

Primary research: Observations

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

- Observations allow you to directly record people's behaviour.
- Observations have the benefit of being easily accessible – you do not rely on finding people to interview or fill in questionnaires.
- However, they are limited in what they can tell you about the feelings, attitudes or motivations that underpin people's behaviour.

How can I get the best out of my observations?

- Before starting your observation, ask yourself 'What is it that I'm trying to find out?'
- If you are clear on the purpose of your observation, then this will help you to decide who you need to observe, and when and where you need to observe them.
- Write out some key questions before you start.
- Use observations to find out information such as:
 - 'How many people use the park at lunch time?'
 - 'What do people use the park for at lunchtime?'
 - 'Who uses the tennis courts more, boys or girls?' etc

How will I record my observations?

- It is useful to record your observations so that you can refer back to your findings at a later date.
- Take notes, using tally charts to record numbers.
- Video recordings may be appropriate only if you have asked permission of the people you are recording.
- Record your observations discretely and be prepared to explain what you are researching and why if someone you are observing asks.
- Always work with another person so that you can compare observations afterwards and never carry out an observation if you feel unsafe.
- Speak to your teacher for advice on health and safety issues before you carry out any primary research.