

DEPTH INTERVIEW ASSIGNMENT

Goal: to experience data collection through semi-structured interviewing, including recording and interpretation of data.

Specifics of the procedures:

(1) Choose as a respondent someone appropriate for your project, preferably someone you don't already know. Arrange the interview well in advance, leaving time for rescheduling should that become necessary.

Choose a place for the interview which will be convenient for the respondent, comfortable for both of you, and relatively quiet and free from distractions. Ask for at least an hour for the interview.

(2) Write up an interview guide in your own words. Your questions or topics should be open-ended, not questions that call for a yes or no answer. Be sure you know beforehand the general areas and topics you want to have discussed; worry less about the wording of specific questions. Also be willing to flow with the interview if it should go in an interesting direction, even if it wasn't one you anticipated.

(3) Conduct the interview. Remember to listen during the interview, to concentrate so that you follow everything the respondent is saying and so that you can remember it all as well.

You may tape record the interview if your respondent agrees and you so wish, but you may want to take some notes as well in case the mechanical recording device fails. Certainly take notes during the interview if you do not use a tape recorder. Be prepared to jot down some notes during the interview to remind yourself of questions you want to ask later.

(4) Fully transcribe the interview as soon as possible. If you have not used a tape recorder, follow the interview itself as closely as possible, using verbatim quotes as much as you can. Transcription of either variety will take considerable time, so be sure to include it in your schedule. And as with field notes generally, the longer you wait, the less you remember.

(5) Immediately following the interview and during the interview transcription, note in as much detail as you can manage your ideas about what is particularly interesting, important, or problematic.

(6) Send your respondent a gracious thank you letter. Include a copy in your report.

(7) Code. Read back through your transcription/write up and generate coding categories: what themes and sub-themes do you see that seem important, and that you might look for in other interviews? Demonstrate some means by which you might physically code your data.

(8) Write a report which includes, but is not limited to the following topics:

- (a) Reason for choosing this respondent and location. Relevant information about the respondent if not included in the interview transcript.
- (b) Analytical responses. For example: what data from this interview are most interesting or most important? What are the themes? What are the gaps? Relate this information in whatever ways you can to previous academic work (theories? previous studies you know about?) and to your own observation project. What general questions

might you generate from what you now know? What specific hypotheses does the interview suggest to you would be interesting to pursue with further research?

- (c) Your coding categories.
- (d) Methodological discussion. Discuss characteristics of your interview that may have affected your data, how your interview might have been affected by circumstances beyond your control, how you might do things differently now that you've had the experience, and so forth. Being methodologically self-conscious is fundamental.
- (e) Finally, present a preliminary research design for a project on your topic using solely or primarily this method of data collection.

Turnin: interview guide (typed, double-spaced); raw notes from the interview; a copy of the thank you letter; interview transcription (typed); results of coding process; report (typed).

OBSERVATION ASSIGNMENT

Goal: to experience the initial stage of data collection through observation, including recording and interpretation of data.

Assignment:

(1) Observe a setting that you think will provide information about the topic you have selected. Do a total of at least 3 hours of observation. Make a reasoned choice of the times to observe: think about whether it makes sense to observe 3 hours straight, or to observe in some number of shorter periods; if you decide to do shorter periods, think about bases for deciding when and how long they should be. Be sure to discuss these decisions in your report.

The aim of initial observation is to begin to discover the basic elements of the setting; who is there, what are they doing, what units of space, time, behavior are meaningful?

(2) Take notes. (Review Analyzing Social Settings on "mental notes" and "jotted notes," pp. 53-64.)

(3) Type up notes to submit. (See Lofland and Lofland on "full field notes," p. 64.) Since this is an initial observation, your notes should be inclusive. You don't know yet what is relevant and what is not, so you need to observe and record everything possible.

Your notes should contain two elements: (1) detailed notes that are concrete and descriptive, and (2) analytical notes consisting of tentative evaluations, generalizations, and questions for further exploration.

(4) Prepare a report, including but not limited to:

- (a) typed notes on observations,
- (b) reason for choosing location and time units for observation,
- (c) analytical discussion: what did you find out? what was interesting? what was important? what might be possible coding categories? what would you look for next time?
- (d) methodological discussion: what were the oddities of this particular observation? what worked best? what did you have trouble with? what might you have overlooked? what would you do differently were you to do this assignment again? what can you see are the advantages to this method of data collection? what can you see, on the basis of your experience, are the disadvantages?
- (e) preliminary outline of a research design for a full-blown project using solely or primarily observation.

SURVEY RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT

The goal of this assignment is to work through the major issues in construction of a survey research instrument.

