Interaction Techniques in MI

The basic approach to interactions between the healthcare practitioner and client in Motivational Interviewing (MI) is captured by the acronym OARS:

O pen-ended Questions
A ffirmations
R eflective Listening
S ummaries

Open-ended Questions:
Are questions that the client cannot answer with a simple “yes”, “no” or “five times last week”. Most healthcare practitioners begin treatment sessions with open-ended questions:

“What brings you here today?”
“Tell me about what has been happening since we met last?”
“So what makes you feel that it might be time for a change?”

Open-ended questions help the client explore change and evaluate for his/herself what are the pro’s and con’s to change.

Affirmations:
Affirming means to actively listen for the client’s strengths, values, aspirations, and positive qualities and then to reflect those back to the client.

Example: a client discusses many previous efforts to change a particular behavior from the position of feeling like a failure. The interviewer (healthcare practitioner) reframes the comment to affirm the client’s strengths:

“What I am hearing is that it is very important to you [the client] to change this behavior. You have made numerous efforts over a long period of time. It seems that you have not found the way that works for you.”