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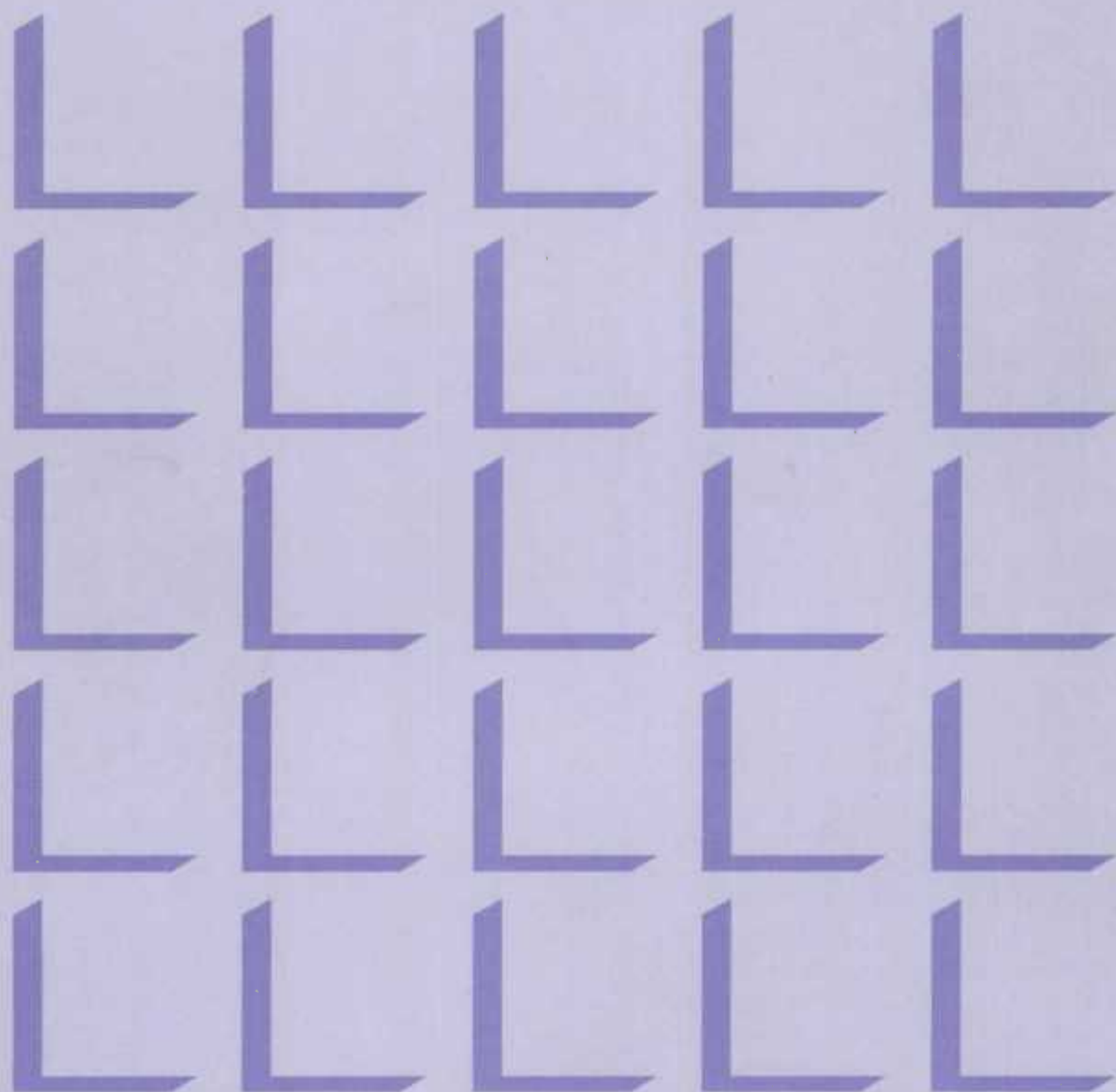
# Survey Interviewing Skills:

## A Guide to Successful Interviewing

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## **Survey Interviewing Skills:**

### **A Guide to Successful Interviewing**

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## Preface

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Every year Statistics Canada trains hundreds of interviewers for its surveys. This training investment pays off in high response rates and lower costs. We know the importance of training; but developing, preparing and delivering a quality training session is costly.

*Survey Interviewing Skills: A Guide to Successful Interviewing* is a "one-stop" information source on interviewing—for new interviewers and for more experienced interviewers who may want to refresh their skills. This guide assembles successful interviewing techniques from Statistics Canada, ranked by the British magazine *The Economist* as the "number one statistical agency in the world" in 1991 and 1993. An updated and expanded version of the original *Introduction to Interviewing, Volume 1* published in 1986, this new guide builds on the experience and knowledge of professionals working in the world of survey taking.

It begins by introducing survey interviewing, including a definition of a survey and an overview of the steps involved in producing the end product—statistics. Confidentiality and ethics are detailed in Chapter 2.

Chapter 3 outlines the keys to effective interviewing. It's your interpersonal and interviewing skills that ultimately gain the respondent's co-operation. But how should you introduce a survey? What factors encourage response? How do you maintain rapport throughout the interview? These and other questions are answered.

There are many elements at play during an interview. Chapter 4 looks at how you can prepare for and organize an interview. Probing techniques, which may be used to control the interview, are outlined. And the importance of question wording is also explored.

Chapter 5 deals with non-response and strategies for dealing with it; difficult interview situations and follow-up and call-back are also addressed.

A chapter on interviewer safety has been added to *Survey Interviewing Skills*. Both you, as an interviewer, and your survey organization share the responsibility for safe working conditions. Chapter 6 provides some helpful "do's and don'ts".

And lastly, another new chapter provides some common questions interviewers are asked, with some suggested responses. Becoming familiar with questions and answers before the interview is also key to becoming a successful interviewer. These guidelines are found in Chapter 7.

## Acknowledgements

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This book was adapted by Susan Lensen and Rita Green from the original version, *Introduction to Interviewing, Volume 1*, 1986 by Marjorie Martin. They are indebted to her and the quality of her work.

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## Introduction to survey interviewing

### 1.1 What is a survey?

A survey is defined as "the collection of information about characteristics of interest from some or all units of a population using well-defined concepts, methods and procedures, and the compilation of such information into a useful summary form."<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes information can be obtained from administrative files and records from governments, institutions and agencies. A survey begins when we need information and no data or statistics are available to meet that need.

Any observation or investigation about a situation may also be called a "survey." Today, however, the word usually describes a method of data collection; specifically, interviewing a representative **sample** of the population being studied.

In the context of a survey, "population" does not necessarily refer to the number of people living in a town, city, province or country. Rather, it refers to the collection of units to which the survey results apply. In this sense, the survey population could be a collection of households, schools, hospitals, farms, businesses—even vehicles.

"Sampling" refers to a scientific method of selecting a small number of units to represent the whole population. If a sample is chosen in such a way that each unit has a known chance of being selected, then the survey results can reliably be projected to a larger population.

Sample surveys are a quick and economical way to evaluate behaviour, beliefs, knowledge, attitudes and expectations. Using a sample eliminates the need for the expensive and time-consuming procedure of census taking (a census is a complete enumeration of every unit in the population being studied).

### 1.2 Conducting a survey

It may appear that a survey is the simple procedure of asking questions, then compiling the answers to produce statistics. However, a survey must be carried out step by step, following precise procedures and formulas, if the results are to yield accurate information. If you

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1. *Survey Sampling: A Non-mathematical Guide*, second edition.



understand what happens behind the scenes, you will better understand the important role you—the survey interviewer—play in the entire process.

- **Defining the objectives**

After an information need has been identified, the first step is determining the investigation's objectives. The information the survey is to collect must first be defined and outlined in general terms, then broken down into specific data needs. The questions that answer these needs become the basis for the survey questionnaire.

- **Developing the methodology**

The established objectives are used to develop the survey methodology, which involves several interrelated activities. Rules must be formulated to define the survey population and to select the sample. For example, in a survey determining how many Canadians are unemployed, the survey population may be defined as all adults (or all Canadians over the age of 15) in Canada. And because the unemployment rate affects different regions in different ways, it is important to choose a sampling strategy that ensures all these regions are adequately represented. Therefore, a portion of the sample should be selected from both urban and rural areas of each major region.

- **Choosing the data collection method**

During this initial stage in developing a survey, other decisions must also be made, including: How should the information be collected? What follow-up methods will be used for reluctant respondents? What resources are available for research?

There are three basic data collection methods: face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews and self-enumeration (mail) surveys. Other methods include direct observation (used in pricing surveys) or using administrative records. The choice of method depends on various factors including the interview's complexity and length, the sensitivity of requested information, the geographic distribution of the survey population, cost and time frame.

Personal interviews—by far the most expensive—are used for surveys with complex or extensive questions, and when the sample requires personal visits to locate or select respondents. Telephone interviews are much less costly and are particularly advantageous when the sample population is dispersed. Mail surveys are even less expensive than telephone interviews; unfortunately, there is a major problem with non-response, as people often complete only part of the questionnaire or do not return it.

Often the most satisfactory collection strategy uses a combination of methods. For example, some surveys interview respondents monthly over an established period of time. For such surveys, it may be cost-effective to contact the respondent in person for the first interview, then telephone for subsequent interviews. Or, you may use the telephone to "screen" eligible respondents (disabled persons, for example) and then make appointments for personal interviews. An advance mail-out is another way to let respondents know the survey's data requirements. The response to mail surveys is improved when non-respondents are followed-up in two stages: the first by telephone and the second in person.

Computer-assisted interviewing (CAI) is becoming increasingly popular as technology improves. A CAI questionnaire is programmed so that each question appears on the computer screen in its proper sequence. You conduct the interview by reading the questions directly from the computer screen and keying the respondent's answers into the computer. The questions and "skip" patterns (the logic of the flow through the questionnaire) are part of the application, and instructions for interviewers and consistency edits (dates and age are two common edits) can be added. CAI has eliminated much of the administrative work required for paper and pencil interviews. Manual editing is no longer necessary and errors and inconsistencies are reduced. CAI interviews may be conducted by telephone (computer-assisted telephone interviewing, or CATI) or in person (computer-assisted personal interviewing, or CAPI). Both methods offer a more efficient data collection, edit and capture process.

- **Designing and pretesting the questionnaire**

Samples are chosen to ensure that each unit in a population has a known chance of being selected. So too must information collection be standardized so that every individual surveyed responds to the same question. Each question and any related terminology must be clearly understood and questions must also be arranged in the best possible order so the interview progresses naturally. "Leading" questions (that is, those that lead the person to answer in a certain way) should be avoided or the results may be biased. Questionnaire length is another consideration, because asking too much of a respondent may result in incomplete information or reduced quality of the information provided.

