

Interview method



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The process of interviewing people to collect data involves a number of skills. Without these skills the quality of the data can be affected.

Interviewer's role is very important

He needs mainly :

Good communication skills

A confident and professional appearance

Interviewer's skills and abilities

- Stimulating the respondent's interest
- Listening attentively
- Asking questions as worded
- NOT suggesting any answers to the respondents
- Answering the respondents questions properly
- Keeping the respondent 'on track'
- Explaining that the information collected is confidential
- Letting the respondents know that the interviewer understands them

Questionnaire Method



Questionnaire Method

Questionnaires play a central role in the data collection process.

A well designed questionnaire efficiently collects the required data with a minimum number of errors.

The biggest challenge in developing a questionnaire is to translate the objectives of the data collection process into a well conceptualized and methodologically sound study.

Steps in questionnaire design

- Preparation for questionnaire design
- Key points in questionnaire design
- The actual questionnaire

Preparation for questionnaire

The following questions should be addressed:

Why is this survey being conducted?

What do I need to know?

How will the information be used?

How accurate and timely the information have to be?

Questionnaire construction

It involves four main decision areas:

- Question relevance and content
- Question wording
- Response form or type of questions
- Question order or sequence

We look at each of these in detail below.

Question relevance and content

- Is it **relevant** to research objectives?
- If a question passes relevance test, we should then consider its **coverage**. Is it of proper scope? If it covers two separate ideas, then it is a double-barreled question requiring **splitting**, e.g. 'Are you satisfied with the service conditions and promotional policy of your employer?' It is better to break this into two questions.
- Does the question **provide information** needed to interpret the response **fully**? If we have to ask about the operational efficiency of an enterprise, a single question can not provide adequate information on the operational efficiency. **Several questions** on the **various dimensions** of operational efficiency should be asked.

- Another test is to consider whether respondents know the answer to the question. **Respondents information level** must be considered when determining the content and appropriateness of the questions. A question should not call for more information than the potential respondent's ability and willingness to provide.
- A question should not **overtax** the respondent's **recall ability**.

- Difficulties with opinion questions are much more fundamental .A person's **opinion** on any issue **is many-sided**. e.g. opinion on 'sati' :there are moral, religious, legal, social and other aspects. There is also the problem of intensity. To estimate the opinions on an issue, an opinion statement may be given and the respondents may be asked to say whether they agree with it or not. Or, a number of opinion statements may be given and the respondents may be asked to check the particular statement which best describes their opinion.

Question wording

“Questioning is more like trying to catch a particular elusive fish, by hopefully casting different kinds of bait at different depths, without knowing what goes on beneath the surface.”

The researcher should choose words which have the following characteristics:

- Shared vocabulary
- Uniformity of meaning
- Exactness
- Simplicity
- Neutrality

- **Shared vocabulary** : The exact understanding between the investigator and the respondent calls for the use of vocabulary common to both parties.
- **Uniformity of meaning**: A word should mean the same thing to all respondents.
- **Exactness**: Such words as 'small', 'frequently', 'good', 'usually', 'beautiful' should be avoided in favor of numerical ranges when possible. Even a word like 'income' should be stated clearly as 'family income per month' or 'individual income per month'.

- **Simplicity:** The words should be simple. Many words commonly used as marital status, nationality, are frequently misunderstood. A question 'what is your marital status?' may elicit feelings about marital life or marital problems. It is better to word it as 'Are you currently married, widowed, divorced or separated, or unmarried ?'
- **Neutrality:** The words used must be neutral ones i.e. free from the distorting influence of fear, prestige, bias, or emotion.

The general rules are that questions should be brief and simple, without compound phrases; they should be clear having few or no adjectives; and they should be positive rather than negative

Type of questions

They may be **open** questions or **closed** questions. Closed questions may be **dichotomous, multiple choice or declarative ones.**

Open-ended questions (oq) are un-structured ones, providing free scope to the respondents to reply with their own choice of words or ideas, e.g. 'what do you propose to do after graduation?' Open responses are useful in studies where **discovery** is the objective. Response freedom may provide unanticipated insights.

