ethical when the trigger is real. Surface it, never fabricate it.
- Sales and negotiation are information-gathering plus rapport plus honest disclosure. Voss’s tactical empathy, labeling, and calibrated questions are the same science in popular form.
- In leadership, an accusatorial style contaminates the truth just as it does in an interrogation. Autonomy-supportive feedback lowers resistance.
- HEAR and the four animals work in ordinary conversations, conflict, and parenting. Choice beats command everywhere.

— IN CLOSING

Closing: how the pieces fit

Put the whole system in one line each and the architecture is clear:

- **Science-based interviewing** is the umbrella. Everything below is a methodology under it, not a “trick in a toolbox.” Practitioners are deliberate about this language: these are methodologies, not tools.
- **Rapport (HEAR and ORBIT), built on Motivational Interviewing**, is how you get someone talking and keep them talking.
- **The account methods (the Cognitive Interview and Conversation Management)** and disciplined, funnel-shaped questioning are how you get a clean, complete story.
- **The Strategic Use of Evidence and the Evidence Framing Matrix** are how you plan and reveal what you know, so that truth and lies separate on their own.
- **Deception science** tells you where not to look (the body, the polygraph) and where to look instead (content, checkable detail, and the gap between account and evidence).
- **The confession research** is why you can run this entire ethical process and still win the case, and why chasing a confession is dangerous.
- **The law, the Méndez Principles, and the ethics** hold it all to a standard that protects the innocent.
- **And all of it travels**, into negotiation, leadership, and ordinary life, because it is really a science of how to talk to another human being and be trusted with the truth.

The goal was never to make people confess. It was to build a case so sound, and an interview so fair, that the truth has nowhere to hide and an innocent person is never railroaded into admitting something they did not do.

— REFERENCE

The people behind the science

The researchers whose work this program is built on.

Laurence Alison and Emily Alison. University of Liverpool. Developers of ORBIT and authors of *Rapport: The Four Ways to Read People*. Their work is built on the largest known corpus of real terrorist-suspect interrogations.

Pär Anders Granhag and Maria Hartwig. University of Gothenburg (Granhag) and John Jay College of Criminal Justice (Hartwig). Co-developers of the Strategic Use of Evidence and the Evidence Framing Matrix. Hartwig is one of the leading deception-detection researchers in the world.

Christian A. Meissner. Iowa State University. The central scientific architect of the shift to information-gathering interviewing, and author of the field's key meta-analyses.

Melissa B. Russano. Roger Williams University. Built the cheating paradigm, the standard ethical method for studying true and false confessions in the lab.

Saul Kassin and Richard Leo. The leading scholars of false confessions. Kassin built the standard typology and showed how confessions corrupt other evidence; Leo mapped the three-error pathway (misclassification, coercion, contamination).

Aldert Vrij. University of Portsmouth. The central figure in the cognitive approach to deception detection: unanticipated questions, cognitive load, verifiability.

Timothy Levine. Author of Truth-Default Theory, the account of why humans default to belief and detect lies at close to chance.

Gisli Gudjonsson. Pioneer of the measurement of interrogative suggestibility and compliance (the Gudjonsson scales), foundational to understanding vulnerable interviewees.

Ronald Fisher and Edward Geiselman. Developers of the Cognitive Interview and its enhanced form.

Eric Shepherd. Devised Conversation Management, the PEACE account method for resistant interviewees.

William Miller and Stephen Rollnick. Creators of Motivational Interviewing, the counseling method that underpins the whole rapport tradition.

Robert Cialdini. The most cited researcher on the psychology of influence; his seven principles are taught inside science-based interviewing curricula.

Mark Fallon. Career NCIS and Department of Defense counterterrorism agent turned critic of coercive interrogation. Author of *Unjustifiable Means*. Past chair of the HIG Research Committee and a member of the expert group behind the Méndez Principles. The rare voice with both hands-on high-value interrogation experience and a documented rejection of torture.

Juan Méndez. Former UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and lead author of the Méndez Principles, the global standard for effective, non-coercive interviewing.

— REFERENCE

Your resource library

Core sources

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Beyond the room - Cialdini, *Influence* and *Pre-Suasion*. Seven principles:

<https://www.influenceatwork.com/7-principles-of-persuasion/> - Voss, *Never Split the Difference* (popular negotiation parallel).

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Glossary of terms and acronyms

Key terms and acronyms used in this program, defined.

Science-Based Interviewing (SBI)

The umbrella term. Rapport-based, evidence-informed, non-coercive interviewing grounded in peer-reviewed research. Not a single mnemonic; it contains rapport-building, the Cognitive Interview, the Strategic Use of Evidence, and related methods.

Information-gathering vs. accusatorial

The two families of interviewing. Information-gathering seeks complete, accurate information through rapport and open questions. Accusatorial presumes guilt and seeks a confession through pressure. The science favors the former.

Reid Technique

The classic accusatorial, confession-focused interrogation method. Criticized for false-confession risk, and the method the science-based approach was built to replace.