A pretest of the questionnaire determines if the questions are completely understood, whether they are in the best order, and if they encourage co-operation from respondents. The pretest is analyzed to establish whether the questionnaire will accurately gather the information it was developed to collect. Usually, experienced interviewers serve as pretesters using a trial questionnaire and a smaller-scale version of the sample.

After testing, interviewers are often given a chance to discuss their experiences in a debriefing session. Questions may be revised: some may be reworded or rephrased; some may be added, dropped or substituted. This interview revision process continues until the questionnaire meets the survey's requirements.

Computer-assisted interviewing (CAI) surveys are designed and tested in a similar way. However, the testing must also ensure that the screens (which display the questions) are presented in the correct order and guide the interview through pre-determined paths. Proper edits, online help, and additional functions that help interviewers must also be tested. For these reasons, testing for CAI, particularly for a new survey, may be longer and more extensive than testing for a paper questionnaire.

- **Interviewing**

Once the questionnaire has been finalized, detailed instructions and procedures are developed to help interviewers. A manual should explain the survey background (the sponsor(s), the general goals) and describe the data collection method and sampling procedures. It should define concepts and terms used in the questionnaire, as well as outline the objectives of specific questions.

A procedures manual should include miscellaneous instructions on the collection process, including the study's schedule and follow-up or call-back procedures. Letters to respondents, diaries, maps (when required for special sampling procedures), lists of establishments to be surveyed, etc., are also prepared at this stage. You will likely refer to both an interviewer's manual and a procedures manual for questions and direction throughout the survey.

You must be thoroughly familiar with the survey concepts and procedures. The method of training depends on the survey's complexity and your experience, but it should take place immediately before the interviewing period. It may include visual aids and mock interviews, or a home-study package with reading material and exercises.

From this point to the end of the interviewing period, the survey's success rests in your hands. You must locate and interview respondents. Then, you must scrutinize completed questionnaires for accuracy and completeness. You will be closely supervised and monitored during this entire phase to ensure that data quality is maintained and the process is completed within the time and budget allowed.

- **Processing survey questionnaires**

Once the data collection phase has ended, the data processing phase begins. Using various manual and computerized operations, raw information is transformed into useable statistics.

On a "paper" survey, written answers are coded manually to a predetermined set of codes. In CAI, the entries are usually coded automatically during the post-processing of the survey, which eliminates this step for you.

Information from each paper questionnaire is keyed into a computer and becomes known as a record. Records are then edited for erroneous, inconsistent or incomplete information that is corrected using other information on that or similar records, or by checking it with the respondent. CAI online edits prevent most errors because you are alerted immediately if an answer is inconsistent (for example, when a numeric entry falls outside an acceptable range).

The ability to monitor errors during the editing process also gives you important feedback that can improve data quality over time as you work on ongoing surveys. Feedback points out problems and is a good learning tool for interviewers and survey managers.

CAI data are normally transmitted by modem (if the interview is conducted outside the office) or directly to a host computer. Information transmitted electronically will be compressed and encrypted (you can think of it as being "scrambled") to prevent unauthorized access.

Once this process is complete, the sample data must be related to the survey population; in other words, each record in the sample is assigned a number or weight to indicate how many units it represents in the population.

- **Analysis and dissemination**

After the information has been put into readable format, researchers and statisticians analyze the data and interpret the results to arrive at some conclusions about the topic being studied. The survey results are then presented in reports or publications. These include the statistical findings, as well as the survey methods used, a description of the survey sample, and indications of the data quality.

### **1.3 Changes in survey interviewing**

It is becoming increasingly more expensive and difficult to conduct surveys. Costs include the heavy "up-front" cost of sophisticated software and hardware, training, interviewing, follow-up, post-processing, analysis and some form of dissemination. These high costs, particularly those for interviewer training, emphasize how important your role is.

As society changes, you may find some respondents more and more reluctant to answer questions over the telephone or to open the door to a stranger, making it difficult to secure an interview. To be successful, you must be properly prepared to ask questions, often on sensitive issues such as violence or the environment. But with proper training you will be sensitive to such issues and feel capable of allaying respondents' concerns while obtaining answers to survey questions.



CAI has also changed the process of survey interviewing. To be successful, you require thorough knowledge of both the survey content and the equipment. CAI places more emphasis on "up-front" preparation, but the benefits of the technology are passed on to the respondent and to you, the interviewer. CAI's automated features have:

- reduced respondent burden by decreasing the need to call them back for missing information;
- eliminated complex interviewer check items; and,
- increased the time you can give to interpersonal skills (and the interview), once you are comfortable with the interviewing equipment.

#### **1.4 The interviewer's role**

This chapter has given a general description of the survey steps. But the step you will be most involved in is, of course, interviewing. The following chapters explore this in detail. But the first step is understanding your role as **an interviewer in the survey process**. You must:

- ensure that you are collecting information from the correct sample unit;
- ensure complete sample coverage by minimizing non-response and the resulting bias;
- collect information accurately (free of bias) and completely;
- minimize recording and data entry errors; and,
- adhere to all security procedures to ensure data confidentiality.

## Ethics and confidentiality

### 2.1 Ethical framework: A respondent's rights

A survey's success is directly related to the respondents' co-operation. You must know the rights of a respondent. Respondents are entitled to:

- *complete honesty*

At the beginning of an interview, you must explain the survey's purpose and objectives. Many respondents will also want to know how they were selected, why their participation is important, who will see their personal information and how long the interview will take.

- *know to whom they are speaking*

You must state your name and the name of the organization conducting the survey. If the survey is sponsored by another organization and the survey results will be shared with this sponsor, you must also state this. On the telephone, give respondents a name and telephone number they can call to confirm the authenticity of the survey and/or organization. For personal interviews, you must carry a recent photo identification card. If possible, mail letters of introduction before data collection to let respondents know you may be calling or visiting. If the survey topics might cause a respondent to become suspicious about the survey, inform local authorities about the survey. For example, a crime survey may ask respondents to state whether or not they own a security system.

- *confidentiality*

It is your responsibility to inform the respondent that all information collected will be kept confidential and that under no circumstances will any individual or business be identified in the survey results. If respondents are still uncertain about data confidentiality, you should immediately pass the concern to a supervisor for follow-up. In some surveys, respondents may be offered the choice of completing the survey by mail.

- **privacy**

You must let respondents know if a supervisor or an observer will be listening in on a telephone interview. Any observer accompanying you on a personal interview must carry proper photo identification: it is your responsibility to explain why an observer is with you. Respondents have the right to protect their privacy. It is extremely important that any follow-up to a non-response not be considered harassment by the respondent.

Pay careful attention when the survey subject is sensitive. Never conduct an interview in front of another individual in a household, unless the respondent grants permission.

In household surveys, always speak to an adult. Do not ask children who live in the home for information about the household. For surveys requiring that children be interviewed, you must obtain permission from a parent or guardian, although the parent (particularly in the case of older children) would not necessarily need to be present during the interview.

## 2.2 Ensuring confidentiality

Survey organizations are responsible for ensuring and respecting confidentiality measures. Steps to ensure confidentiality include: minimizing the links that can be made between identification codes and personal identifiers such as name, address and telephone numbers; omitting names and addresses from survey data used for analysis, destroying questionnaires and deleting files as soon as possible after tabulation; and using broad categories for tabulations.

As an interviewer, you are responsible for:

- ***treating your interviewer identification card as you would your driver's licence or social insurance card.*** If your identification card is lost, it can be used to collect sensitive information in your name.
- ***ensuring the physical security of confidential data.*** All survey material containing names, addresses, telephone numbers, or any other information about a respondent or business must be securely stored at your place of work (including your home, office or car). Never discuss the survey information with anyone, including members of your immediate family. During personal interviews, keep any completed survey information out of view. When working from your car, lock all survey material (including laptop computers) in the trunk.



- *securing portable computers or laptops.* Memorize your log-on password. Do not write it down. Label and properly count all backup diskettes. Store diskettes securely when they are not in use. When you take a break or must leave your computer, log off to ensure no one can access your computer in your absence—however brief.
- *carefully disposing of survey materials.* All material that contains confidential data must **always be shredded**. **NEVER** place such material in a trash can or wastebasket. You should also shred training material and test data, which may be mistaken for confidential data.
- *properly shipping completed work.* If you work from home, you must securely wrap all confidential material; specifically, it must be double wrapped. Packages must be sent by registered mail so they can be traced if necessary. **NEVER** leave a package between the doors of your home for pick up. **ALWAYS** give the package to the post office driver yourself or deliver it to the post office.
- *immediately reporting any loss of confidential materials to your supervisor.*

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## Keys to effective interviewing

The interview is the key component of any survey. Survey questionnaires and computer-assisted interviews are designed with great care to ensure that the data collected will meet the survey's objectives. But surveys are only as good as the skills you use to get respondents to co-operate.

### ✓ 3.1 The interviewer-respondent relationship

Your first step in the interview process is to set up a friendly relationship with the respondent and secure his or her co-operation. This relationship is usually more important to the respondent than the questions asked. Most people like to talk to someone who is friendly and supportive, who is interested in what they say, and who never criticizes or disagrees with them.

If you project a positive, professional yet receptive attitude, you will create an atmosphere conducive to collecting complete, accurate and relevant answers. There are several ways you can encourage respondents to be receptive:

- ***Be sensitive to a respondent's concerns, including those not orally expressed.*** For example, some respondents might be worried that the information they give will be used to their disadvantage. Or, they may be embarrassed by what may be perceived as a "socially incorrect" answer or that they will not know the "right" answer. Or, respondents often worry that the interview will take too long.

You can reassure respondents by identifying their concerns. Then, address those concerns with a concise and honest explanation of the survey's nature and purpose. Explain how respondents are selected, the confidential nature of the interview and the beneficial uses of the findings. Also outline what is expected from them during the interview and about how long it will take.

- ***You can stimulate a respondent's interest by explaining why the survey is important and worthwhile.*** For example, you can explain that respondents actually represent many others and the information they provide will be meaningful to the survey results.
- ***Make respondents feel that the time you spend talking with them will be pleasant.*** Show that you understand the respondent's situation and point of view. Often this alone determines whether or not you will obtain an interview.

### 3.2 Response and non-response

Different people respond to different influences. You may find it helpful to look at factors that may influence respondent co-operation while you prepare for the interview. Such factors are at play throughout the interview, but they are critically important during the introduction.

