



# INTERVIEW TACTICS: THE MODEL STATEMENT TECHNIQUE

A simple technique for eliciting more information from cooperative interviewees, and for using this additional information to help establish whether the account is true and accurate.



## HOW DOES IT WORK

**“ A model statement is an audio-taped statement in which someone explains what she has experienced in a great deal of detail. ”**

The main goal of an investigative interview is to elicit a complete account from an interviewee. This is easier said than done. When asked an open-ended question at the beginning of an interview (such as ‘Please tell me in as much detail as possible all you can remember about what happened when...’) interviewees typically do not provide all the information they know. One reason for this is that not all information stored in an interviewee’s memory is easy for them to retrieve.

A second reason is that interviewees initially do not report all they can remember because they think that many details they do remember are not important or relevant enough to report. In general conversation, most people leave out detail when talking about their activities because they don’t want to bore their conversation partner with excessive detail. Interviewees also tend to apply

these ‘conversation rules’. In fact, in interview settings interviewees may say even less than usual, because people typically say more to their friends and relatives than to people they do not know.

So how can we encourage interviewees to report more detail in interview settings? One promising technique involves the use of a ‘model statement’. A model statement is an audio-taped statement in which someone explains what she has experienced in a great deal of detail. Interviewees who listen to a model statement before talking about their experiences tend to produce more detail than interviewees who do not listen to a model statement. A possible explanation for this effect is that the request ‘to be detailed’ is an *instruction*, whereas the model statement is an *example*. It is probably easier for interviewees to follow examples than to follow instructions.

The model statement technique helps to discriminate between truth tellers and liars. People who are going to lie often prepare themselves for interviews and have thought what they are going to say in these interviews.

Listening to the model statement, a liar faces two challenges. First, the model statement usually shows that they will have to be more detailed than they expected, so how are they going to add plausible detail to the story they have prepared? Second, if they make up new details, they risk giving an investigator more to check, and so more ways to undermine the plausibility of their account.

The result is that, compared to a truthful account, a deceptive account given after hearing the model statement tends to include less information,



**USEFUL FOR**

- Eliciting more details in genuine accounts about events and activities
- Identifying when an account may be false.

particularly about core aspects of the event being asked about, and these details tend to sound less plausible.

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## HOW TO USE IT

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The model statement technique can be used in two ways.

### METHOD 1

Start by asking the interviewee to give as much detail as possible about what happened.

Next, let her listen to the model statement. You could say: 'I know that sometimes people are not sure just how much detail to include. In order to give you an idea of what I am looking for I'd like to play you an example of what we consider a detailed answer'.

Finally, ask her again to give as much detail as possible about what happened.

When the technique is used in this way, listen to the additional detail provided by the interviewee, particularly about the core event. If the account is truthful, it should include additional detail about the core event, and this information should sound plausible.

### METHOD 2

Start by asking the interviewee to give as much detail as possible about what happened, but directly after this instruction, and before the answer, let her listen to the model statement. When the technique is used in this way, listen to the amount of detail provided by the interviewee, particularly about the core event. True accounts should be rich in detail about the core event and this information should sound plausible.

The first method takes more time to carry out (the interviewee has to tell the story twice) but has the advantage that the interviewee's account before the model statement can be used as a 'baseline' for detecting deception. The second method saves time, but is most appropriate when your focus is eliciting maximum detail, rather than detecting deception.

## BEAR IN MIND

When putting together a model statement:

- It is important that the model statement is unrelated to the topic of investigation so that it does not give liars the chance to 'copy' the example and use it in their own statement. The event under investigation should be entirely different from the model statement.
- The person giving the model statement should describe an authentic experience rather than a made up experience. True experiences sound more realistic and are therefore more powerful.
- It is a bad idea to make up a model statement on the spot. It typically is not detailed enough, and often sounds like a made-up story. Use an audio-taped model statement (could be played from a mobile phone) or read out a written example.
- An audiotape is better than reading out a text as disfluencies easily and quickly occur when reading out a text. These are distracting and make the model statement less powerful.

Deceptive and truthful accounts will both be longer after the interviewee has been exposed to a model statement. The difference between the two is most likely to be in how plausible their accounts are (true detailed accounts sound more plausible) and whether the account includes details about the core event (true accounts will likely include more detail about the core event, whilst deceptive accounts will likely include more detail about peripheral matters).



**FREE DOWNLOAD!**

You can download a free version of the Model Statement from the CREST website at:  
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### READ MORE

Sharon Leal, Aldert Vrij, Lara Warmelink, Zarah Vernham, & Ronald P. Fisher. (2015). You cannot hide your telephone lies: Providing a model statement as an aid to detect deception in insurance telephone calls. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 20, 129-146. DOI: 10.1111/lcrp.12017

Aldert Vrij, Lorraine Hope, & Ronald P. Fisher. (2014). Eliciting reliable information in investigative interviews. *Policy Insights from Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 1, 129-136. DOI: 10.1177/2372732214548592

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