



Types of Surveys

Surveys can be divided into two broad categories: the **questionnaire** and the **interview**. Questionnaires are usually paper-and-pencil instruments that the respondent completes. Interviews are completed by the interviewer based on the respondent says. Sometimes, it's hard to tell the difference between a questionnaire and an interview. For instance, some people think that questionnaires always ask short closed-ended questions while interviews always ask broad open-ended ones. But you will see questionnaires with open-ended questions (although they do tend to be shorter than in interviews) and there will often be a series of closed-ended questions asked in an interview.

Survey research has changed dramatically in the last ten years. We have automated telephone surveys that use random dialing methods. There are computerized kiosks in public places that allows people to ask for input. A whole new variation of group interview has evolved as focus group methodology. Increasingly, survey research is tightly integrated with the delivery of service. Your hotel room has a survey on the desk. Your waiter presents a short customer satisfaction survey with your check. You get a call for an interview several days after your last call to a computer company for technical assistance. You're asked to complete a short survey when you visit a website. Here, I'll describe the major types of questionnaires and interviews, keeping in mind that technology is leading to rapid evolution of methods. We'll discuss the relative advantages and disadvantages of these different survey types in [Advantages and Disadvantages of Survey Methods](#).

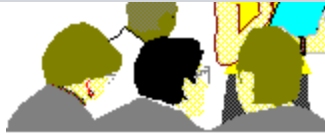
Questionnaires

When most people think of questionnaires, they think of the **mail survey**. All of us have, at one time or another, received a questionnaire in the mail. There are many advantages to mail surveys. They are relatively inexpensive to administer. You can send the exact same instrument to a wide number of people. They allow the respondent to fill it out at their own convenience. But there are some disadvantages as well. Response rates from mail surveys are often very low. And, mail questionnaires are not the best vehicles for asking for detailed written responses.



A second type is the **group administered questionnaire**. A sample of respondents is brought together and asked to respond to a structured sequence of questions. Traditionally, questionnaires were administered in group settings for convenience. The researcher could give the questionnaire to those who were present and be fairly sure that there would be a high response rate. If the respondents were unclear about the

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What's the difference between a group administered questionnaire and a group interview or focus group? In the group administered questionnaire, each respondent is *handed an instrument* and asked to complete it while in the room. Each respondent completes an instrument. In the group interview or focus group, the interviewer facilitates the session. People work as a group, listening to each other's comments and answering the questions. Someone takes notes for the entire group – people don't complete an interview individually.

A less familiar type of questionnaire is the **household drop-off** survey. In this approach, a researcher goes to the respondent's home or business and hands the respondent the instrument. In some cases, the respondent is asked to mail it back or the interviewer returns to pick it up. This approach attempts to blend the advantages of the mail survey and the group administered questionnaire. Like the mail survey, the respondent can work on the instrument in private, when it's convenient. Like the group administered questionnaire, the interviewer makes personal contact with the respondent – they don't just send an impersonal survey instrument. And, the respondent can ask questions about the study and get clarification on what is to be done. Generally, this would be expected to increase the percent of people who are willing to respond.



Interviews

Interviews are a far more personal form of research than questionnaires. In the **personal interview**, the interviewer works directly with the respondent. Unlike with mail surveys, the interviewer has the opportunity to probe or ask follow-up questions. And, interviews are generally easier for the respondent, especially if what is sought is opinions or impressions. Interviews can be very time consuming and they are resource intensive. The interviewer is considered a part of the measurement instrument and interviewers have to be well trained in how to respond to any contingency.



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telephone interviewer. Like personal interviews, they allow for some personal contact between the interviewer and the respondent. And, they allow the interviewer to ask follow-up questions. But they also have some major disadvantages. Many people don't have publicly-listed telephone numbers. Some don't have telephones. People often don't like the intrusion of a call to their homes. And, telephone interviews have to be relatively short or people will feel imposed upon.

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