Open-ended questions

Oq may be included in the opening part of the tool **to arouse the interest of the respondent.**

They are useful **to start an in-depth interview.**

It is better to use oq when investigator has **no clear idea of the respondents' level of information.**

Oq are also preferable for **determining the depth of feelings and expressions of intensity.**

However, they make **compilation and classification of responses difficult.**

Closed questions

Closed questions (cq) are **structured** ones with two or more alternative responses from which the respondent can choose.

They contain standardized answers and are **simple to administer and easy to compile and analyze**.

Here, the chances of securing **relevant answers** are better.

But, cq force a response couched in **researcher's terms** rather than the respondent's.

Respondent may choose a response even when he has no knowledge of it or limited alternatives may not cover his **viewpoints**.

Different respondents will **interpret** the same words or statements **differently**.

Closed questions

- **Dichotomous** :one to three choices 'yes', 'no', 'undecided'.
- **Multiple-choice** : More than two with 'others (please specify)' to provide for unanticipated choices.

These should contain an exhaustive list, should not contain overlapping choices ,choices should be reasonable e.g.wages in survey of industrial workers, logically consistent, and unidimensional e.g. in a survey on low labour productivity, alternatives like 'lack of demand', 'insufficient capital' should not be included.

- **Declarative** : Here the respondent is asked a series of statements which best describes his view. When responses are best expressed in degrees of agreement or disagreement ,the declarative form is desirable.

Types of questions to be avoided

- **Leading** : worded in such a way to influence the respondent to give a certain answer.
 - “Are you against too much power to the trade unions?”
 - “Do you think that the government should get involved in...?”
- **Loaded** : are emotionally colored and suggests automatic feeling of approval or disapproval.
 - “Do you think we should maintain religious harmony?”

Types of questions to be avoided

- **Ambiguous** : it means different things to different people. e.g.
“Are you interested in small house?” Here what does the word ‘interested’ mean: to own or to hire ? What does the word ‘small’ mean?
- **Double-barreled** : They contain two or more different ideas. ‘Are you satisfied with the service conditions and promotional policy of your employer?’ It is better to break this into two questions
- **Long**: When questions become long ,they often become ambiguous and confusing.

Question sequence

Question sequence is as important as question wording. It has two major implications :

An appropriate sequence can ease the respondent's task in answering.

The sequence can either create or avoid biases due to context effects i.e. the effect of preceding questions on the response to later questions.

There should be a **logical progression** such that the respondent is drawn into questioning process by awakening his interest; not affronted by early and sudden request for personal information; easily brought along items which are simple to answer to those which are complex; never asked to give an embarrassing answer without being given an opportunity to explain.

Question sequence

Question sequencing has two dimensions :

Overall sequence : the sequence among the topical areas within the instrument.

Intra sequence: sequence within the topical area.

Overall sequence

Opening questions must invoke **respondent's interest**, put him to ease and build up his confidence and motivate his participation. An example of reasonable opening questions are as below:

Question sequence: opening question

E.G : For a study involving dealership survey :

“ there has been much talk about industrial deregulation and the emerging competitive market situation. It is said that industrial marketing has become highly challenging .We are interested in knowing, how , long standing dealers like you, manage this challenging task. How do you find this emerging scenario? Highly competitive ,moderately competitive? Is it both an opportunity and challenge?”

Question sequence : overall

Following a few general questions of the sort seen earlier, the principle of logical progression should be followed **moving from simple topics to complex ones and sensitive topics must be kept at the end** since they demand particular attention to ensure that respondents understand their relevance to the research purpose.

Questions **related** to a **particular** topic should be **kept together**.

Question sequence : intra

There are two general patterns in arranging the questions within a specific topical area :

- Funnel sequence
- Inverted funnel sequence



Funnel sequence

Listing the **most general questions first , followed by specific and detailed questions.**

The objective is to learn the respondent's frame of reference and to extract the full range of desired information without the distortion effect of earlier questions on latter ones.

Inverted funnel sequence

Narrower questions are followed by broader ones.

If the purpose is to obtain a judgment on a concrete situation like election result, and it seems that the respondents do not hold considered opinions on it ,then it is helpful to begin with specific questions which are easier to answer ,and in answering them, the respondent is led towards forming a considered opinion on the broad question.