The following factors may motivate a respondent to respond to a survey:

- *The desire to be helpful.* At the outset, virtually all respondents will be courteous and most will want to be helpful. And for short surveys, this may be enough. For longer interviews that require a greater time commitment from the respondent, you may have to appeal to other factors, particularly the one described next.
- *The sense that the study is important and may ultimately be beneficial.* Most successful interviews occur once the respondents have been convinced the survey is important and that the results will be used. A well-constructed introduction highlights the importance and the potential benefits of the research.
- *An interest in the topic.* A particular issue may be important to a group of respondents who share the same characteristics (for example, working parents being interviewed about child care). Be careful, however, not to let the respondent's enthusiasm sway the way you conduct the interview.
- *A sense of duty.* Many Canadians realize the importance of surveys in guiding government policies. This factor may influence some respondents' attitudes in the case of government-sponsored surveys. For example, a survey on a subject that is important to the respondent may encourage response to the survey.
- *A feeling that they have "no choice."* This feeling often leads to hasty, poorly considered answers. But you can avoid this if you have a well-prepared introduction.

The following factors may influence an individual to NOT respond:

- *A feeling that the interview will be a waste of time.* It is your responsibility to fully answer any questions respondents have about the survey. A respondent's time is valuable and you must convince respondents that participation is not a waste of time.
- *A feeling that the topic is irrelevant.* Respondents may feel that their participation is not important because the topic does not concern them, or that they are not qualified to respond. Because all responses are needed for reliable survey results, you can address this concern by providing specific examples. For example, a senior citizen selected for the Labour Force Survey might feel unqualified to respond unless you assure him or her that the survey's objective is to measure labour force participation for different age categories.

- ***Suspicion of the interviewer's or the study's motives.*** You can usually dispel any suspicion at the outset by showing proper identification and by giving respondents a telephone number they may call to verify the survey and your role. During the interview certain questions may arouse suspicion if you do not make the purpose clear to the respondent. For example, our Household Facilities and Equipment Survey contains questions on ownership of stereos, televisions, personal computers, cameras and so on. If such questions are not properly introduced, they may arouse suspicion about a burglary.
- ***Social desirability.*** Some respondents may feel hampered by literacy or language difficulties. Language problems can be turned over to other interviewers who are fluent in the language identified. Literacy problems can often be addressed by asking other household members to help out, or by slowing the pace and giving the respondent more time to respond.

You may lose a respondent's co-operation if he or she becomes frustrated at not understanding the questions or at not being able to provide answers in the required format. If such problems occur frequently, notify your supervisor or the survey designer, because they could affect the reliability of the results.

### ✓ 3.3 Introductory techniques

- **Make a good first impression**

The foundation of a good relationship begins with the introduction. The first impression you make, on the telephone or in person, greatly influences the interview's outcome. To create the best impression, it is vital to project a professional image that portrays the seriousness of your intentions. Your tone of voice, attitude and, in face-to-face situations, your smile and style of dress, should invite co-operation. The respondent will see you first as a person and only second as a representative of your organization. And you must remember to consider the respondent as an individual, not just another statistic.

Your introduction should be brief, sincere and should contain:

- your name and the name of the organization conducting the survey. Also mention the name of any sponsoring organization(s). (Note: for some marketing surveys or omnibus surveys with many sponsors, it may not be necessary to name the sponsoring organization(s).)
- the purpose of the survey. Present the research objectives, but also include—and stress—the benefits. But be careful not to oversell the survey.



Be prepared to add:

- an explanation about random selection. Assure the respondent that he or she has been selected by chance and not because of any prior knowledge. By explaining random sampling, you may convince respondents that their answers are important because they actually represent others in the population.
- a reassurance of confidentiality. Tell respondents that their answers will be aggregated with others and used only to produce statistical tables. Do not claim anonymity unless you really do not know the respondent's name.
- a description of how the survey results will be used. You should be able to provide examples of possible uses for the survey results.

Even though letters of introduction can be sent before the interview, respondents often don't read them, so you must be prepared to introduce the survey upon first contact. Telephone calls can also be used to introduce the survey; phone contact also gives you a chance to schedule appointments.

For personal interviews, you must always carry an employee photo identification card. You should be prepared to leave your business card with the respondent if one is requested. Respondents often wish to verify who you are before allowing you into their homes.

- **Stimulate respondent interest**

The respondent's first reaction is likely to be a mixture of curiosity and courtesy. Although this interest is not enough to carry the entire interview, it does allow you time to describe the survey.

Try to have information about the survey clearly in your mind ahead of time. This makes it easier for you to explain the survey so the respondent will be interested. You may want to prepare by writing an introduction and testing it on friends and colleagues. Using words you are comfortable with will make your introduction sound sincere.

- **Avoid questions that can be answered "no"**

Many interviewers find this difficult to do, especially if they have been raised to ask permission politely. Once you are aware that this method sets you up for refusals, you may find it easier to replace your questions with positive statements. For example, instead of asking: "May I talk with you now?" or "Is this a convenient time to do the interview?", try saying, "I'd like to do the interview with you now."

Once you have been invited in, go in quickly and, when possible, be seated to conduct the interview. You are then in a better position to convince respondents how valuable their co-operation is. It is easier for respondents to say "no thank you" on the doorstep than in the living room.

- **Approach each interview as though it will take place immediately**

Never assume a respondent is too busy. Make arrangements to call at a more convenient time **only if the respondent suggests this**. When you must make an appointment, don't ask for a convenient time. Begin by suggesting alternate days and times (preferably times when you work; for example, "I will call on Thursday evening.") After confirming an appointment, a nice touch is, "I'm looking forward to talking with you."

- **When respondents are reluctant or hesitant, listen closely in order to focus on their main concern**

In a telephone survey if the respondent says, "I don't know about giving information over the phone," you may respond, "You can check with my supervisor that I do work for \_\_\_\_\_ . The number is \_\_\_\_\_. Please call collect."

The respondent may follow your advice or feel reassured enough to continue, or may indicate that the problem is somewhat different by saying, "Well, I think you're probably legitimate, but I don't like giving out personal information. I don't know who will use it." You should realize that confidentiality, not you or your organization, is likely the problem. Focus on this concern.

- **Answer the respondent's questions**

It is important, however, to listen to respondents and answer **only** what he or she has asked. Unsolicited information may bore the respondent, may be misunderstood, or may even be interpreted as "justifying" your request. You should be prepared to tell the respondent—honestly—the length of time the interview will take.

Respondents may ask: "How did you happen to pick me?"; "Who gave you my name?"; "I don't know anything about this. Why don't you call someone else?"; "Why are you doing this survey?"; or, "Why is someone from Toronto calling me in Vancouver?"

You should be prepared with ready, convincing answers to such questions. Your training, survey manuals and supervisor will give you the answers you need. (See Chapter 7 for some commonly asked questions and some suggested answers.)

- **Above all, let respondents know you hear them**

It is often difficult to really listen in the rush to secure an interview. But if active listening could be reduced to a single formula, it might be: "I understand [respondent's concern], and I think this is how we can solve it . . . ."

### Introducing a Survey—Examples

Introducing the survey is the first step in the interviewing process. The techniques discussed in this section will help you obtain the respondent's co-operation, either at the doorstep or over the telephone. It is a good idea to prepare—and practise—your introduction ahead of time.

#### Example 1:                      **Doorstep introduction**

*Remember:*                      You should not ask questions to gain permission for the interview; rather, suggest the desired course of action. Be prepared to support your explanation about the survey.

*Interviewer:*    Hello, I'm [your name] from [your organization]. Here's my ID card. I'm here for the [survey name].

*Respondent:*    The [name of your survey]?

*Interviewer:*    Yes, the survey is about . . . . The data will be used to . . . .

*Respondent:*    I see. Why did you pick me?

*Interviewer:*    You/your household has been chosen as part of a random sample to represent your area. Your answers will be combined with others to produce statistics. If you're not too busy now I could come in.

cont'd . . .



. . . cont'd

*Respondent:* Well, I am rather busy. I've got to do some shopping and pick up my husband.

*Interviewer:* Oh, well, it wouldn't take too long. Couldn't we do it now?

*Respondent:* [hesitant] Well . . . if you're sure. Is it difficult?

*Interviewer:* No, not at all. It'll go very quickly.

*Respondent:* [relieved] Good! Won't you come in?

*Interviewer:* Thank you.

*Note:* By suggesting to the respondent that she may be too busy, the interviewer gave her an opportunity to say "No." The interviewer did say that the interview would not take long and would go quickly. By being positive and cheerful, the interviewer relieved the respondent's main concern: that the survey would be difficult.

Example 2:                      **Doorstep introduction**

*Interviewer:* [hesitating] I hope I'm not disturbing you. My name is [your name] and if you're not too busy, I'd like to ask you some questions for the [survey name].

*Respondent:* Sorry. I'm not interested.

*Interviewer:* But the survey is about. . . .

*Respondent:* [harsh] Look, I said I'm not interested, so go next door!

A poor introduction and a negative attitude will cause the respondent to react negatively as well.

Example 3: Telephone introduction

*Remember:* You must be friendly; you must sell yourself and your survey. You should keep your introduction brief.

Allow the telephone to ring at least six times.

*Respondent:* Hello?

*Interviewer:* Hello. This is [your name] from [your organization]. I am calling about the [survey name]. If you have a few minutes, I would like to ask you a few questions about [survey name].

*Respondent:* How did you get my telephone number? It's unlisted.

*Interviewer:* Your telephone number was randomly generated by computer.

*Respondent:* I see. Well, this isn't exactly a good time for me. We have company.

*Interviewer:* Would later this evening or sometime tomorrow be more convenient? The interview will only take a few minutes.

*Respondent:* Oh. In that case, let's do it now. I'll change telephones . . .

*Interviewer:* Certainly.

*Note:* A respondent may **not** want to be interviewed on the telephone because of a language or hearing problem. Or, the respondent may have an unlisted telephone number. A respondent may also be concerned about a lack of privacy (a party line, for example).

*If a respondent is hesitant, offer to call back at another time. Or, if the interview will be short, let the respondent know. Always get a "best time" to call back. Remember to record the telephone number and include the area code.*

### 3.4 Maintaining rapport—skills and techniques

Rapport describes the personal relationship of confidence, trust and understanding between you and the respondent. The impression you make on the respondent during the introduction and your ability to adapt to the situation from the respondent's point of view determine the rapport that will develop. Sincere comments about an attractive garden, children or even the weather help bring the respondent "on side" by making him or her more comfortable.

*Respondent:* Hello?

*Interviewer:* Hello, I'm [your name] from [your organization]. I'm calling concerning the [name of the survey]. I'd like to take a few minutes . . . .

*Respondent:* How do I know you are who you say you are?

*Interviewer:* I can give you the name of my supervisor and a telephone number that you can call. You can call now if you wish.

*Respondent:* Okay, I'll call now.

*Interviewer:* That's fine. I'll call you back in about 10 minutes.

*Respondent:* OK. Bye.

You must be careful to establish and keep a positive tone throughout the interview. Be professional and friendly. Remember, during a telephone interview, the respondent cannot see you, your ID badge, your survey material: it is even more important to establish a positive rapport. Your vocal expression—language, grammar, voice quality, rate of speech, and effective enunciation—are key to creating a positive image over the telephone.

