

Primary research: Interviews

Why should I use interviews as part of my primary research?

- Interviews allow you to find out information about facts, attitudes and opinions.
- They provide you with the opportunity to get in-depth responses, helping you to better understand the behaviour and motivations of your interviewees.
- Interviews are more flexible than questionnaires, as you are able to respond to the interviewee as appropriate, making up new questions as appropriate.
- However, interviews can be time-consuming to carry out.

Who should I interview?

- You should interview whomever you think might be affected by the issue that you are investigating.
- Try and interview a wide range of people if possible. For example, if researching attitudes to bullying in the school, you could interview students, teachers, your Head Teacher, dinner ladies etc.
- Or you may choose to research the views of a narrow group of people, e.g. the attitudes of Year 10 students to bullying.
- Try to interview a mix of boys and girls, and students from different forms and social groups.

How can I get people to agree to be interviewed?

- Explain clearly to your potential interviewees what you are researching and why.
- Let them know how you intend to use the interview findings as part of your project.
- Agree to respect the confidentiality of interviewees if they wish to remain anonymous. If they still don't wish to be interviewed, then it's probably best to try and find someone else!
- Speak to your teacher for advice on health and safety issues before you carry out any primary research.

What questions should I ask?

Before writing your interview questions, ask yourself 'What is it that I'm trying to find out? If you are clear on the purpose of your interview, this will help you create a set of interview questions.

Open questions, questions which invite a range of responses, are more likely to give you an in-depth answer than closed questions, questions to which there are a limited range of response (e.g. yes/no questions).

Check that your questions avoid bias – are you trying to lead interviewees to specific answers? You could ask a friend to read through your questions to check for bias.

Be flexible. As your interview progresses, you may think of new questions to ask, or you may decide that it isn't appropriate to ask certain questions from your original list. Respond to the dynamics of the interview situation as appropriate.

Some useful sentence stems:

- 'What do you think of...'
- 'What do you mean by...'
- 'Can you say a little bit more about...'
- 'Can you give me some examples...'
- 'Have you anything more to say on that?'
- 'What would you say to the criticism that...?'
- 'Would it be fair to say that...?'

How can I get the best out of the interview?

- Think about where you hold the interview.
- It may be appropriate to find a private room, although be sure to ask the advice of your teacher to ensure the setting is safe for you.
- Try and engage in 'active' listening – show that you are listening to the interviewee through your body language and your verbal responses.

How will I record the interview?

- It is useful to record your interview so that you can refer back to your findings at a later date.
- Audio recordings or video recordings are easy to do, although always ask permission of your interviewee first and bear in mind that interviewees might be more reluctant to talk openly if they are being recorded.
- Note-taking is another option- if possible, ask a friend to note-take for you so that you can focus on the interview itself.

How do I analyse the information I collect?

When reviewing the recordings you took of different interviews, look for common themes and cluster ideas and quotes under certain headings or categories. Try not to make generalisations, but look for trends in the answers you have gathered.