PEACE

The information-gathering interview framework from England and Wales. Preparation and Planning, Engage and Explain, Account and Clarification and Challenge, Closure, Evaluation.

PACE

The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, the UK law that governs police questioning and makes ethical interviewing enforceable. A law, not an interview method. (Separately, in Motivational Interviewing, PACE means Partnership, Acceptance, Compassion, Evocation. Do not confuse them.)

PLAT / PLATO / PLATCOM

The PEACE model's account-coverage mnemonic: People, Locations, Actions, Times, and in longer forms Objects, Communications, and Motives. A probing checklist, not an ORBIT term. Exact letters vary by trainer.

HIG

The High-Value Detainee Interrogation Group. A US interagency body (FBI, CIA, Department of Defense) created in 2009. Runs the research program behind modern science-based interviewing.

FLETC

The Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers, a Department of Homeland Security organization that trains federal agents, including in science-based interviewing.

ORBIT

Observing Rapport-Based Interpersonal Techniques. The Alisons' coding system and training model for rapport-based interviewing, built on the largest real-world corpus of suspect interrogations.

Yield

ORBIT's outcome measure: the amount of investigatively useful information an interview produces. Rapport raises it; confrontation lowers it.

HEAR

The four cornerstones of rapport in the Alisons' model: Honesty, Empathy, Autonomy, Reflection. (Occasionally the R is mislabeled "Respect"; the correct word is Reflection.)

Motivational Interviewing (MI)

The counseling method (Miller and Rollnick) that ORBIT's rapport is built on. Spirit is PACE (Partnership, Acceptance, Compassion, Evocation); skills are OARS (Open questions, Affirmations, Reflections, Summaries).

Reactance

The instinct to reassert a freedom that feels threatened. Why pressure backfires and autonomy support works.

Interpersonal wheel (four animals)

The Rapport model's map of interpersonal style on two axes, control and warmth: Lion (control), T-Rex (confront), Mouse (capitulate), Monkey (cooperate). Each has a healthy and a destructive form.

Cognitive Interview (CI)

Fisher and Geiselman's method for cooperative interviewees: report everything, reinstate context, change order, change perspective, inside a rapport frame. Maximizes accurate recall without leading.

Conversation Management (CM)

Shepherd's PEACE account method for resistant interviewees. The interviewer manages the conversation transparently rather than handing over the floor.

The funnel

Question structure from open and broad down to specific and closed. In SUE, also a way to walk a suspect toward committing to an account on the points your evidence touches. "Staying in the funnel" means keeping that discipline and not pushing past a run of denials.

TED / 5WH

Good-question prompts. TED: Tell, Explain, Describe (some add Show, TEDS). 5WH: who, what, where, when, why, how.

SUE

The Strategic Use of Evidence (Granhag and Hartwig). Take the account first, question about the evidence without revealing it, lock in the account, then disclose evidence late. Surfaces statement-evidence

inconsistency as the cue to deception.

EFM

The Evidence Framing Matrix. A planning grid for one piece of evidence on two axes, strength of source (weak to strong) and specificity (general to specific). Drives incremental disclosure.

Statement-evidence inconsistency

The gap between what a suspect says and what the evidence shows. In SUE this is the signal you engineer and then read, in place of body language.

Truth-Default Theory

Levine's account of why people presume honesty by default and detect lies at close to chance. Accuracy comes from checking content against evidence, not from watching behavior.

Cognitive approach (to deception)

Vrij and colleagues' family of techniques: unanticipated questions, cognitive load, model statements, verifiability. Makes lying harder to sustain rather than reading demeanor.

Cheating paradigm

Russano and colleagues' lab method for studying true and false confessions ethically. Showed that minimization and offering deals raise both true and false confessions and lower diagnosticity.

Diagnosticity

The ratio of true to false confessions. Pressure tactics lower it. High diagnosticity means a confession is more trustworthy as evidence.

Minimization and maximization

The two pressure levers of accusatorial interrogation. Minimization downplays and offers excuses; maximization exaggerates the evidence or the consequences. Both are what science-based interviewing avoids.

False confession (three types)

Kassin's typology. Voluntary (no police pressure), compliant (knowingly false, to escape or gain), internalized (the person comes to believe it, often via the false-evidence ploy).

False-evidence ploy

Lying to a suspect about the evidence. Legal in the US (Frazier v. Cupp) but the strongest driver of internalized false confessions.

Polygraph and Voice Stress Analysis (VSA)

Devices that measure stress, not deception. Neither is validated by science. Their real function is to convince a subject that the interviewer already knows the truth.

Méndez Principles

The 2021 global standard for effective, non-coercive, science-based interviewing. Six principles: Foundations, Practice, Vulnerability, Training, Accountability, Implementation.

Interrogative suggestibility

The degree to which a person accepts and acts on messages put to them under questioning. Measured by the Gudjonsson scales. Central to understanding vulnerable interviewees.

Science-Based Interviewing. A training program developed by Chris Michael. Compiled from peer-reviewed research, cited throughout. July 2026.