

# How to Detect Deception in Investigation Interviews



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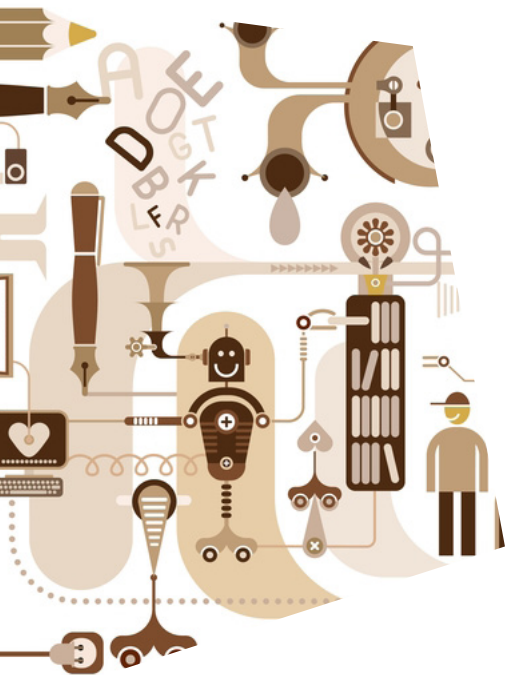
## Introduction:

### The Importance of Detecting Deception

The ability to detect deception is one of the most important skills an investigator can master. After all, the goal of an investigation is to find the truth and deception is the biggest obstacle standing in the way of that goal.

Failing to detect deception during an investigation interview can put the entire investigation at risk, and could lead to a lawsuit, cause an innocent person to lose a job or go to jail, or even put a company into bankruptcy. So it makes sense to devote significant time and energy to honing this skill.

Deception is all around us. Most people tell at least a few small lies every day. A 2015 study conducted by professors at Oakland University and Korea University and published in the *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* found that the average person views telling up to four lies each day to be acceptable.



## History of Detecting Deception

There have been many theories about detecting deception. Some of the more interesting ones include the following:

- In ancient Babylon 3,000 years ago, it was believed that a liar would look at the ground and rub his or her big toe around in a circle.
- The Prophet Isaiah believed that you could look in people's faces and tell whether or not they were telling the truth.
- The Ancient Chinese believed that the food in someone's mouth would remain dry if they were telling a lie.
- Native Americans would place a hot knife blade on the suspect's tongue. If it stuck the person was being deceptive.
- An Italian, Lomborso, theorized that when you put a liar's hand in a jar filled with fluid it would overflow as the volume of the hand increased due to rising blood pressure.

Having a feeling that someone isn't telling the truth isn't good enough. You may be right, but you need to be able to explain why.

## Reading the Signs

Humans learn to deceive at a very early age, grasping the concept at around 18 months and mastering it by the time we are 36 months old. With that kind of on-the-job training, it's not surprising that many of us are adept at lying and that detecting deception is a difficult skill to acquire.

An investigator requires finely-honed powers of observation in order to notice changes in the language and demeanor of interview subjects. Just as importantly, you must be able to articulate the clues that cause you to conclude that someone is being deceptive.

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Investigators should never react to statements made by an interviewee. You should remain non-judgmental, fair, objective and emotionless. Keep in mind that while you are observing verbal, non-verbal and physical actions of the subject, you could also be sending messages through your own verbal, non-verbal and physical actions.

## Setting the Baseline

The first task in any investigation interview is to ask the subject some basic, non-threatening questions to which you already know the correct answers. This establishes a baseline for how they respond when telling the truth.



Sample baseline questions include:

- What is your address?
- How old are you?
- How long have you worked at company xyz?
- What is your position with the company?

**TIP:** Observe and note the way the person uses gestures, style of speech and the degree to which he or she establishes eye contact while answering these questions. From here, you will be able to measure differences in their response behavior when you are asking questions they are less inclined to answer truthfully.



## Forms of Deception

There are two forms of deception you may come across in investigations interviews: **deception by concealment** and **deception by falsification**. While they are both deception, one of them is much harder to uncover than the other.

Understanding the difference between the two types of deception will help you to decide how to probe further with questions that will get you to the truth.

### Deception by Concealment

Concealment is the easiest form of deception because it is passive. It's also the most difficult form of deception to spot. As a deceiver, all you have to do is leave something out.

For example, when asked how the daily deposit is made, the concealer might explain all the steps taken to transfer money from the cash register to the bank, but they'll leave out the step where they pocket some of the cash just before they seal the bag.

When someone is deceiving you by concealment, "everything they are telling you is the truth; it's just not the whole truth," explains expert investigator and trainer, Don Rabon.

Concealment is often missed by even the most experienced interviewers. People who are good at detecting deception through more overt forms of deception often succumb to deception by concealment because it's less about what's there and more about what isn't.

“You’ll never know what you don’t know if you don’t ask,” advises Rabon.

**TIP:** A common sign of concealment is the use of modifiers and qualifiers. When a speaker begins using vague terms - such as sort of, kind of, primarily or mostly – take note. This is where you want to probe further and this is where you may find the deception.