Four important keys to effective interviewing are: **listening skills, empathy, speech and knowledge of the questionnaire.**

## **1. Listening skills**

To be a good interviewer, you must do more than just ask questions. You should also develop and practise good listening skills. This is particularly important during telephone interviews.

- **Wait for the respondent to stop speaking before you stop listening.**

This is more difficult during a telephone interview because you cannot see the respondent's facial expressions or gestures. If you allow a short pause after each question, this ensures that the respondent has finished speaking. Pauses in the interview also communicate a mood. No pauses indicate that you are anxious and insecure, which tends to make the respondent feel the same.

- **Indicate that you are listening.**

An occasional "Yes, I see," shows that you are still interested in what the respondent is saying.

- **Ask questions if you don't understand something or feel you have missed a point.**

Neglecting to do so could cause confusion later in the interview and the respondent may feel you are not really listening.

- **Don't make assumptions about what the respondent is going to say, or try to finish a sentence for him or her.**

Don't record an entry until the respondent has given you a complete answer.

## **2. Empathy**

Both businesses and households operate on schedules, with several activities throughout the day. You must be sensitive to the respondent's situation at the time of the call or visit. Look for cues that indicate it would be better to conduct the interview at another time.

This courtesy should also be extended to chatty respondents. Sometimes a survey question may take them off course into a long description of a personal incident. It may be difficult to get them back on track. A simple "I understand but (continue interview)" or "I can see how that could happen but (continue interview)" will help refocus the respondent.

### 3. Speech

Vocal expression, through language, grammar, voice quality, rate of speech and proper enunciation, is key to a positive image. Keep these points in mind:

- **Clarity.** Avoid talking with anything (cigarettes, chewing gum, pencils) in your mouth. Speak directly into the telephone mouthpiece with your mouth about one inch away.
- **Enunciation.** The English language is full of phonetic similarities: T and D, P and B, M and N. Clear enunciation will help prevent misunderstandings and the need to repeat yourself.
- **Rate of speech.** The basic rate of speech is 120 words per minute. If you speak too quickly, people start listening to your rate of speech, not to what you are saying. But speaking too slowly may irritate listeners: it keeps them hanging on every word. When you speak too slowly, respondents tend to anticipate what you are about to say. Use pauses for emphasis and for regulating the pace of the interview.
- **Pitch.** Speech experts say low pitch is desirable because it projects and carries better. It is also more pleasing to the ear. Try lowering your head, which lowers your voice pitch. Don't let your voice become high-pitched. This results in an irritating sing-song delivery.
- **Inflection.** Don't talk in a monotone. Use the full range of your voice to make the interview interesting. Rising inflection toward the end of sentences is very helpful.

### 4. Know the questionnaire

Know your material, especially the questionnaire. You don't have time during an interview to look up definitions or answers to questions. Nothing breaks the rapport more quickly than long pauses, especially in telephone interviews. You must develop the ability to explain what you're doing (the reason for the delay) as you are doing it. This lets the respondent know that you are still connected and that the questioning will continue.

## Maintaining Rapport—Examples

### Example 1:

*Interviewer:* Last week did you work at a job or business?

*Respondent:* I'm not sure how to answer that. You see, there's a strike at the plant and I . . .

*Interviewer:* [interrupting] Yes, but did you work at a job last week?

*Respondent:* Well, for part of the week. I was on the picket line, but I . . .

*Interviewer:* [interrupting] Did you actually work last week?

*Respondent:* LOOK, I just TOLD you I'm on strike. That should be enough. Click.

Impatience, lack of empathy and constant interruption broke the bond of trust. Despite repeating the question three times, the interviewer still didn't get the required information. Example 2 illustrates a better way to ensure a successful interview:

### Example 2:

*Interviewer:* Last week did you work at a job or business?

*Respondent:* I'm not sure how to answer that. You see, there's a strike at the plant and I walked out on Tuesday.

*Interviewer:* Oh yes, I heard about the strike. Did you do any work at a job any day last week?

*Respondent:* I put in my shifts on Monday and Tuesday and I spent time on the picket line after that, but we don't get any strike pay.

*Interviewer:* I see. That can make it tough. Last week did you have more than one job or business?

*Respondent:* As a matter of fact my neighbour hired me part time to make deliveries.



### **3.5 Special conditions: Proxy versus non-proxy**

For some surveys, information for an absent respondent can be obtained from another knowledgeable household member, known as a proxy. Proxy response is most suitable for surveys collecting facts generally known to all household members. This technique is ill-suited to collecting personal information. Non-proxy interviewing reduces the usable sample and may increase field collection costs. The resulting responses, however, are generally of higher quality.

You will be told in your survey training if the interviews are "non-proxy"—that is, when only the specific respondent selected can provide the information. For example, it may be impossible to obtain complex details about previous employment or specific dates from other household members, or the survey may be asking for personal opinions. In non-proxy situations, other household members can still be used as translators in cases of language difficulty.

Remember that the number of call-backs and appointments needed to secure non-proxy interviews should be carefully planned to avoid respondent burden and to control survey costs.



## Conducting interviews

By now you should feel comfortable enough to introduce a survey and be ready to start interviewing. Your goal is to collect accurate information by using the survey instrument (questionnaire or computer screen) according to the interviewing practices you have learned. This chapter gives you more information on preparing and organizing for interviewing. In addition, the "Guidelines for question wording" will help you understand the rules governing questionnaire design. If you are familiar with these guidelines, you can use them in your probing. In this chapter you will also learn how to handle survey questions properly, and how to probe, record and edit information.

Your basic tasks are: posing questions and maximizing the respondent's ability and willingness to answer those questions; listening actively to determine what is relevant; and probing to increase the validity, clarity and completeness of the responses.

Interviewing is not a simple matter of asking questions and recording the answers—there are specific concepts, techniques and principles that must be learned. But time and experience will help you develop the skills needed to conduct excellent interviews.

### 4.1 Preparing for the interview

As an interviewer, you must first mentally prepare for the interview. You can build confidence by:

- thinking positively. You are a professional and expert in your field;
- remembering that you are well trained, know the survey and the questionnaire, are comfortable with the interviewing procedures and can answer questions about the survey;
- reminding yourself that you control the interview and can accomplish what you set out to do.

You must always be fully prepared, whether you are calling a respondent on the telephone or planning a personal visit. It is important to organize your work day, schedule your calls or visits and be fully knowledgeable about the survey forms and materials.

Follow these steps to:

- **organize your work time.** Organize your work daily so you will know exactly how many calls you intend to make. Be sure you allow enough time between calls to complete the necessary notes or editing required for paper questionnaires.
- **enter notes.** You should enter any notes during the interview. Include information such as: how co-operative the respondent was; the best time to call the respondent; what type of follow-up action has been agreed upon and when it is to be completed; and the name of the best or most knowledgeable person to talk to.
- **make appointments.** You should always have a calendar on hand to book appointments. Always enter the appointment on the appropriate computer screen or questionnaire space. **Do not write appointments on scraps of paper.**
- **listen to the respondent.** It is important that you be able to record accurate information and continue the conversation with the respondent at the same time. A useful technique is to repeat the information you are recording, thereby eliminating an awkward pause and confirming that you have interpreted the answer correctly.

#### 4.2 Guidelines for question wording

Important guidelines are used to formulate the survey questionnaire. If you understand these "behind-the-scenes" considerations and if you are familiar with the questions, you will be able to anticipate problems. It is paramount that you read the survey questions **exactly** as worded. However, if probing is required, these guidelines will help you to rephrase the question or to clarify the respondents' answers.

**Keep the wording simple.** Surveys directed to the general population should avoid complex phrasing and long subordinate clauses littered with "if," "then," "when," etc.

**Be specific and give the respondent a frame of reference.** Decide which terms must be defined for the respondent. You will be given specific instructions that must be conveyed to the respondent; for example, "choose all that apply" or "choose only one."

**Avoid jargon and abbreviations.** It is better to avoid using technical jargon, abbreviations and acronyms; however, if you do use such terms, you must introduce and define them.

**Ask only one question per question.** Sometimes, in clarifying a question, interviewers accidentally introduce a second thought. For example the original question, "Did you look for work last week?" can become "What did you do to look for work last week?"—a different question looking for different information. Questions should contain one thought only.

**Do not use implied alternatives.** Alternatives are presented using the word "or." For simple "yes"/"no" questions, the alternative can be left implied. Generally, you should present alternatives to respondents explicitly to avoid ambiguity. When required, read any categories in a list to the respondent.

**Avoid negatives.** Questions are usually worded to avoid using "not," "none," and so on. If negatives must be used, there should be only one per question. When you ask a question containing a negative, you must pay close attention to the respondent's answer. (Probing may be required to confirm that the respondent understood.)

**Do not use leading or "loaded" questions.** A **leading** question suggests to the respondent the answer that the researcher wants. Opinion questions are obviously more prone to this. A **loaded** question contains strong wording that tends to invoke an emotional response. Again, opinion questions are most susceptible.

**Soften the blow of personal or sensitive questions.** When you switch from one topic to another, you should always use a **lead-in statement** (for example, "And now I'm going to ask you a few questions about . . ."). Such statements are particularly important when you move from the main survey topic into personal questions like age, marital status or income. A well-designed survey will always include a transition statement.

On sensitive subjects, respondents tend to give answers they think are socially acceptable. You can reduce any potential bias this causes by using a lead-in statement before asking the direct question. If lead-in statements are needed, they will appear on the questionnaire and you must read them as part of the question.

Treat sensitive questions the same as you treat others: read them at the same pace, in the same tone of voice and in a relaxed, comfortable fashion. Ask the question exactly as worded on the questionnaire/screen and wait for an answer. If you expect a problem with a question you consider personal, sensitive or delicate, the respondent will pick up on it—and you'll likely find yourself with one.

#### 4.3 Using the questionnaire/survey screens in computer-assisted interviewing

The survey questions are the basic tools used to collect survey data. Question wording and logical question order are important considerations when designing questionnaires or computer-assisted interviews. Because researchers need to combine the data collected from all interviews, they must be collected in a uniform manner. This means that all people in the sample must be asked the same questions in the same way.

You should remember to:

1. **Ask questions exactly as worded.** Research has shown that even inadvertent or very slight word changes can change the response obtained. If questions are rephrased or response categories are altered by some interviewers, the responses cannot be accurately combined with the responses obtained by interviewers who adhered strictly to the question wording.
2. **Ask questions in the order presented.** Question sequence is planned for continuity. The sequence is also arranged so that early questions will not adversely affect the respondent's answers to later questions. For these reasons, the interviewer must adhere to the paths directed on the paper questionnaire.
3. **Ask every question specified.** Sometimes the respondent, in answering one question, also answers another question that appears later in the interview. However, it is important to ask every question. In this situation, you might say, "You've already told me something about this, but this next section asks . . ." This indicates that you are aware of the earlier response and you are asking for the respondent's co-operation to answer the question again.
4. **Ask questions in a positive manner.** Some interviewers feel uncomfortable when asking certain types of questions and adopt an apologetic attitude; for example:

"You might not want to answer this question, but . . ."

