

Qualitative Data Collection Instruments

So you've decided you want to collect qualitative data. Now we have to determine how to best collect that information (which is referred to as your instrument). Please see the common instruments for qualitative research below.

Surveys

Surveys are a set of questions sent to participants (think: Google Form, Survey Monkey). If you are collecting qualitative data, these would be [open-ended questions](#).

- **Be cautious of your language**

- Bias**

- Do you agree that education should be free?

- Prior Knowledge Needed**

- Do you like our old logo or new logo better, why?

- **Survey fatigue**

- If your survey is too long, participants will generally hit a place of fatigue. They will either just not take the survey or will not pay close attention when answering (which will skew your data). Ensure you are only asking the questions you **need** answered.

- **Survey flow**

- Consider how you order your questions. They should be organized logically and not hop between topics.

- **Test Your Survey**

- Test your survey with a couple of peers prior to sending it to your participants. Ensure you have adjusted any inconsistencies and fixed questions where you are not getting the answers you had anticipated or needed.

Interviews

Interviews will consist of a one-on-one session with a participant where they are asked a series of questions. These can either be structured or unstructured interviews (meaning, they can have a set list of questions that is not deviated from, or there is more flexibility with questions that come up naturally during the interview). These can be face to face, digital (ex. Zoom), or on the telephone.

- **Express the purpose**

- Ensure you start the interview telling the participant the purpose of the questions, what you are trying to answer, how you will use this information, and how you will protect their anonymity/confidentiality (if applicable).

- **Be cautious of language**

- Just as with survey questions, your questions need to be clear, concise, and written in a way that gets you the answers you are looking for.

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- **Interview fatigue**

Keep your interviews limited to only the questions you need answered. When interviews are too long, participants will hit a point of fatigue and be less engaged in the conversation.

- **Avoid leading questions**

Avoid leading questions that will influence the way in which your participant will answer. As an example, Don't you love the new logo design?

Focus Groups

Focus groups are like interviews, but they are conducted with multiple participants at one time.

- **Size**

Consider how large of a group you want at a given time. You want each person to be able to speak and feel confident enough to do so (typically, focus groups are not larger than 8).

- **Data Collected**

With focus groups, certain personalities might dominate or influence how others respond. Just consider that some individuals are not comfortable speaking in a group setting.

- **Suggestions**

Please follow the suggestions listed for interviews for focus groups as well

Observations

Observations are when a researcher observes the life, behavior, or experience of participants. These are generally more lengthy studies and involve quite a bit of consideration prior to implementation.

Ethnography

An ethnographic study is a type of field research where the researcher lives life alongside the participants. This could be in the same community or work environment, but they always immerse themselves in the lives of the participants.

Archival documents/government records

Researchers can go through rare books, special collections, old journals, maps, images, artifacts, and more to gather qualitative data and make connections from that data.