



INTERVIEWER TRAINING MANUAL



STRATEGIC RESEARCH GROUP
995 GOODALE BLVD.
COLUMBUS, OH 43212
(614) 220-8860
WWW.STRATEGICRESEARCHGROUP.COM

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I. OVERVIEW OF SURVEY RESEARCH

A) Survey Research

Survey research is a systematic way of collecting data by asking a sample of Respondents a standardized set of questions. A **sample** is a scientific way of choosing a small number of people from a larger population – once chosen, the opinions of the members of the **sample** will represent the views of the larger population.

B) Terms you need to know

1. **Survey:** A standardized set of questions.
2. **Respondent:** The person that has been chosen to be interviewed.
3. **Informant:** Any person in a household that is not the Respondent or any person in a household before a Respondent is chosen.
4. **Interviewer:** A trained professional who administers the survey to a Respondent and records the Respondent's answers.
5. **Case ID:** An identification number given to each phone number.
6. **Call Disposition:** Result of the telephone call, such as: busy, no answer, and completed interview.
7. **Call sheet:** Form used to record the result of each call. The call sheet also has the case ID, telephone number, and other information about the case.
8. **Callback:** When an informant or a Respondent tells the Interviewer to call back at a different time or different day.
9. **DK:** A respondent does not know the answer to a specific question.
10. **RF:** A Respondent refuses to answer a specific question.

C) Uses of Survey Data

1. Determine what a population thinks about a certain issue.
2. Aide to planning and decision-making.
3. Evaluate the results and effectiveness of programs and policies.
4. Obtain information to measure costs.
5. Learn about customers or clients.
6. Determine relationships between social and political issues and individual characteristics.

D) Steps in Survey Research

1. Identify the problem.
2. Identify the population.
3. Decide on information gathering techniques.
4. Design a survey.
5. Pretest the survey.
6. Revise the survey.
7. Choose a sample.
8. Collect data.
9. Code data.
10. Enter data in computer format.
11. Analyze data.
12. Make recommendations.

II. SAMPLING

A) How can a small sample of Respondents represent the opinions of an entire population of people?

If a sample is randomly drawn (a **random sample**) from a population then we can say that it is theoretically representative of the population. This is the case even if we are interviewing a small number of people from a much larger population.

If it is a **true random sample** we can be confident that the information we are gathering is accurate.

B) Types of Samples used in survey research

Random Sample

A random sample is a method of Respondent selection where everyone in the population has an equal chance of being included in the sample.

Example: We put everyone's name in a big fishbowl and someone reaches in and takes out a certain number of people to interview.

NOTE: *Because we only chose a small number of people in a random sample it is important that everyone possible that is chosen to be interviewed IS interviewed.*

List Sample

A list sample is chosen from names of specific people the Interviewer must contact for an interview. The Interviewer calls the telephone number provided and asks to speak to the person identified on the call sheet.

NOTE: *It is imperative that the Interviewer only speaks with the person named, and that they do not attempt to interview another member of that household.*

RDD Sample (random digit dialing)

1. Telephone numbers are randomly generated by a computer.
2. The Interviewer is provided only with a phone number, no names are known.
3. The random selection sample Respondent is usually selected from a specific household using a series of questions to randomize which adult in the household is to be interviewed.
4. If that person is not available, it is important that the Interviewer find out a good time and date to call back that individual.
5. To insure validity of the entire survey, all Interviewers should follow proper Respondent selection procedures for a RDD sample.

III. ADMINISTERING THE SURVEY

A) General tasks

1. Write the date, time, and your Interviewer ID number on the call sheet.
2. Call the telephone number.
3. Confirm that the phone number is correct (*RDD sample*)
4. Choose a Respondent (*RDD sample*)
5. Gain the Respondent's cooperation.
6. Ask the Respondent the questions as written.
7. Record the Respondent's answers in the computer.
8. If the interview is complete, code the call sheet then set it aside for the supervisor.
9. Call the next telephone number.

B) Types of questions

Close-ended questions: These questions have predetermined answers. The Respondent chooses from one of the answers already written in the survey.

✓ *Example:*

Q1. Do you think that the teachers at Acme schools are paid too little, too much, or about the right amount?

- | | |
|-----------------|-------|
| 1. Too little | 8. DK |
| 2. Too much | 9. RF |
| 3. Right amount | |

Open-ended questions: The Respondent is not given any predetermined answers for these questions. They answer whatever comes to mind.

✓ *Example:*

Q2. What would you say is the most serious problem facing Pleasantville today?

C) Basic rules for administering the survey

1. Read questions exactly as they are written. Do not rephrase any parts of the question.
2. Read only the parts of the question that are *not* bolded and capitalized.
3. Follow all interviewer instructions (Interviewer instructions *are* bolded and capitalized).
4. Ask all questions in the order they appear on the survey.

D) Recording Answers

Close-ended questions:

1. Listen to the response given by the Respondent.
2. Determine if the response corresponds to one of the predetermined answers in the survey.