Part I. Initial Development of Instrument

1. Present the goals and general framework of your research: what broad questions do you want to answer and what are the major mechanisms of social behavior you intend to explore?
2. Develop and state two hypotheses about your research setting. Remember that a hypothesis relates at least two variables to each other, and that variables vary.
3. State both conceptual and operational definitions for each variable in your hypotheses.
4. Present and justify a sampling strategy for obtaining responses generalizable to your setting. Assume you have sufficient research funds for the most appropriate sampling strategy you can design. Be sure to discuss all the aspects of sampling about which decisions must be made. (Babbie's list includes: element, universe, population, survey population, sampling unit, sampling frame, observation unit, variable, as well as the types of sampling design, e.g., simple random sampling, stratified sampling, cluster sampling, etc.).
5. Write a questionnaire including at least 20 close-ended questions.
6. Discuss your decisions about wording, ordering, acceptability, in particular as these were influenced by what you already know about your setting.
7. Discuss why you expect that these questions will provide the data required by the operational definitions of the variables in your hypotheses.

Part II. Pre-testing and Administration of Instrument

8. Ask another member of the class to take your questionnaire; modify the questions as necessary afterwards.
9. Give the questionnaire to a person appropriate to your topic and modify the questions afterwards as indicated by this pre-test.
10. Give the questionnaire to at least 5 more persons appropriate to your topic.
11. Turn in BOTH the original and the 2 modified surveys, with a discussion of why you made the modifications you did.
12. Discuss how you would "reduce" the data from your survey in order to use them to evaluate your hypotheses.
13. Viewing these as very preliminary and limited data, discuss what they seem to tell you about your hypotheses (or about the limitations of your questionnaire). Some simple counts would be helpful.
14. Critique your project. What would you do differently next time now that you have had this experience? What are your thoughts about this method relative to others?
15. Suggest a research design on your topic for a full-blown project using survey techniques.

FINAL ASSIGNMENT: RESEARCH PROPOSAL

The purpose of this assignment is to have you use what you've learned to design a full-scale research project and to present your design in a proposal format as if it were to be reviewed for possible funding.

Your proposal should include the following sections:

1. A brief abstract (no more than 250 words).
2. An introduction which announces the topic, makes a statement of the goals and rationale of the study, and specifies the research questions and hypotheses. The statement of the rationale should pay attention to Lofland and Lofland's concern about one's study being "interesting" and important.
3. A literature review which provides the substantive context for your own research. Normally a proposal includes a detailed literature review (which is similar to what you know as a library term paper). Here you are asked to complete only two aspects of this portion of proposal writing. (a) Go through a minimal searching process, searching for previous research on your topic, but emphasizing the range of resources. You are asked, therefore, to list potential sources, listing with complete bibliographic references, at least 2 items each from at least six different types of sources (e.g., books, professional journal articles, dissertation abstracts, etc.). That means a minimum of 12 items listed. Kate Cleland, the social science librarian, is an excellent resource for help in finding such material. (b) Write a short literature review on your topic, probably around 5 pages, enough to show that you have gotten your feet wet, substantively speaking.
4. An explanation of preliminary studies that you have yourself completed and how they lead up to this particular proposal.
5. A detailed plan of research which states the methods of data collection you plan to use and how they relate to your research questions. The plan should include all major issues of data collection, including sampling strategies, operationalization of key concepts, and so forth. A special requirement here: in your plan of research you **MUST** include at least one qualitative strategy (e.g., observation, in-depth interviews) and one quantitative strategy (survey, available data).
In this section be sure to justify your methods: what the advantages are of these choices, what we can learn from them that we cannot learn from other methods, why your choices are appropriate, why they are necessary to obtain the data you need. You should also include a discussion of possible problems or challenges and how you intend to address them.
6. A detailed plan for data management and data analysis. Here you need to describe what you plan to do with the data once you have them: how they will be recorded, stored, coded, and analyzed in order to answer your questions and/or evaluate your hypotheses. E.g. how will the data you collect be used to operationalize your variables? how will you combine different types of information to answer your questions? how will you present the information for readers of your final report? If you might use tables or diagrams, explain what material they would include. (It can be very helpful to sketch "empty" tables or diagrams to show what you plan to do with your data).
7. A schedule to show the timing of each of the various research activities within the project (this is often done in units of a month).

8. A budget written in terms of the major categories of expenses which will need funding. Major categories typically include personnel, equipment, travel, supplies, miscellaneous (e.g., phone, postage, photocopying). Each category in your budget needs to be justified (e.g., you must say, if you plan to hire a secretary, what that secretary will be hired to do, such as, for example, transcribe interview tapes; if you will be paid full-time for a year what will be your responsibilities; if you need to travel, why; if you want to buy a computer, what for, etc.). Assume that you are working for an agency or institution which will bill the funding source for overhead or "indirect" costs at 60%. (In fact these charges vary because they are negotiated between each institution and the funding source).
9. A statement regarding your project's protection of human subjects. Issues of confidentiality, possible risks to subjects/respondents, possible benefits, and informed consent belong here.
10. A description of how the results of your research will be distributed.
11. In conclusion, for the purposes of this class, write a critique of your proposal as it stands, pointing out what you see as areas needing improvement and suggesting how you would go about trying to make improvements in future versions.