"This question probably won't make much sense to you . . ."

Such statements negatively affect the flow of the interview and have a tendency to change the respondent's answers.

If you have any doubts about the importance or objectives of any question, check your manual or ask your supervisor for an explanation.



5. **Explain delays between questions, especially during telephone interviews.** Some answers will take longer to record than others. You can explain this to the respondent by saying, "Please excuse the delay, I'm writing down/entering the information you gave me."

CAI interviews should be supported by an online help system that allows interviewers to navigate easily and quickly through the questions. Ideally, telephone respondents should not be able to determine whether the interview is being conducted on paper or a computer. Occasionally, computer screens take a long time to be "refreshed", resulting in pauses in the interview. On the telephone, you must explain to the respondent that you are waiting for your computer screen.

6. **Repeat and clarify questions that are misunderstood or misinterpreted.** Questions are phrased to be understood by respondents all over the country, and most of the people you interview will understand them. Occasionally, however, a respondent may misunderstand or misinterpret, particularly when the question involves numbers. When this happens, repeat the question as it is written. If you still do not get an appropriate response, you may have to probe.
7. **Pay particular attention to skip patterns.** To ensure a respondent replies to all applicable questions, survey questions are ordered according to whether or not they apply to all or only some respondents. A "filter" question (sometimes called a "skip" question) determines whether subsequent questions are applicable and directs the flow through the questionnaire. You must pay particular attention to filter questions and watch for "instructions to interviewer" on the questionnaire. You must also be familiar with the flow patterns of computer-assisted interviews.

#### 4.4 Probing techniques

Probing is a technique experienced interviewers use to obtain the needed information. Even the best survey questions with willing respondents occasionally elicit inadequate responses. Sometimes, respondents may not know the answer to a question. Or, they may misunderstand or misinterpret the question and as a result the answer may be incomplete, unclear or inconsistent with other information. When this happens, you will have to probe.

There are five basic types of probes: rephrasing the question; pausing; rereading the question; asking for more information; and zeroing-in. Any probe must be **controlled** and **neutral**. Some probes are only good in certain situations. As you become more experienced, you begin to easily substitute one for another and quickly find the probe most suitable for the problem.

Sometimes, even when you have used these probes as effectively as possible, the respondent may still not be able to give you the precise answer you need. When this happens, you should record the respondent's answer in the "Comments" section.

### Probing—Examples

#### Example 1: Rereading the question

Sometimes a respondent will not understand a question, will get off the subject or will give you an answer that does not fit the question. When this happens, reread the question, emphasizing the most important words.

*Interviewer:* What was the main reason why you did not look for work last week?

*Respondent:* What's the point? Don't you ever read the newspaper? For 30 years I worked in that store. Didn't miss a single day in all that time. What else do I know? That store was my whole life, and now it's gone.

*Interviewer:* [pausing briefly] Yes, I can understand that, but tell me; what was the **main** reason why you did not look for work last week?

*Respondent:* Like I said before, I had a confectionary for 30 years. Business had been slow the last couple of years and finally I went bankrupt. I'd like to work, but there's nothing else around in that line of work.

By rereading the question, you will signal the respondent in a neutral way to listen more carefully and to focus on the question.

### Example 2: Rephrasing the question

When repeating the question doesn't work, probe further by asking neutral questions. Your probe has to control the respondent's train of thought as well as elicit more information. Probing has to be done carefully: you must never introduce bias by suggesting answers. You are pushing the respondent—take great care in how you do it.

*Interviewer:* Do you have a definite date to start your new job?

*Respondent:* I'm hoping things will work themselves out down at the plant. There have been some shutdowns over the winter, but they should be back in production by the spring.

*Interviewer:* [probe] What do you think will happen?

*Respondent:* Well, your guess is as good as mine.

This is a weak probe because: the respondent has not answered the question; the probe was not controlled since it did not help the respondent focus on the question; and the interviewer received an irrelevant response and must now probe for more information.

Here's another example.

*Interviewer:* Do you have a definite date to start your new job?

*Respondent:* I'm hoping things will work themselves out down at the plant by then. There've been some shutdowns over the winter. But they should be back in production by the spring.

*Interviewer:* [probe] So, would you say you do have a definite date to start your new job?

*Respondent:* Yes, I guess so. As I said, things are up in the air, but I hope I'll be starting the job the first of April.



This is a controlled probe, but biased because the respondent was forced to focus on the question; however, the interviewer was leading the respondent when he/she said, "So, would you say you have a definite date to start your new job?" The respondent was unsure, so he or she simply accepted the suggestion as his or her own answer.

Let's try this again.

*Interviewer:* Do you have a definite date to start your new job?

*Respondent:* I'm hoping I will, but things are kind of unstable at the plant right now.

*Interviewer:* [probe] I can understand the situation, but tell me, do you have a definite date to start your new job?

*Respondent:* Well, the talk around is that the company may be on the ropes. No orders. The economy's not too good. So, I don't know. I'm getting kind of worried. I guess I don't have a definite date that I will be starting.

This is a controlled neutral probe. In this case, the interviewer acknowledged the respondent's concern but immediately got back to the question. The interviewer controlled the respondent's train of thought by repeating the question (which is neutral, because the question does not suggest an answer) and let the respondent focus on the question.

### Example 3: The pause

Simply waiting expectantly can be the most effective controlled and neutral probe. Pausing lets the respondent know that he or she has not answered the question satisfactorily and that you are waiting for an appropriate answer. You must get used to silence. Be careful, however, not to pause too long during a telephone interview.

Example 4: Asking for more information

Respondents may not always know how much or what kind of information is required. They need you to let them know how detailed their answers should be. Sometimes, you can just ask for more information using questions like, "Can you tell me a little more about that?" or "Anything else?" or even, "I'm not sure I understand."

For questions requiring specific information (for example, days, hours), it is important to get the respondent to convert answers into the appropriate units. Don't assume that an answer of "about half an hour" means 30 minutes. If you need the response in minutes, probe by asking "How many minutes did . . .?"

*Interviewer:* Counting from the end of last week, in how many weeks will you start to work at your new job?

*Respondent:* Not very long.

*Interviewer:* Can you tell me specifically what you have in mind when you say, "Not very long"?

*Respondent:* Oh, I suppose by the end of the month.

*Interviewer:* So, in terms of weeks, that would be . . . [pause to give the respondent time to think].

*Respondent:* Well, I'm to report on the first Monday of next month, so counting this week that would . . . um . . . three weeks.

*Interviewer:* That's fine, thank you.

### Example 5: Zeroing-in

Respondents may feel uneasy at times when they cannot give you the most precise or exact information possible. In most cases, their opinion or best recollection is better than no information at all. Forcing a choice may seem awkward to you, but it is not forcing the respondent to make an arbitrary choice. Actually, what you are doing is motivating people to think about the answers.

Zeroing-in is also used when a respondent cannot remember information.

- |                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| <i>Interviewer:</i> | Last week, how many hours were you away from work for any reason? (holiday, vacation, illness, labour dispute, etc.)   |
| <i>Respondent:</i>  | I don't even want to think about last week. Boy, did I feel rotten. I missed all kinds of time.  |
| <i>Interviewer:</i> | I'm sorry to hear that, but last week how many hours were you away from work for any reason? (holiday vacation, illness, labour dispute, etc.)                                 |
| <i>Respondent:</i>  | [clears throat] I must've picked up that flu bug that's been going around. There's just no way I could've made it to work on Wednesday. My temperature was up to 101 you know. |
| <i>Interviewer:</i> | Un huh [pause].  |
| <i>Respondent:</i>  | Well now, let's see. I only worked a half-shift on Tuesday, so there's four hours and add on another eight for Wednesday.  |
| <i>Interviewer:</i> | So then, altogether you missed [pause] . . .   |
| <i>Respondent:</i>  | Well, altogether it would have been 12 hours.  |

*Probing is an art.* You should probe without making respondents feel that their judgement is being questioned. Respondents must not get the impression that the interview is a quiz or a cross-examination.

Respondents also tend to answer in ways that will be socially acceptable. If you allow your own values and attitudes to enter the interview, your respondents' answers could well reflect these rather than their own, thus introducing a bias into the survey results.

Respondents must not feel some answers are more "acceptable" than others. In general, let nothing in your words or manner imply criticism, surprise, approval or disapproval, agreement or disagreement with an answer.

#### **4.5 Ending the interview**

The final step of the interview process is to ensure all the necessary information is legibly recorded. At the end of each interview, check over the questionnaire thoroughly. Scan entries for completion and perform all necessary edits. You may not have enough time to do this in the respondent's presence. Therefore, **it is important to thank the respondent courteously for all the information, but leave an opening for a future interview.**

You must also properly exit and save all CAI interviews. Note any problems with the hardware or software and attach your comments to the relevant interview or case number.

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## Non-response and call-back strategy

In statistical surveys, each selected dwelling, household, person or business in the sample represents several others. One of the principal factors affecting the accuracy and "representativeness" of the survey results is the response rate. If a significant portion of the selected sample does not respond, one can **never** be sure how their answers might have affected the final results.

### 5.1 Call and call-back strategy

Initial call and call-back procedures greatly affect survey response rates and costs. You may use the following suggestions as a guide.

- Plan your visits/calls so as not to inconvenience respondents (i.e., not too early in the morning, at mealtimes, or too late at night). Be flexible. If you have obviously reached a business or a household at a bad time, arrange to call back at a more convenient time.
- For visits to the respondent, organize your materials and plan your route carefully. Through efficient organizing and planning, non-response, call-backs and travelling time can be kept to a minimum.
- Note the specified respondent and plan to call when that respondent is most likely to be available. For example, if you are to interview a member of the household who is working, try to make your first call late in the afternoon, early in the evening, or on the weekend when the respondent is most likely to be at home. Similarly, if you are to interview a comptroller for a business survey, try to call in the morning between 9:30 and 12:00, or in the afternoon from 1:00 to 4:00.
- When unable to contact a respondent, you must try calling on a different day and at a different hour. For personal interviews, after you have called twice and still cannot locate the respondent, try asking a neighbour about the best time to find someone at the selected dwelling.
- If you are conducting a telephone follow up of a survey that has been mailed to a respondent but the respondent has not as yet responded to the survey, be prepared to introduce the survey. You should know all aspects of the survey so you can persuade reluctant respondents to participate.



## 5.2 Strategies for obtaining a personal interview

If you suspect that someone is not answering the door, wait a few seconds before knocking again, then knock again, a little louder. When possible, try knocking on another door and investigate the backyard.

