**Protocol and Pilot workshop**

The aim of this workshop is for each group to produce a standardised method by which you will run your study, and score your data. By this we mean that you have an agreed procedure that will be replicated by each experimenter, in such a way that you all run essentially the same experiment.

This might sound trivial, but it is not. Because people (i.e. your participants) are reactive, they are going to respond differently to how each experimenter runs the experiment. If each person in the group runs the study differently, this is going to introduce variability into your results (i.e. noise or bias), which could affect your outcome.

**Activity zero: Get ethical approval**

This isn’t strictly an activity for this workshop, but a reminder that if you do not have ethical approval, then you should complete (or revise) your ethical proposal as soon as possible. You can’t collect data in your study until you have ethical approval.

**Activity 1 (25 minutes)**

*Part 1: Develop a standard protocol for running the study.*

As a group, you need to agree how you are going to run the study. This involves thinking about the environmental context and the way in which you interact with the participants. I can’t anticipate every aspect of your study (because they are all different), but here are some things to think about:

Environmental context

Are people going to be tested individually or in groups?

What times of day will you test?

Will participants be in a quiet or noisy environment?

Will you stay in the room with them at the time? If so, will you observe them?

Are they allowed to keep their phone on during the study?

etc

Interactions with participants

Will you explain what is going to happen verbally, or in writing, or both?

Will there be a practice first?

Will you allow participants to ask questions?

If they ask questions, what will you say? (e.g. what if they ask what your hypothesis is)?

If you are observing them, how will you ensure their anonymity is assured when they complete their questionnaire?

If you don’t observe them, how will you ensure they have followed your instructions?

If people want a break (or if the phone rings) will you allow it? If so, what will you do with their data?

If people look stressed, or bored, will you say it is OK to finish later?

If people have to write their answers, will you tell them that spelling is not important?

Etc

*Part 2: Develop a standardised scoring protocol*

The same general point applies to scoring any data that are obtained. What you want to know is that the score(s) obtained would be the same, whoever scored them. If you use different scoring protocols then you risk introducing noise or bias.

Here are some things to think about:

If you are using questionnaires, how will you score responses that are missing? (i.e. they didn’t answer one or more of the questions)? How will you respond to answers with two (or more) responses (e.g. on a 5 point scale someone circles 2 AND 3). What will you do with responses that have added comments on them (e.g. “I didn’t understand this question”, or “Sometimes I feel like rating 1, and other times I feel like rating 5”).

The issue of missing data might be particularly tricky if you asked people for data covering a range of occasions (e.g. a dietary diary over 3 days). What will you do if they forgot to fill it in one day?

If you are collecting responses that are handwritten, how will you deal with answers that are hard to read because of the handwriting, or spelled incorrectly, or are partially correct (e.g. instead of writing “supermarket” they write “market”, or “Tesco”).

If you are asking for verbal responses, how will you deal with partial answers (as above), but also answers that are mumbled.

How can you collect your data in such a way that someone else could check your scoring? For example, if you simply record answers are correct or incorrect by using ticks and crosses, there is no way for someone else to see if your scoring is correct.

Finally – when you were participants, was there anything you noticed that was particularly good / bad from your perspective. Are there lessons you can learn from this that you can apply to your own study, e.g. was the experimenter particularly friendly / unfriendly, professional / unprofessional (etc)? Were the instructions particularly clear / unclear etc.

**Activity 2 (25 minutes)**

*Part 1: try running a participant through the study.*

Once you have an agreed protocol for the method, and the scoring of the data, try it out!

Agree with members of another group to each act as experimenter and participants for each other.

(Note: if you study involves several sessions, such as a diary over 3 days, you can’t do the whole procedure, but you can check whether your participant is able to fill it out once).

Once you have run a participant through the procedure, and collected their data, meet back with other members of your group. Did any issues arise? Did participants understand their instructions? Did you know how to score their data?

As a group, decide what changes (if any) you need to make to make sure all experimenter run the study (and score the data) in the same way.

*Part 2: look at the data you collected.*

Are there any obvious problems with the data you collected? E.g. lots of missing responses, or performance at ceiling (or floor)? Are there large differences between the data collected by different experimenters? Why might that be? (Note – these could be genuine individual differences between participants, so don’t jump to conclusions, unless you spot something different about how they collected their data).

As a group, decide what changes (if any) you need to make to ensure your full experiment collects data that is appropriate.