

3.0 Quantitative or Qualitative Methodology

If you are going to be gathering primary data, then the first choice many students will face will be whether to use quantitative or qualitative methods. You may also choose to do a mixed methods project where you use a combination of both.

(Note: if you choose to do both, that this can be challenging in terms of timescale.)

4.0 Quantitative methods

If you are using quantitative methods, the primary research instrument used will be a survey (questionnaires).

Key questions for you to consider and justify will be:

what type of questions to use - for example, do you use Likert questions, yes / no questions, open ended questions or a combination?

ensure that your survey includes a participant information sheet and some means of indicating that the person completing the survey consents to taking part and that they know that they do not have to complete all the questions. An example is found in Appendix 1q

how you will distribute your survey (online, face to face, email, post). There are an increasing number of ways of administering surveys, including web-based platforms and mobile devices. Some of your employers may have access to survey design tools such as Survey Monkey, which you may wish to use. Survey Monkey is also available free, but the free version only allows you to have a maximum of 10 questions, which is unlikely to be enough. You can also create a questionnaire using Google Forms. Information on this is available via the following link: <https://support.google.com/a/users/answer/9302965>.

sample size and selection; this will vary according to your topic. For example, if you are surveying the views of consumers, a minimum sample size of 100 is likely to be appropriate. In other projects, you may survey the whole population. For example, if you were researching the views of local authorities in Scotland, it would be appropriate to survey the whole population since there are only 32 local authorities

response rate and what you will do if your response rate is very low

how you will analyse your results, including what type of statistical analysis may be appropriate. There are a range of more advanced statistical tests that can be used to analyse your findings and the text books on this subject cover this; however, it

Keep an eye out for good examples of survey design next time you are asked to complete a questionnaire.

The video below is on the importance of considering how someone who completes a survey will interpret a question:

Asking survey questions: identifying problems <https://youtu.be/nC-PCckXVYY>

Videos on analysing quantitative data

University of Southampton, Analysing questionnaires <https://youtu.be/c5CIF8RIGb4>

NUS, Analysing quantitative data <https://youtu.be/81jmL-jUdcA>

Qualitative research projects

If you are using qualitative methods, the typical research instruments that you are likely to consider are interviews and focus groups.

Other qualitative methods you may consider using include qualitative content analysis and observations (increasingly referred to as ethnography in textbooks) or the use of diaries.

Additional ethical issues may arise if you use these methods, particularly if you are thinking about ethnography.

Which of these methods is the most appropriate, will again, depend on your aims and objective and you will need to justify your choice for preferring one over the other.

When using qualitative research methods you will also need to:

justify your sample size. The number of interviews tends to be a lot smaller than the sample size for questionnaires

6.0 Final comments

Remember the project handbook also contains lots of advice on how to decide upon your aim and objectives, how to approach research methods, what information you need to provide when submitting your research proposal and what your methodology chapter must contain. It also includes the marking criteria. Make sure you read this guidance in conjunction with the project handbook.

There are also many good resources out there and this handbook is not a definitive guide. If you do identify something that you found particularly useful, then inform the Education Team and we can add it to future versions of this handbook.

APPENDIX 1: Participant Information sheets

You must include a copy of any participant information sheet as part of your proposal. Most universities and other research institutions provide pro formas for creating participant information sheets that you can have a look at.

If you are using a survey, then the information below should form the front page of your survey. For qualitative research, participants should be given or provided electronically with an information sheet containing the following information.

You must ensure that any information sheet includes the following areas:

Heading

The information sheet / form should include your employers heading / logo.

Title of the research project

Invitation paragraph

Explain that the prospective participant is being asked to take part in a research project.

For example, you could say:

My name is Sam Student and I am a XXXXXXXX working for XXXXX. I am currently studying for XXXXXX and as part of this qualification must complete a research project. The title of my project is, xxxxxxxxxx

Purpose of the research

The background, aim, and duration of the project should be given here. Remember to be brief and avoid overly complicated language.

Why have I been chosen?

You should explain how the participant was chosen and say how many other participants will be recruited.

Example:

There are no criteria over the age of 18 to participate in the project. There are no criteria (e.g. gender, age, or health) for being included or excluded - everyone is welcome to take part. *[If there are inclusion / exclusion criteria, then these should be stated.]*

What do I have to do?

You should explain:

how long the participant will be involved in the research, how long the research will last (if this is different)

if they are being asked to participate more than once, how often will they need to participate and for how long each time (you should explain if travel expenses are available)

what exactly will happen (

Examples:

Interviews

the researcher at a venue of your choice. The interview will be recorded and subsequently transcribed. The researcher is not aware of any risks associated with the interviews. The interview should take no longer than 45 minutes. Your agreement to take part is voluntary. You are also free to withdraw at any time and you do not have to give a reason."

Online survey

This survey consists of 24 mainly tick-