If your first visit is unsuccessful, leave a "Notice of Visit" with a letter and a brochure about your survey in the mailbox. Indicate that you will return or will try to contact the respondent by telephone.

Try to obtain the selected respondent's name and the best time to call by any reasonable means. In rural areas, you can look for a names on mailboxes, or ask neighbours. Additional sources are real estate agents, assessment authorities, fire halls, regional health nurses, regional district or municipal offices, forestry and mining companies and residential associations. In urban apartment buildings, you can try the lobby directory or the janitor or building superintendent. Neighbours, mailboxes or the city directory may also be helpful.

Once you have a name, look it up in the telephone book and if it is not there, try to obtain it from the telephone operator. You can use a reverse directory (found in libraries) to obtain a telephone number from an address. If you find a telephone number, then you can try to reach the respondent. Be sure to verify that the respondent lives at the selected address.

**NEVER RESORT TO UNETHICAL PRACTICES TO GAIN AN INTERVIEW.** Using false pretences or threatening respondents are strictly forbidden tactics. NEVER quiz third parties about the respondent.

Telephone answering machines are becoming increasingly common in homes. If you must leave a message in the machine, include your name and the name of your organization and the telephone number where you can be reached.

## 5.3 Minimizing refusals

Sometimes, non-response is beyond your control (for example, the selected respondent may be away for the duration of the survey period or may be too ill to be interviewed). In all other cases, however, you should make every effort to secure an interview. Keep the following in mind to avoid refusals.

- When respondents refuse to participate in the survey, it is usually because they do not have enough information about the survey or your organization, or the timing of the call is wrong. If you are well-prepared, you should obtain the respondent's co-operation. Be sensitive to the respondent: apologize for bad timing (rather than risk a refusal) and suggest a call-back time.



- Sometimes, the respondent's refusal will not be explicit (for example, just not interested). When this happens, pick an issue (time, confidentiality, purpose or importance of the survey) and begin to discuss it. This usually has the effect of forcing the respondent to express a more specific concern, one you can deal with directly.
- Remember that you must speak to the selected respondent directly to explain the survey. Do not accept someone else's word that the selected respondent is unwilling to participate.
- Listen carefully. Focus on one item: Is there a reason why the respondent does not want to participate? Find common ground so you can relate to the respondent.
- Start a conversation. Share a joke. Let them know their time is worthwhile.
- Negotiate with the respondent. Suggest that you try a few questions; once you get started, he or she may realize how non-threatening it is. Make the respondent aware that he or she can refuse single questions.
- Know your material well. Be ready to give honest, direct answers to questions. Knowing your material puts respondents at ease, adds professionalism and gives you the confidence to "sell" the survey.

When all else fails and you are faced with an adamant and vocal refusal, withdraw politely. Above all, do not allow a tough interview to influence your next call. Remember, you are speaking to a different person each time you interview; it is important to maintain a positive attitude for that next call.

#### **5.4 Handling delicate situations**

Periodically, a situation that challenges your good judgement and tact arises. The following illustrations and guidelines for coping with unusual circumstances are by no means complete. Fortunately, in most cases, common sense will prevail.

- Avoid asking respondents to supply answers in front of others, as all information is confidential. If respondents have visitors, ask if it would be better for you to return later. If you are given permission to conduct the interview, indicate that some of the questions may be personal. If there is no objection to having others present, proceed with the interview.

- You will occasionally meet respondents who are new to Canada, who may be suspicious or hostile because they do not understand the purpose or content of the survey. You must be sensitive and tactful. You can overcome language difficulties by passing the respondent to an interviewer who speaks the same language. If the survey is not sensitive or personal, other family members can sometimes be used as interpreters.
- When you are faced with an adamant and vocal refusal, withdraw politely and report the incident to your supervisor. Your untimely persistence could provide unfavourable publicity for your organization and may damage your supervisor's chances of winning the respondent's co-operation.
- Never argue with or threaten a respondent, either directly or by implication. Reliable and complete information requires respondents' willing co-operation.
- Never discuss politics or other controversial topics or involve yourself in debates with the media about your work. Your job is to collect statistical information, not to enter into debates.
- Television, radio and the press may publicize the collection activities of your organization. Be alert to media coverage and interest in your survey.
- When respondents are in a state of obvious personal hardship such as a serious illness or bereavement, assess each situation. You may decide to proceed with the interview, arrange for a convenient call-back time, or terminate the interview.
- Meeting respondents who live in highrise apartments is sometimes a problem, because the intercom is a poor way to make the first contact. Try to establish contact with the superintendent, landlord or owner of the building. Explain the purpose of your visit and request permission to enter the building. If building authorities are unco-operative and flatly refuse to admit you, politely withdraw and notify your supervisor.
- Never resort to unethical practices to conduct an interview. When you ask neighbours questions, never go beyond finding out how or when you can contact the respondent.
- Finally, remember your personal rights. If you are threatened with abuse, verbal threats, physical harassment or violence, withdraw immediately and report the incident to your supervisor. **NEVER ARGUE: WITHDRAW IMMEDIATELY.**

## Safety

Interviewers are often required to work evenings to accommodate respondents' schedules. This section provides important information you can use when conducting personal interviews, as well as on your way to and from work.

Interviewer safety is the responsibility of every employer. It is **your** responsibility as an interviewer to know how to prevent an accident, injury or work-related incident. The following information was prepared in consultation with the police and other safety professionals. Please read this advice on personal safety carefully.

### *Starting out—for personal interviews at businesses or private homes:*

- Wear proper walking shoes to avoid trips, slips and falls.
- Wear suitable clothing. In severe weather conditions it could save your life.
- Listen to road reports (especially in winter) for information on driving conditions.
- Establish informal "buddy systems" with your family, friends or co-workers. Tell them your planned destination and time of return.
- Carry only a small amount of money.
- If possible, leave your purse at home. If not, carry a small purse tucked under your arm. If someone grabs your purse, do not resist.
- If you plan to return home after dark, leave an outside light on. Use a timer for inside lights.
- If you suspect someone may have broken into your home, **DO NOT ENTER**. Drive to a neighbour's home or the nearest telephone and call police.

### **Your car:**

- Keep your car in good operating condition. Ensure that the brakes, lights, tires, wipers and car battery are in good working order.
- Check your gas gauge before your start. A full tank of gas could save your life in winter. Check your tires frequently for wear and adequate tire pressure.
- Equip your car with a winter survival kit including a shovel, sand and booster cables. Keep additional warm clothing, a sleeping bag, flashlight, candles, matches and snack food/juice packs in the car. Ensure you know how to safely jump-start your car.
- Lock all valuables, including confidential material, in the trunk.

### **Driving:**

- Familiarize yourself with your assignment area. Check maps and addresses **before** you start to drive. Never read maps while driving.
- Have your keys ready as you approach your car. Check the back seat and floor for intruders before opening the door.
- Keep your purse or wallet out of sight.
- Drive defensively. Exercise caution at intersections and watch for pedestrians.
- Slow down in poor weather conditions.
- If possible, travel on well-lit streets. In the evening, especially, windows should be rolled up and doors should be locked at all times.
- If you think that another car is following you, do not drive home. Drive to a service station, drive-through restaurant, or the nearest police station.
- If someone tries to get into your car, drive off immediately. If this is not possible, lean on your horn to draw attention to what is happening.
- If you have car trouble in a dark area or on the highway, turn on your four-way flashers and raise the hood of the car. Return to your vehicle and stay in the car with the doors locked, until help arrives. Do not open the doors to a stranger; instead lower your window slightly. Ask the person to call for assistance.

- Do not stop to offer help to a stranded motorist. Stop at the next phone booth and call for assistance.
- Never pick up hitchhikers.

#### **Parking:**

- Park in well-lit, busy places. Avoid alleys, parks and tunnels. If you must park in a dark area or have to walk some distance from the car, use caution.
- Keep your car doors locked and passenger windows up.
- Park in an unblocked lane or driveway that provides a quick exit if necessary. In rural areas, unknown road conditions could prevent you from being able to turn your vehicle around or from leaving quickly.
- Be cautious in underground parking garages. Stay in open, well-lit areas near exits. Park away from pillars and stairwells.

#### **Public transportation:**

- Avoid isolated bus stops.
- If your bus stop is not well lit, walk to another stop, even if it is less convenient. Complain to the transit authorities.
- If you are alone or it is late at night, sit near the driver. If someone bothers you, tell the driver immediately.
- When you step off a bus at night, check to see if you are being followed. If you think you are, cross the street. If you are still being followed, go to the nearest home, service station or store and call the police.
- Use care boarding and leaving the bus in bad weather. Ice and snow can collect on steps and may cause you to slip, or you may step onto an icy spot on the sidewalk.

#### **Walking:**

- Plan your route. **Do not** take shortcuts through parks, alleys, buildings, or vacant lots.
- Walk on the curb side of the sidewalk to avoid surprise from an alley.



- Do not overburden yourself by carrying unnecessary items or bulky purses.
- Walk with an air of determination and authority. Timid people make easier targets.
- Be alert, especially when approaching shrubbery, dark doorways, pillars, etc.
- Always carry a flashlight. Use it after dark and in dark hallways.
- Watch out for uneven, broken or poorly constructed surfaces or stairs.
- Hold on to stairway handrails. If a rail is not provided, proceed with caution.
- Walk on the side of the street opposite the parked cars to avoid an opening door or sudden movement by someone inside the car.
- If someone in a car follows you when you are walking, change direction. The car will have to turn around and will then be on the opposite side of the street. If the car continues to follow you, make a visible point of taking out a pen and paper. Look at the licence plate and write down the number. Walk into the nearest store, restaurant or the nearest residence. Call the police.

#### **Apartments:**

- Be especially alert when approaching recessed entrances to apartment buildings.
- Ensure that stairwells are well lit and locate unlocked emergency exits.
- Watch for and be cautious on wet floors in the lobby and on stairs.
- Check with apartment superintendents if you need help.

#### **At the door:**

- Ask your supervisor about any potential problem areas.
- Beware of dogs and other animals. If warnings are posted, try to call the respondent to the door or telephone for an appointment before entering the premises. Carry a self-opening umbrella for protection.
- Placing your foot against the bottom of a screen door will often prevent a dog from lunging at the door and pushing it open.

- Stand to the side of the door when facing it to avoid a door swinging violently outwards.
- If a respondent slams the door, leave the dwelling.
- If you are invited into a dwelling, use common sense: stay by the door to ensure a quick exit.
- Use extreme caution when faced with domestic disputes and intoxicated or violent respondents. Leave immediately.
- If you are threatened when conducting an interview, leave immediately. Call your supervisor as soon as possible.
- Record hazards such as dangerous dogs, broken stairs, etc., in case future personal visits are required.