## Deception by Falsifying

Falsifying is much more difficult than concealment because it is active, requiring that the individual do something: tell a lie. Your goal as an interviewer is to take away the luxury of concealment so the deceiver has to begin falsifying. One of the ways you can do this is by asking probing questions.

Once someone begins to falsify, they are more likely to make errors, which are then possible to detect.

Once someone begins to falsify, they are more likely to make errors, which are then possible to detect. So by asking probing questions in an area you suspect someone is concealing something, you force the subject into a situation where he or she must falsify in order to answer your questions.

To avoid falsifying, he or she must resort to vague, irrelevant or evasive answers in an attempt to move the interview off the subject.

Example: A woman who works in a clothing store is being interviewed about theft of returned items. The store has a special cupboard for items that are returned. The interviewer asks the woman: “At any time in the past week, have you gone into the returns cupboard?”

Her response: “I don’t have a key to that cupboard. Only authorized managers are given keys to that cupboard.”

She has not answered the question. As an investigator, these types of responses should trigger your internal alarms, as they are indicators of deception.

**TIP:** When you get a response that skirts the question, keep note of the part of the interview where this occurred and revisit it later, without letting on that you think the subject is lying. Continuing to probe an area where the subject is being evasive may force them to either come up with an outright lie or confess. Either way, you are one step closer to the truth.

## Language Indicators

A skilled investigator is able to analyze language indicators, looking for symptoms of deception. Some indicators are:

1. **Use of terms that suggest uncertainty** – expressions such as usually, kind of, sort of, are comfortable because they allow a subject to conceal rather than falsify.
2. **Fewer factual statements** – the less detail a liar provides, the less he or she needs to remember when the investigator questions them about what they have said. Too much detail leads to conflicting statements and mistakes.
3. **Passive language** – interviewee switches from the active to the passive voice. Instead of “I then lock the door” he or she says “The door is then locked”.
4. **Use of the second person** – interviewee uses second-person pronouns and refers to himself or herself in the second person (e.g. “you lock the door”).
5. **Shorter message duration** – subjects say only what they think they have to say to convince the investigator they are telling the truth without providing any extra information.
6. **Response latency** – a change in the amount of time it takes someone to respond to a question, responding to some right away and taking longer to answer others.

**TIP:** When you encounter these indicators, note where in the conversation they occurred, without giving the subject any indication of your suspicion. Return later to this part of the subject’s story with more probing questions.

## The Role of Anxiety in Deception

Anyone being interviewed will have some amount of anxiety. It’s important to determine whether someone’s anxiety is simply caused by the process of the interview or the fact that they did something wrong.

Deception by concealment creates little anxiety because the subject is actually telling the truth. Similarly, someone who is being vague or deflecting questions is unlikely to show significant anxiety. It’s usually when someone is falsifying that their anxiety levels increase as they become more vulnerable.



## Body Language

There are a lot of theories, and just as many myths, about detecting deception through a subject's body language.

Common beliefs include:

- A liar can't look the interviewer in the eye
- Excessive fidgeting or sweating is a sign of deception
- Certain types of eye movements indicate that a person is inventing, rather than recalling, information

There are many more theories and myths and it's important that investigators don't become convinced of any one reaction being an absolute sign of deception. However, there are certain signs of anxiety that, when they occur together, may indicate that a subject is lying.

Physical signs of anxiety, also known as adaptors, are used to relieve stress. There are three types of adaptors:

1. **Internal adaptors** – crossing and uncrossing of the legs and/or arms.
2. **Self-adaptors** – touching the body and/or face.
3. **Object adaptors** – picking up an object to dissipate anxiety, then putting it down when the topic switches to something more comfortable.

**TIP:** The presence of one of these signs is not necessarily an indication of deception. The savvy investigator knows to watch for clusters of anxious behavior and note where in the interview they occur. Clusters of signs indicate an area where the investigator needs to return later for deeper questioning.

## How to Improve your Deception Detection Skills

- Practical exercises are helpful in aiding investigators in developing their interviewing skills. It's hard to duplicate an interview, as someone playing a role has nothing to lose. Adding a stressor to the practice interview can help.
- Get local theatre groups involved, as this gives investigators an opportunity to interview someone they don't know. Videotape the practice sessions and play them back for the investigator to learn from.


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- Watch people. Go to a shopping mall or public park and observe how they interact, their physical movements and how they behave in different situations. Become a student of human behavior so that you have a wide variety of examples to use as reference.
- Read as much as you can on the subject, keeping an open mind and understanding that there is no surefire way to detect deception. Practice and experience are the keys to becoming a better detector of deception.

## Additional Resources

- [The Reid Technique](#)
- [Dr. Paul Ekman: Telling Lies](#)
- [Don Rabon: Interviewing and Interrogation](#)
- [American Psychological Association: Detecting Deception](#)

A man in a plaid shirt is sitting on a wooden dock by a lake, working on a laptop. The background shows a calm lake and distant hills under a clear sky. The scene is captured in a soft, slightly desaturated light, suggesting a peaceful, remote work environment.

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