

Primary research: Questionnaires

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

- Questionnaires allow you to find out information such as facts, attitudes and opinions.
- They are a simple way to gather short responses to questions from people.
- Questionnaires are less time consuming than interviews and can easily be kept anonymous.
- However it can be difficult to gain an in-depth response from questionnaires and they are not as flexible as interviews.

Who should I give my questionnaire too?

- You should give your questionnaire to whomever you think might be affected by the issue that you are investigating.
- Try and give your questionnaire to a wide range of people. For example, if researching attitudes to bullying in the school, you could give your questionnaire to 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 give your questionnaire to a mix of boys and girls, and students from different forms and social groups.

How can I get people to agree to fill in my questionnaire?

- Explain clearly on the questionnaire what you are researching and why.
- Let people know how you intend to use the interview findings as part of your project.
- You could have a stall with copies of your questionnaire, pens and even free sweets to encourage people to complete the questionnaire.
- Allow the questionnaires to be filled in anonymously and be sure to have boxes for people to put completed questionnaires in.
- 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.

Closed questions, questions to which there are a limited range of response are useful for questionnaires as they are quick to complete, and they provide answers that are easy to analyse.

Useful types of questions include:

- Factual questions: e.g. *How old are you?*
- Yes/No questions: e.g. *Do you currently use the park?*
- Who/what/why/where/when how questions: e.g. *Where do you spend most of your free time?*
- Ranking questions: e.g. *On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being strongly agree, and 5 being strongly disagree, how far do you agree with the following statement...*
- Multiple choice questions: *Which of the following do you think is most likely to be the cause of vandalism in the park? A) Boredom B) Peer Pressure C) Frustration*

Open questions are questions that allow for a range of possible answers, e.g. *Describe how you feel when you see vandalism in the park?* These questions are

useful for getting more in-depth responses, although if there are too many open questions this can be off putting for those filling in the questionnaire.

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.

How do I analyse the information I collect?

- It is relatively easy to find patterns when looking over questionnaires that include closed questions.
- Look at the responses to each question in turn, making notes or a tally chart to record patterns as you go along.
- Then calculate percentages – e.g. 80% of people who answered the questionnaire were aged 14-16; 40% of people thought that vandalism was caused by peer pressure.
- You can show your research findings as a pie chart or bar graph.

When reviewing the answers to open questions, 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.