

RESEARCH METHOD QUADRANTS





QUESTIONNAIRES

Open Questions

DEFINITION

A open question questionnaire is a document that is handed to a participant to complete alone and the questions allow them to explain their responses.

EXAMPLE STUDIES

- **Venkatesh 2011:** Gang Leader for a day - *Started with open questionnaire but switched to observation when it was clear the gang members wouldn't answer the questions.*

STRENGTHS

- Cheap
- Quick
- Easy
- Anonymous
- Confidential
- Detailed in depth data
- Reliable
- Access Large Samples

LIMITATIONS

- Low response rates
- Misunderstanding of the question
- Difficult to analyse
- The respondent may not be the intended participant.
- Right Answerism



QUESTIONNAIRES

Closed Questions

DEFINITION

A closed question questionnaire is a document that is handed to a participant to complete alone and the questions provide a selection of responses to choose from or a Likert scale.

EXAMPLE STUDIES

- **Crime Survey of England and Wales** – *Annual survey asking about experiences of crime in the last 12 months.*
- **Connor and Dewson 2001:** Social class & Higher Education.

STRENGTHS

- Cheap
- Quick
- Easy
- Anonymous
- Confidential
- Reliable
- Access Large Samples
- Easy to analyse

LIMITATIONS

- Low response rates
- Misunderstanding of the question
- Lacks validity (depth)
- The respondent may not be the intended participant.
- Right Answerism



QUESTIONNAIRES

**Web- based
Questionnaires**

DEFINITION

These are questionnaires that are sent out via the internet possibly using services such as Google Forms or Survey Monkey. Can be a mixture of open and closed questions.

EXAMPLE STUDIES

STRENGTHS

- Cheap
- Quick
- Easy
- Anonymous
- Confidential
- Reliable
- Access Large Samples
- Easy to analyse

LIMITATIONS

- Low response rates due to email going to junk mail.
- Misunderstanding of the question.



QUESTIONNAIRES

Postal Questionnaires

DEFINITION

These are questionnaires that are sent out via the Postal Service.

Can be a mixture of open and closed questions.

EXAMPLE STUDIES

STRENGTHS

- Easy
- Anonymous
- Confidential
- Reliable
- Access Large Samples

LIMITATIONS

- Low response rates due to being considered to junk mail.
- Expensive for postage and freepost returns.
- Time consuming waiting for the postal service.
- Misunderstanding of the question.



INTERVIEWS

Structured Interviews

DEFINITION

A conversation between to people where the questions have be set in advance and are not deviated from.

Effectively a face-to-face questionnaire.

EXAMPLE STUDIES

- **Halsey, Heath and Ridge 1980:**
Origins and Destinations
- **Willmott and Young 1962** – Families in the East End
- **Peter Townsend 1979** – Poverty and Social Exclusion

STRENGTHS

- Researcher is present to explain the questions.
- Reliable
- High response rate
- Builds a rapport so can help with sensitive topics.

LIMITATIONS

- Inflexibility
- Researcher Effect (Demand Characteristics & social Desirability)
- Time Consuming
- Expensive to train interviewers
- Not Anonymous



INTERVIEWS

Semi - Structured Interviews

DEFINITION

A conversation between to people where the questions have be set in advance but the researcher is able to deviate from them in response to the participants answers.

EXAMPLE STUDIES

- **Dobash and Dobash 1979** – Violence against wives.
- **Anne Oakley 1974** – The sociology of Housework
- **Archer, Halsall & Hollingworht 2007** - Class, gender, (hetero) sexuality, and schooling: working-class girls' engagement with education and post-16 aspirations

STRENGTHS

- Researcher is present to explain the questions.
- Flexibility
- Increased depth of data
- Verstehen

LIMITATIONS

- Lacks reliability
- Researcher Effect (Demand Characteristics & social Desirability)
- Time Consuming
- Expensive to train interviewers
- Not Anonymous



INTERVIEWS

Unstructured Interviews

DEFINITION

A conversation between to people where the initial question maybe set but all subsequent questions are based on the responses from the participant.

EXAMPLE STUDIES

- **Pat Carlen 1988** – Class and Gender Deals
- **Fiona Devine 1992** - How close-knit are kinship ties?
- **Howard Becker 1971** – Teacher Labelling

STRENGTHS

- Researcher is present to explain the questions.
- Flexibility
- Increased depth of data
- Verstehen

LIMITATIONS

- Lacks reliability
- Researcher Effect (Demand Characteristics & social Desirability)
- Time Consuming
- Expensive to train interviewers
- Not Anonymous



INTERVIEWS

Group Interviews

DEFINITION

Where the researcher interviews several people in one sitting.

Can be structured or unstructured.

EXAMPLE STUDIES

- **Paul Willis 1977** – Learning to Labour

STRENGTHS

- Researcher is present to explain the questions.
- Good to use when researching children.
- Increased depth of data
- Participants can bounce off each other
- Verstehen

LIMITATIONS

- Lacks reliability
- Researcher Effect (Demand Characteristics & social Desirability)
- Peer Group Pressures
- Time Consuming
- Expensive to train interviewers
- Not Anonymous



OBSERVATION

Covert

DEFINITION

Where the researcher goes under cover and the people being observed are not aware of it.

Can be participant or non-participant.

