

Collecting Data: Interviewer Training

Introduction to Interviewer Training

Interviewing is an extremely important part in the process of collecting clear, accurate data. Bad interviewers can be one of the main sources of error in the data, or mean no data at all. Good interviewing is a skill that is incredibly valuable.

The four parts to the interviewer’s job are:

- Selecting respondents
- Getting respondents to take part and establishing a relationship
- Handling the question-and-answer process
- Recording answers and finishing the conversation

Glossary

Interviewer	
Respondent	
Data	
Bias	
Sample and sampling	
Probe and probing	
Recording	

1 # Selecting respondents

This is rather formally put, but it basically means a systematic approach to going up to people and getting them to talk to you.

Selecting the right people is a key element of the whole process or data can be 'biased' and unusable in analysis.

You will need to use the SAMPLING PROCEDURE to decide who to approach. Different events will have different samples but the 'best' method to use is randomised sampling so we'll use that when possible.

You will be told which approach to use in the ETA briefing sheet and the AEW will have been involved in choosing this so be able to answer any questions on the day.

Randomised sampling

is good for crowd events – where lots of people are standing around, or coming and going over time from an activity:

eg: a display/exhibition, watching children/others do something, Lightwaves type.

RANDOMISED SURVEY SAMPLING PROCEDURE

YOU'LL BE GIVEN A NUMBER IN THE EVENT BRIEFING – USUALLY BETWEEN 1 AND 10. Assume it is 3 for this example:

Stand somewhere near, but not in the way of the activity

Approach people as they leave the activity (or parents of children if standing around while their children are involved)

Count people leaving/passing – 1, 2, then approach the 3rd person

If they agree, interview them. If they refuse count 1, 2, more people and approach the 3rd.

Continue as above.

'Select all' sampling

For some activities, it is feasible to ask everyone. In this case all participants will be given a survey and asked to complete it.

This is used most in workshops and other higher level participation activities.

Sampling for seated events

where people sit down at events, you can use the seats to deliver the questionnaire – placing them on every other seat (or every seat if very few). As with workshops it is most effective if the activity deliverer mentions that some people have been selected to answer a questionnaire and that there will be help in doing so if needed.

Sampling for promenade theatre and similar

This is the hardest group to sample from. Due to practicalities we ask you to approach everyone you can as they leave the activity (or if there is a break) – ie when you aren't going to interfere with their watching.

Sampling for large performance events

this is again hard as everyone leaves together. For these, you should have tables/clipboards ready and approach people as they leave the performance area. Ideally give out the questionnaires (random sampling eg every 3rd person), then go and help people if they need it once the crowd has subsided.

What NOT to do in sampling -

- Approach people because you know them
- Leave people out because you know them
- Leave people out because they look scary
- Leave people out because you know they'll say no – they can say 'no' quite quickly if they need to, you then restart the counting
- Leave people out because they don't speak English (you can't do the survey with them but we need to record how many of these there are)
- Interrupt the activity or people's enjoyment of the activity

2 Getting respondents to take part

The key thing here is that they agree to talk to you knowingly – with full understanding of what you are asking. You can work out your own introduction that works with your own style, but you need to include:



What the survey is and what it is for



How long it will take



That it's their choice to speak to you, they can stop at any time. Make sure they know that they can ask you any questions

Establishing a relationship is an essential part of the work, but hard to provide guidance for. You will use your own personal skills, but do practice and think of any issues that might arise.

3 Handling the question-and-answer process

✘ Avoiding interviewer error

Interviewers can be a source of error when they do not read questions as worded. There is a reason for each question to be worded in a certain way. You'll have been told what level of adaptation is appropriate – for some there can be leeway, others need to be asked as stated.

😊 Staying neutral

Interviewers risk skewing results when:

- They probe directly.

Sometimes probes are needed; perhaps it's clear people don't understand the term used in the question, or misunderstood the question itself. You can use non-directive probes in this case, see the box for suggestions, but also think of others yourself. But some can be leading, for example, giving people ideas of answers when actually the question seeks to see if they have any ideas themselves.

Three non-directive probes:

- How do you mean...?
- Tell me more about that.
- Anything else?

- They bias answers by the way they relate to respondents.

This is a really hard one to work on but it is easy to accidentally influence people's replies. For example they might feel you would think badly of them if they admit not to have attended any previous events, and lie or exaggerate attendance. You need to work out how to use the rapport you have developed in order to avoid this. The approach you need is supportive and interested – and not judgmental.

👍 Knowing the questionnaire

It is essential to be comfortable with the questionnaire you are giving. Check it every time you start a collection session, you should be happy with all the questions and remember most of them. Ensure you know what each mean, and ideally understand WHY they are being asked – someone might ask you why that question is included, even if you don't answer at the time (if it affects the answers) you can explain at the end. More importantly, if you understand what you are asking, it'll make more sense to the participant.

4 Recording answers and finishing the conversation

The key thing here is to ensure accuracy and clarity.



Accuracy

This can be complicated. People might talk a lot, especially when answering open questions. How do you record the gist of what they say, while listening and also engaging? What if they give one answer, then correct themselves? Have you heard the answer they INTENDED to give?

The tip is to be open-minded, don't mark down what you think the answer is, but what they actually say. If you need to ask them to repeat it then go ahead.

If you are collecting a self-completed questionnaire, take a minute to check handwriting – is anything illegible? Now is the time to ask them to explain and you can note (esp email addresses).



Clarity

Ensure you've marked the answer clearly, written words clearly and so on. If there was a previous answer that was then changed, have you made this change clear? Remember it probably isn't you reading your handwriting!

With lots of open questions such as 'give details', you need to work out how best to get these down. Practice is the only thing that really works here.



Thanking the respondent and finishing the conversation

Using the guidance on the questionnaire, make sure that people are thanked and can keep in touch.

In summary

1 WHO? 2 WHY? 3 ASK. 4 ACT.

1 Selecting respondents

Who? Count intervals

2 Getting respondents to take part

? **What** and why we're surveying

🕒 **How long**

👉 **Your choice** – you can stop when you want and ask questions

3 Handling the question-and-answer process

✘ **Avoid error** through reading the question as written

😊 **Stay neutral** – don't bias or probe directly

👍 **Know the questionnaire**

4 Recording answers and finishing the conversation

✍️ **Accuracy**

★ **Clarity**

😊 **Thanks**