#### **Emotional self-defence:**

If you ever feel that your personal safety is threatened, you may have to be assertive and show you are serious about what you say. Police forces suggest the following:

- Maintain eye contact.
- Use statements beginning with "I," for example, "I don't like that," instead of "stop that."
- Speak in a firm, confident voice.
- Match your facial expression to your verbal message; that is, don't smile when you are angry.
- Use short statements.
- Repeat your message like a broken record, because your intentions may not be recognized.
- Don't apologize for demanding your rights or privacy.
- Don't offer excuses or explanations.
- Put your own needs first. Refuse to sacrifice your safety for fear of being rude.

**If you are confronted:**

The best way to avoid an attack is to **prevent** it. Common sense is your best protection. For example, talking to a would-be attacker may reduce the possibility of attack. However, if you are attacked, police recommend the following defensive techniques:

- Scream and run to the nearest lighted residence or business. Cries for help have often discouraged attackers. Call police immediately.
- If you have a purse and robbery appears to be the motive for the attack, throw the purse away from you to distance the attacker. Run to safety.
- If you can't run, use any available object for a weapon, such as an umbrella, interviewer binder, etc.
- If you are overpowered by an armed assailant, your options are limited. You must decide whether or not to resist. An attacker's behaviour is unpredictable and you must rely on your common sense.
- Aim for vital parts and make it hurt: gouge with your keys or thumb and scratch with your fingernails.
- If you are attacked from behind, kick down onto the instep of the attacker, kick at the shins or grab any finger and bend it backwards.
- While waiting for the police, write a description of the assailant (hair and eye colour, height, weight, age, type of clothing, glasses, moustache, etc.). Note the type of car and the licence number. Write down the time and location of the incident.

## Questions and answers

Most people will go through an interview without asking you any questions. However, others will ask for information during the introduction or after you've started the interview.

You can prepare for these situations by becoming familiar with the types of questions most often asked, and by learning how to deal with them. Here are some examples:

### *What is a sample survey?*

A sample survey is the process of gathering information about a large number of people/businesses/organizations by interviewing a selected group of them. The sample is selected to represent the total group. The use of a sample for surveying not only reduces the cost of interviewing everyone, but lightens the burden on the group as well.

### *How was I chosen for the survey?*

*Note: each survey will differ, of course, on exactly **how** a respondent was selected. The following example (for Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey) briefly explains how a dwelling was selected and why it is important that the household participate in the survey:*

Statistics Canada uses a scientific sampling method to select your dwelling. Every member of your household represents about 160 people of the same age and sex. You were selected to be representative of many others and you cannot be left out or replaced if the survey is to be representative.

### *Can I be interviewed in another language?*

*Note: Before the survey starts, inform yourself about the availability of interviewers who speak other languages. (Note: Statistics Canada interviews are offered to be conducted in either English or French.) If possible, offer the respondent an interview in the language of his/her choice. If not, ask: "Perhaps there is someone else in your home such as a teenaged son or daughter, who could assist with this interview."*

***Can you please take me off your mailing list? I no longer want to participate in your survey.***

I'm sorry, but I am not authorized to remove respondents from our mailing list. You have been randomly selected to represent [a specific industry, group, etc.] and it is very important that all [institutions, individuals] selected do respond to help us complete the picture. (Note: if this interview is the final interview for the survey, tell the respondent. Otherwise, if you believe the respondent will refuse to participate in the next survey, make a note to advise your supervisor so that appropriate followup can be done).

***Who gave you my name?***

*Note: In many cases, you will not have the respondent's name—instead, you will be calling a telephone number or visiting a street address. If you were given the name of the respondent, for example from another family member or a neighbour, say so.*

*For some surveys, offering to record the household members as "Unknown, No. 1", "Unknown, No. 2" etc. may be the only condition that the respondent will consent to. Always check with your supervisor ahead of time as to what entries are acceptable for your survey.*

***How long will the interview take?***

The interview should take approximately XX minutes. (Be honest. Most telephone interviews are short. Be prepared for the respondent to ask how long your survey will take. Once the interview has started, offer to call back if the respondent cannot complete the interview at this time.)

***What is this survey all about?***

*Note: Be well informed. Know your material "inside out" so you can willingly (and concisely!) provide honest and knowledgeable answers to alleviate a respondent's concerns. You will be much more convincing in selling your survey if you can answer questions on the purpose of the survey.*

***The government has too much information already!***

*Note: this is not a question - it is more of a comment. Be prepared for comments as well!*

Canadian society is dynamic and our attitudes and social and economic conditions are constantly changing. It is important to monitor these changes so that the government can react accordingly.



***Is this survey mandatory?***

This survey is an important source of information for planning programmes and policies that affect all Canadians. Although the Statistics Act gives the authority to collect information, we are seeking your willing co-operation. We need your help in collecting reliable information. The Act guarantees that any information you provide will remain strictly confidential.

***I'm not interested. Can't you interview someone else?***

This is a sample survey so I must interview residents in this building. If I change the random selection of dwellings in the sample, I will introduce error into the final statistics.

***Do you honestly believe this information will be kept confidential?***

Statistics Canada goes to extraordinary measures to safeguard the information it collects. All employees of Statistics Canada are under oath and can be prosecuted or severely penalized if they do not safeguard that confidentiality.

The Statistics Act guarantees that information identifying individuals will not be released to anyone outside of Statistics Canada without their written consent. Revenue Canada, the police, the courts, even the Canadian Security Intelligence Service do not have access to this information.

***Why should I take part in this survey? How will it affect me?***

As Canadian citizens we share a responsibility to take part and provide information. Your honest answers are necessary in compiling current, up-to-date statistics. You may not be directly affected by the outcome of the survey, but you represent [# of] people in Canada. Your family, friends, neighbours, or people in your community could be affected by the results of the survey.

***Why did you choose me? I'm retired/disabled/unemployed/not looking for work, etc.***

You represent an important segment of the population and are affected by changes in society as much as anyone else. To conduct an accurate survey it is necessary to interview people from all walks of life.

***Is this really going to help me get a job?***

Although it may not directly help you get a job, our statistics will show which regions of the province and which fields or occupations are hardest hit by unemployment.

***What is a longitudinal survey?***

A longitudinal survey follows the same people over time in order to identify changes they may experience that are related to the survey subject.

***How do I know someone will not break into your computer and access my information?***

There are measures to protect the data on the computer so no one can access the information once it is entered. Your data will be scrambled before they are transmitted. If anyone tried, they would be unable to read the data during transmission.

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## DEFINITIONS

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The following definitions<sup>1</sup> are commonly used in survey research. As an interviewer, you should familiarize yourself with these terms:

**Accuracy:** The extent to which the survey results approach the true (but unknown) value of a particular characteristic of a population.

**Administrative data:** Data available from the information recorded in administrative records, applications, reports, etc.

**Analysis:** The summary and interpretation of data collected by a survey that relate them to the survey objectives.

**Anonymity:** In a survey, anonymity exists if the identity of each respondent who has returned a completed questionnaire is not known to anyone other than the respondent and no respondent can be identified by inference from the results of the survey. If code numbers or other identifiers are put on the questionnaire when sent out, anonymity does not exist.

**Attribute:** A characteristic of a person, object or concept that can be described only in terms of categories (e.g., marital status, sex, hair colour, etc.) rather than in quantitative or numerical units.

**Bias:** The tendency, during any step in a survey, to systematically favour or give advantage to answers or findings that will cause resulting estimates to deviate in one direction from the true value. Bias may or may not be intentional.

**Call-back:** Follow-up conducted in person or by telephone.

**Case study:** A method of teaching or study in which the relevant experiences of a person, organization, etc., are recorded and analyzed in order to gain insight into a type of conduct assumed to be common to a whole group or category of people, organizations, etc., or that illustrates a particular type of situation.

**Census:** The collection of information about all units in a population, sometimes also called a 100% sample survey. (When capitalized, "Census" usually refers to the national Census of Population and Housing.)

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1. Adapted from Definitions of Terms Used In Survey Research by E. Wilhelm of the Federal Statistical Activities Secretariat, R. Dibbs and W. Shastry of the Information Bank and Special Surveys Methodology Sub-Division, Statistics Canada.

**Census metropolitan area (CMA):** A term used by Statistics Canada to describe the main labour market of an urbanized core (or continuous built-up area) having a population of 100,000 or more.

**Characteristics:** A distinguishing trait or quality.

**Closed-ended question:** A type of question that provides a respondent with a limited number of specific answer choices.

**Cluster:** A set of units of a population grouped on the basis of some well-defined criteria. The cluster may be an existing grouping of the population (a city block, a hospital), or conceptual (the area covered by a grid imposed on a map).

**Coding:** A process for converting questionnaire information to numbers or symbols to facilitate subsequent data processing operations. Sometimes this involves interpreting responses and classifying them into predetermined classes.

**Cohort study:** A study, at two or more points in time, of certain characteristics of a sub-population's members who have some particular common attribute, e.g., persons born in a specific year, graduates of a specific year, etc.

**Computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI):** A type of telephone interviewing in which the interviewer keys in answers to questions, as they are received, onto a data entry keyboard. A viewing screen automatically displays the appropriate question to be asked next or, if warranted, an error message.

**Confidentiality:** Maintaining the privacy of information provided by individual respondents to a survey, and ensuring the information about individual respondents cannot be derived from the published survey results.

**Continuing survey:** A survey carried out at regular intervals or on a repetitive schedule, such as an ongoing TV audience survey.

**Coverage:** The degree to which a survey includes those units of the population relevant to the survey objectives.

**Custom-designed survey:** A survey designed expressly to meet the particular needs of a sponsor.

**Data:** Collective reference to individual items of information (always plural).

**Data capture:** The process of transferring survey data from questionnaires or coding forms to a machine-readable medium (tape, discs, etc.).



**Demographic variable:** A characteristic pertaining to the size, geographic distribution and density of human populations. Classic demographic variables include only age, sex, marital status, fertility, mortality and migration, but common usage has tended to include a wider variety of social characteristics such as education, income, employment, etc.

**Diary:** A type of questionnaire in which respondents record, for a specified period, their activities of interest to the survey e.g., purchases, TV viewing, trips made, as the activities take place.

**Dwelling:** A set of living quarters in which one or more persons reside or could reside.

**Editing:** The process of checking fields of every record or certain predetermined combinations of fields of every record to ensure they contain valid entries.

**Enumeration area (EA):** The geographic area canvassed by one interviewer in the Census of Population and Housing. EAs are units that are well defined and readily identifiable on maps and in the field, but are unique to a particular census.

**Error:** The difference between the observed or reported value of a characteristic and the true value. Errors may be random, which tend to cancel out, or systematic (directional), which introduce bias.

*Non-response error:* Errors occurring due to non-interviews or non-response to a question on a questionnaire.

*Non-sampling error:* Errors caused by factors other than sampling, e.g., errors in coverage, response errors, non-response errors, faulty questionnaire design, interviewer recording errors, processing errors, etc.

