**Conducting Research: Guidelines**

HSB4U Research Report

(Info adapted from Purdue Online Writing Lab)

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| **Summary:**  Primary research is a method of data collection on a given subject directly from the real world. When conducting this research you must be aware of any ethical considerations, and be sure to focus on creating good questions to collect the most accurate data possible. As discussed in class you will conduct your research using one or a combination of the following methods: interviews, surveys, and field research. Please familiarize yourself with these recommendations when creating your research method. |

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| **Interviews**  Interviewing is a great way to learn detailed information from a single individual or small number of individuals. It is very useful when you want to gain expert opinions on the subject or talk to someone knowledgeable about a topic.  **Types of Interviewing:**  Several different types of interviews exist. You should choose one based on what kind of technology you have available to you, the availability of the individual you are interviewing, and how comfortable you feel talking to people.  Face to Face Interviews: Face to face interviews are when you sit down and talk with someone. They are beneficial because you can adapt your questioning to the answers of the person you are interviewing. You will need recording equipment for the interview, and it is highly recommended that you bring two recording devices with you in case one fails.  Phone Interviews: Phone interviews can be used when you need to interview someone who is geographically far away, who is too busy to meet with you to talk, or who does not want to use Internet technology. You have to purchase a special recording device for use with most phone systems.  Email Interviews: Email interviews are less personal than face-to-face or phone interviews, but highly convenient for most individuals. You may not get as much information from someone in an email interview because you are not able to ask follow-up questions or play off the interviewee’s responses. However, email interviews are useful because they are already in a digital format.  **Setting up an interview**  When setting up an interview, be sure to be courteous and professional. Explain to the person being interviewed who you are, what you want to talk them about, and what project you are working on. Don’t be discouraged if not everyone you contact is willing to be interviewed.  **Interview Do's and Dont's**  When conducting interviews…   * Do be careful of the types of questions you ask. * Do start the interview with some small talk to give both yourself and the person you are interviewing a chance to get comfortable. * Do bring recording equipment (iPhone) if you are recording. * Do pay attention to what is being said during the interview and follow up on responses that sound interesting. * Do come to the interview prepared. You should learn as much as you can about the person you are going to interview before the interview takes place so that you can tailor your questions to them. * Do have an interview sheet that includes: topic, date, interviewer, interviewee, at least 5 focus questions with room to write in answers/take notes. * Don't pester or push the person you are interviewing. If he or she does not want to talk about an issue, you should respect that desire. * Don't stick to your questions rigidly. If an interesting subject comes up that relates to your research, feel free to ask additional questions about it. * Don't allow the person you are interviewing to continually get off topic. If the conversation drifts, ask follow-up questions to redirect the conversation to the subject at hand. |

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| **Surveys**  Surveying is a great way to discover what a large amount of people think about a particular issue or how a group of people report their behavior. Surveys can be done on a large range of topics and can be conducted relatively easily.  **Things to consider when conducting surveys:**  **Who are you planning on surveying?** Decide what group you are going to focus on surveying based on who you have access to and what your research is focused on.  **How many people are you going to survey?** You want to choose a target number of surveys to conduct. You don't want too few surveys because you won't have enough answers to support any generalizations or findings you may make. At the same time, you do not want too many surveys because you will be overwhelmed with analyzing your data.  **How are you going to survey people?** You can choose to conduct your survey in person (i.e. walk up to people and ask them questions); on paper (i.e. hand out surveys and ask people to return them); or even via the Internet. The survey method should be chosen based on the length of your survey and types of questions.  **How long is your survey going to be?** The answer to this question depends on what information you are attempting to discover and how much you want to find out. Longer surveys sometimes involve the same question asked in multiple ways to see if people are consistent in their answering strategies. For your first survey, however, it is better to keep things simple. Short questions are usually more effective than longer ones.  **What type of questions are you going to ask?** Do you want open-ended questions or closed questions? Open-ended questions are questions that allow the participant any type of response. An example of an open-ended question is: How are you feeling today? A closed question is one with a set of possible responses or yes/no responses. **Multiple choice falls into this category**. An example is: Did you feel that the new campus regulation about parking was fair? While closed questions are much easier to analyze they do not provide the rich responses you may get with open-ended questions. Ultimately, what type of question you ask depends on what you want to discover.  **Building Multiple Choice and Other Closed Questions**  a) *Multiple choice questions*, in which you ask respondents to choose one answer from a list. For example, given the question “What is your favorite mode of public transportation in your local area?”, choices may include “Bus,” “Taxi,” “Subway,” or “Ferry.” If you are not sure whether you covered all of the different modes of transportation, you can also include an “Other” option, and ask respondents to specify the “other” transportation that they have in mind.  b) *Multiple answer questions*, in which you ask respondents to select all that apply from a list. An example is the question “Which of the following extracurricular activities did you participate in during college? Select all that apply.”  c) *Ranking questions*, in which you ask respondents to rank a number of items first, second, etc. An example is the question “Rank the following five TV game shows from 1 to 5, 1 being your favorite and 5 being your least favorite.”  d) *Rating questions*, in which you ask respondents to rate a number of items on some scale(s). For example, you might ask respondents, “Rate the quality of customer service at the following stores on the following scale: 1 = poor, 2 = fair, 3 = good, 4 = very good, 5 = excellent.” |

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| **Observation**  Observations are a type of primary research that involves spending time watching people or other creatures interact with each other and the world around them. Observations are used in nearly every scientific field and can be incredibly useful in gathering information. Before observing, consider how you as an observer may alter the event being observed.   * How fully will you participate in the event? * Will you simply sit, watch, and take notes with no interaction? * Will you interact with the participants? * Will you become a participant yourself?   These different choices can radically change what you end up observing. The mere presence of an observer may alter the events--and if you interact with participants, you further risk changing what takes place. The other side to this is that by not participating in an event, you may not gain a complete understanding of that event.  **How to Observe**  When observing, it is especially important to separate observations from your feelings or reactions to observations. A good way to do this is to take your observations in a double-entry notebook. A double-entry notebook has two columns, one for what is directly observed and one is for what the observer interprets from the events. Here is an example:  **Observation:** The teacher walks around the circle and speaks to each student individually.  **Interpretation:**The teacher seems to want to make sure that each student understands the assignment.  If you are observing a group that is not found in public (such as a group of students, a sports team, or a special-interest group), it may be wise to plan to spend multiple sittings with the group. This will allow the group some time to adjust to your presence (and hence, for you to get more accurate observations). |