EXAMPLE STUDIES

- **Laud Humphreys 1970 / 1975** – The Tearoom Trade
- **Hobbs 1988** – Police Attitudes
- **“Patrick” 1973** – A Glasgow gang observed

STRENGTHS

- Lack of researcher effect.
- Rich detailed data
- High validity as doesn't disturb day to day life of participants
- Access to secret/unconscious behaviour of the group

LIMITATIONS

- Lacks reliability
- Breach of Privacy
- Lack of informed consent
- Subjective
- Time Consuming
- Hard to gain access
- Small Sample



OBSERVATION

Overt

DEFINITION

Where the researcher makes the participants aware that they are being observed.

Can be participant or non-participant.

EXAMPLE STUDIES

- **Venkatesh 2011** - Gang Leader for a day
- **Hargreaves 1967** – Setting and Streaming
- **Eileen Barker 1984** – The Moonies

STRENGTHS

- Rich detailed data
- High validity as doesn't disturb day to day life of participants
- Informed consent can be gained
- Researcher doesn't have to fit in with the group.
- Objectivity

LIMITATIONS

- Lacks reliability
- Researcher Effects - Hawthorne Effect
- Time Consuming
- Small Sample
- Not generalizable



OBSERVATION

Participant

DEFINITION

Where the researcher plays an active role in the group they are researching. They become part of the group.

Can be overt or covert.

EXAMPLE STUDIES

- **Bill Whyte 1955** - Street Corner Society
- **Paul Willis 1977** – Learning to Labour
- **Simon Holdaway 1983** Inside the British Police

STRENGTHS

- Rich detailed data
- High validity as the research experiences the life of the group.
- Verstehen achieved
- Builds rapport and trust
- Flexibility

LIMITATIONS

- Lacks reliability
- Researcher Effects – just by being present the researcher can change the dynamic of the group.
- Time Consuming
- Small Sample
- Not generalizable



OBSERVATION

Non - Participant

DEFINITION

When the researcher simply watches the group without taking an active part in the activities of the group.

Can be overt or covert.

EXAMPLE STUDIES

- **Atkinson 1978** – Coroners Inquests into Suicide
- **Smith and Grey 1983** – London Metropolitan police
- **Gilborn 1990** – Race Ethnicity and Education

STRENGTHS

- Rich detailed data
- High validity as the research experiences the life of the group.
- Verstehen achieved
- Builds rapport and trust
- Flexibility

LIMITATIONS

- Lacks reliability
- Researcher Effects – just by being present the researcher can change the dynamic of the group.
- Time Consuming
- Small Sample
- Not generalizable



EXPERIMENTS

Laboratory

DEFINITION

When the research takes place in an artificial setting and the variables are manipulated by the researcher

EXAMPLE STUDIES

- **Milgram 1963** – Study of Obedience
- **Harvey & Slatin 1976** – Teacher Expectations & Social Class
- **Charkin 1975** – Teacher Labelling

STRENGTHS

- High Reliability
- Can establish cause and effect
- Informed Consent is gained.
- Easy to analyse the data

LIMITATIONS

- Artificial environment
- Small Sample size
- Impractical for some situations
- Not all variables can be controlled
-



EXPERIMENTS

Field

DEFINITION

When the research takes place in a natural setting but the researcher is manipulating the variables.

EXAMPLE STUDIES

- **Rosenthal and Jacobson 1966** – Pygmalion in the classroom
- **Bandura 1962** – Social Learning through imitation.

STRENGTHS

- External Validity compared to Lab Experiments.
- Large Scale
- Reliability
- Can establish cause and effect.

LIMITATIONS

- Impractical for some situations
- Not all variables can be controlled
- Experimental Effect
- Access Problems
- Can have deception and Harm



SECONDARY DATA

Official Statistics

DEFINITION

Quantitative data that comes from governments and their agencies.

EXAMPLE

- **Official Crime Rate**
- **Census**
- **Exam Results**
- **Demographic Data**

STRENGTHS

- Reliability
- Easy to Access
- Cheap
- Up to date data
- Can be used comparatively.
- Allows researchers to see correlations.

LIMITATIONS

- Definitions may differ between sociologists and those compiling the data.
- Tell us very little about the "why" behind the data.
- Socially constructed.



SECONDARY DATA

Personal Documents

DEFINITION

Personal documents consist of qualitative data that reflect an individuals or groups experiences, feelings attitudes and motives.

EXAMPLE

- **Diaries**
- **Letters**
- **Memoirs**
- **Emails and Blogs**

STRENGTHS

- High validity (detailed)
- Ethnographic
- Cheap
- Easy to access

LIMITATIONS

- Subjective
- Not representative
- Unreliable
- Lack validity due to being one persons experience.



SECONDARY DATA

**Public and Historical
Documents**

DEFINITION

Documents which are produced by government departments or state agencies as well as companies, charities and other organisations.

EXAMPLE

- **Major government reports**
- **Media Reports**
- **Publicity materials**
- **Internet content**
- **Documents which report on specific activities (Hansard and Ofsted reports)**

STRENGTHS

- Usually the product of standardised reliable research methods.
- Try to be objective
- Easy to access & cheap.
- Quick
- Avoids potential bias.

LIMITATIONS

- Authenticity may be suspect.
- Difficult to verify contents
- Official documents might be censored.
- Documents might not exist for all areas of research.
- Subjective interpretations.
- No guarantee of reliability or representativeness.