*Processing errors:* Errors that may occur during any process in which data are transformed from questionnaires, control sheets, etc., into sets of tabulations and estimates.

*Response error:* The difference between the true answer to a question and the respondent's answer for it; may be caused by the respondent, the interviewer, or their interaction.

**Filter question:** A type of question used to exclude a respondent from a subsequent question (or series of questions) if it or they do not apply to the particular respondent.

**Flashcard or showcard:** A card shown to respondents in personal interviews to assist them in making a response, or in understanding a particular question of a visual nature.

**Focus group interview or group discussion:** An interviewing technique whereby respondents are interviewed in a group setting; used to stimulate respondents to talk freely, express ideas or explore attitudes and feelings about a subject.

**Follow-up:** One or more additional attempts (in person, by telephone, letter, etc.) to contact a designated respondent when the initial attempt did not produce a completed interview or questionnaire.

**Frame:** A list, map or conceptual specification of the units comprising the survey population from which respondents can be selected, e.g., telephone or city directory, list of members of a particular association or group.

**Household:** A person or group of persons who occupy a dwelling.

**Longitudinal study:** A type of study in which observations are made for the same specific types of analysis over a substantial period of time. The actual units of analysis may change from wave to wave.

**Mall intercept:** A type of survey in which passers-by in a shopping mall are asked to participate in a survey.

**Non-response rate:** The number of persons who are not available, not able, refuse or neglect to complete the questionnaire, expressed as a percentage of the original sample; can also be applied to individual questions.

**Omnibus survey:** A survey containing several sections that is initiated and conducted by a survey research organization at specific times or stated intervals. Each section is custom-designed to meet the needs of an individual client. Each client receives the results of his/her section of the survey on an exclusive and confidential basis. Also referred to as "shared-cost," "multi-client" or "co-op" studies.

**Open-ended question:** A type of question that the respondent answers in his/her own words. As the type of range of response sought isn't indicated, the respondent may interpret the scope of the question as he/she sees fit.

**Panel:** A sample of individuals or organizations who serve as respondents to a series of surveys over a period of time.

**Poll:** The questioning of persons selected at random or by quota to obtain opinions on a specific issue(s) or topic(s) of current general interest.

**Pilot test:** A small-scale survey using respondents from the target population to test the integrated functioning of all component parts of the survey operation. Revisions can then be made as necessary before the full-scale survey is undertaken.

**Population:** The complete group of units to which survey results are to apply. (These units may be persons, animals, objects, businesses, trips, etc.)

**Precision:** A measure of the closeness of the sample estimates to the result from a census taken under identical conditions.

**Pre-test:** A preliminary test of individual component parts of a survey to check that each component functions as planned. Each component can then be revised as needed.

**Probe or probing:** A technique used by an interviewer to help a respondent to expand or clarify his/her thinking on a topic or to assist recall about an event or events. It does not favour one particular answer over others.

**Proxy response:** Information provided by someone other than the respondent who is the subject of interest.

**Qualitative study:** A (usually small-scale) study of a non-probability sample often used as an exploratory tool to identify the range of behaviour, attitudes and spontaneous vocabulary of the population of interest in relation to a specific topic, e.g., focus groups. The sample is usually too small to provide statistical estimates or data that can be analyzed numerically.

**Quality control:** Monitoring an operation or a process as it occurs in order to ensure that a prescribed level of quality is maintained.

**Quantitative study:** A type of study in which questions ask for specific answers that can be recorded in discrete categories. These answers can then be used to produce tabulations expressed as counts, proportions, rankings, averages, etc.

**Questionnaire:** A series of questions designed to elicit information on one or more topics from a respondent.

**Random:** A situation where the occurrence (and recurrences) of an event cannot be predetermined but have some known probability of happening.

**Random digit dialing (RDD):** A system of selecting respondents for a telephone survey by using telephone digits generated randomly by computer; used to improve coverage by reaching unlisted and recently-installed numbers.

**Rare population:** A population with a specific and unique characteristic but which constitutes only a very small fraction of a more general population. Some procedures for locating individuals (such as screening) are often necessary to identify members of this rare population from the larger group.

**Rating scale:** A type of survey question (or set of questions) designed to record the direction and strength of a respondent's attitude(s) toward a specified topic or topics. The best-known types of rating scales are: Thurston; Likert; Guttman; and semantic differential.

**Recall:** The need for respondents to remember facts, events, etc., from some point in the past in order to answer specific questions.

**Reference period:** The period of time to which questions and corresponding answers in a survey apply, usually specified in the questions.

**Re-interview:** The procedure of re-interviewing certain respondents to study response errors and/or evaluate interviewer performance.

**Reliability:** The extent to which a survey, if repeated using another (but statistically equivalent) sample and identical questionnaire and procedures, would produce the same results.

**Report:** Printed information on specified aspects of a survey, (e.g., a technical report, a statistical report (tabulations), an analytical report).

**Reporting:** Compilation of survey data and their publication in a specified form and format, most often as printed statistical tables and/or machine-readable data tapes.

**Respondent burden:** The effort, in terms of time and cost, required for respondents to provide satisfactory answers to a survey, sometimes causing them to be annoyed, angry or frustrated at being asked to participate. These feelings tend to escalate depending on the complexity, length and/or frequency of surveys.

**Respondent incentive:** A premium or gift offered to a prospective respondent as an incentive to respond to a survey.

**Response rate:** The number of interviews or questionnaires actually completed compared to the number assigned, usually expressed as a percentage. The response rate can also apply to individual questions.

**Representativeness of sample:** The degree to which a sample reflects the characteristics of the population from which it was chosen.



**Sample:** A part of the population selected for the purpose of studying certain characteristics of an entire population of interest.

*Probability sampling:* Any method of selecting units from a population in which:

- (a) every unit has a known and calculable chance (greater than zero) of being selected;
- (b) the sample is selected randomly; and
- (c) the probabilities of selection are used to project the results from the sample to the population.

*Simple random sampling (SRS):* The selection of a predetermined number of units from a population list so that each unit on the list has an equal chance of being included in the sample and each possible combination of units forming a sample has an equal chance of being selected.

*Area sampling:* A sampling procedure applied to a geographic area that selects units based on their location rather than inclusion on a list.

*Cluster sampling:* A type of sampling in which complete groups of units (clusters) are selected and a 100% sample of the units within the cluster taken.

*Multi-phase sampling:* A sampling procedure in which some information is collected from the whole sample and additional information is collected, at the same time or later, from subsamples of the entire sample, i.e., some units provide more information than others.

*Multi-stage sampling:* A sampling procedure in which a sample is selected in two or more successive stages. For example, the first stage could be a selection of city blocks, the second a selection of dwelling units within these blocks, and the third stage a selection of individuals within these households.

*Probability proportional to size (PPS):* A sampling technique used when sampling units vary in size and some measure of size is known. Units are selected with varying probabilities, in proportion to the size of the unit. If one sampling unit is twice as large as another, it is given twice the chance of being selected. For example, a 1,000-bed hospital has twice the chance of being selected as a 500-bed hospital.



*Replicated sampling:* Selecting a number of samples from a population rather than a single sample. Instead of one overall sample, a number of smaller samples of roughly equal size, called "replicates," are independently selected, each based upon the same sample design.

*Rotating sampling:* A type of sampling for continuing surveys in which part of the sampling units are dropped and replaced by an equivalent number of new units, using a consistent method of selection and the same survey frame.

*Stratified sampling:* A sampling procedure in which the population is divided into homogeneous subgroups or strata and samples are selected independently in each stratum.

*Systematic sampling:* Selecting units from a list using the selection interval (K) so that every "Kth" element on the list, following a random start between 1 and K, is included in the sample, e.g., 2nd, 8th, 14th, 20th—(where K= 6).

*Non-probability sampling:* Any method of selecting units in which the probability of selection is not known and cannot be calculated.

*Convenience or haphazard sampling:* The sample selection is based on convenience or availability.

*Judgement or purposive sampling:* A sample chosen on the assumption that personal judgement and expertise can be the basis of selection of units as typical or representative of the population of interest.

*Quota sampling:* A procedure where the number of respondents in each of several categories is specified in advance and the final selection of respondents is left to the interviewer, who proceeds until the quota for each category is filled.

*Snowball sampling:* A method of identifying members of a rare population in which a respondent with a specific characteristic suggests other persons with the same characteristic.

**Sample design:** A set of specifications that describe population, frame, survey units, sample size and sample selection method in detail.

**Sampling fraction:** The ratio of the sample size to the population size.

**Screening:** The process of checking whether an individual or a situation should be included in (or excluded from) a survey or survey questions, usually done as part of the survey itself.

**Segmentation:** The process of dividing a population into homogeneous sub-populations on the basis of specific groupings of characteristics (socio-economic, demographic, psychological, attitudinal, behavioral, etc.). Analytic procedures used to develop segments range from straightforward cross-tabulations to multi-variate techniques.

**Self-administered questionnaire:** A questionnaire that the respondent personally completes him or herself.

**Skip pattern:** A device used in some questionnaires to guide respondents (or interviewers) past any question(s) that do not apply to them.

**Standard question wording:** The wording of questions used to classify data (by variable) in a consistent way. For example, many survey organizations adopt a standard wording for demographic questions in all surveys, to reduce variations in answers that might be caused by different wording from one survey to another. It also aids comparability between surveys.

**Statistics:** Summary values of a variable or attribute calculated from a sample.

**Survey:** Collecting information about characteristics of interest from some or all units of a population, using well-defined concepts, methods and procedures, and the compiling such information into useful summary form.

**Syndicated survey:** A survey conducted by a research firm at specific times or stated intervals on any number of topics selected by the research firm, based on requests from clients. The survey uses a sample representative of the general population of the country. The entire survey results are made available to all clients who subscribe to the service.

**Tracking:** The process of establishing benchmarks and then measuring changes or trends over time through successive surveys; also applies to relocating respondents for a longitudinal or cohort study.

**Units**

*Unit of reference:* The unit about which information is obtained from the respondent.

*Respondent unit:* The unit that provides the information.

*Sampling unit:* One of the discrete and identifiable units that form the population of interest, from which sample selection can be made.

*Unit of analysis:* The unit or variable of interest.

For example, in a survey of the incidence of a particular type of illness, the *sampling unit* is the hospital; the *respondent unit* is the doctor; the *unit of reference* is the patient; and the *unit of analysis* is the type of illness.

**Universe:** Same as **Population**.

**Validity:** The degree to which a method of measurement succeeds in measuring what it is intended to measure.

**Variable:** A characteristic that may assume more than one value among a set of values to which a numerical measure can be assigned e.g., income, age, weight.

**Wave:** One set of activities among the same population and using the same methodology for a survey or series of surveys or survey-taking activities.

**Weighting:** The procedure for applying weights to a survey record. The weight is equal to the number of units in the population that that record represents.

## NOTES

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