IF YES: enter the corresponding number in the computer.

IF NO: reread the question and/or answers and ask which of these answers best fits how they feel. Confirm the exact answer. For example, do not accept 3 or 4. Ask if the answer should be closer to 3 or 4.

Open-ended questions:

Type in everything that the Respondent says *exactly as they say it*. You may need to go back to the answer after the interview to make sure the answer can be understood by a coder.

E) General Feedback

Assume that the Respondent does not know how to participate in a survey of this type. They will need regular feedback throughout the interview to let them know that they are doing a good job.

Here are some general feedback phrases that can be used after a response to reinforce acceptable behavior for the Respondent.

Good Feedback

I see...
Ok... now the next question reads.
That is helpful information.
That's important to know.

Bad Feedback

Yes, a lot of people say that.
Wow, that's the first time I have heard that.
Oh, really?
I agree.

NOTE: Good feedback makes the Respondent feel more comfortable and helps them understand the questions. Bad feedback biases the Respondent or makes them feel confused or uncomfortable with the survey.

F) Task-related feedback

Good feedback when typing a note or open-ended question

*Let me make sure that what I have is correct (REPEAT ANSWER).
One moment while I type that into the computer.
I want to make sure I have that right (REPEAT ANSWER).*

NOTE: Be sure feedback does not lead to personal conversations.

Good feedback/preparation when Respondent already answered a question in a previous response

We have touched on this before, but I need to ask every question in the order that it appears in the survey.

G) Biasing surveys

Biasing: The Interviewer somehow affects the Respondent's answers by telling the Respondent his or her opinions or prejudices during an

interview. Ultimately, the Respondent's true responses are not recorded in the survey.

1. Jeopardizing an interview

✓ *Example:*

Interviewer: Now, I would like to get your opinion on the salaries that some people in Acme schools are paid. Do you think the administrative staff are paid too little, too much or about right?

Respondent: I think they are all over paid. Too many staff members make over \$100, 000 a year while the children have outdated materials.

Interviewer: But they have earned a college education and are entitled to decent salaries.

Comment: This type of response biases the interview. In other words, the Respondent will probably not answer the remaining questions as he or she really feels. The Respondent may change answers to suit the Interviewer, or feel generally uncomfortable towards the Interviewer throughout the remainder of the interview.

2. Suppressing opinions includes agreeing and/or disagreeing with the Respondent.

✓ *Example:*

Interviewer: Now, I would like to get your opinion on the salaries that some people in Acme schools are paid. Do you think the administrative staff are paid too little, too much or about right?

Respondent: My neighbor goes to all of the PTA meetings she said the teachers are under paid and over worked. They have twice as many children to teach than the limit suggests.

Interviewer: That's true. My sister is a teacher there and said they are searching for more teachers to fix the problem.

Comment: In this case the Interviewer may have influenced the Respondent to answer differently for future salary questions than he or she would have before the Interviewer interjected an opinion. In addition, unnecessary information was provided.

3. Another type of bias can result if you unconsciously stereotype the Respondent by:

- Anticipating his or her opinions.
- Exaggerating a consistency in his/her views, or making assumptions based on the Respondent's group membership or social standing.
- Leading the Respondent to what you consider to be the appropriate answer.
- Unconsciously checking the answer you expect to hear instead of the actual answer stated by the Respondent.

An Interviewer must always be aware of what the Respondent is saying.
EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED!

4. Biasing also occurs when the Interviewer rewords questions in order to fit his or her perceptions of what the Respondent is capable of understanding.

Problems occur when:

- The Interviewer simplifies the wording if he or she thinks that the Respondent will not understand the question.
- Upgrades the questions if the Respondent seems highly educated.
- Shortens the question if he or she feels the interview itself is too long.

5. Attempts to interpret the question in response to a Respondent's query may also unintentionally bias the interview.

Key words you might use to respond to a question:

Respondent: What do you mean?

Interviewer: What ever it means to you.

-or-

Interviewer: It's important that the question be answered as best you can in terms of the way it's stated, maybe I can read it to you again.

-or-

Interviewer: I will type in the concern you just mentioned so it will be taken into account during analysis.

6. Respondent missing and/or not hearing part of the question

It is very easy for Respondents to miss a word or two that is crucial to the meaning of the question. Sometimes they are embarrassed to admit that they didn't quite understand.

If you suspect a question has been misunderstood do not tell the Respondent that you think he or she misunderstood.

Rather, utilize one of these useful responses:

Interviewer: Could I reread the question and answer I've typed to be sure I have everything you wanted to say?

-or-

Interviewer: I think I may not have read the question correctly, may I read it again to be sure?

NOTE: *Since the questions are being read to the Respondent it is essential that the interviewer enunciate each word so the Respondent does not have any difficulty understanding. Yet, the interviewer should strive to maintain a natural and conversational*

To summarize:

- Read the questions exactly as worded.
- Read each question at a good pace and enunciate clearly.
- Ask the questions in the order they appear.
- Ask all questions.
- Repeat questions when they are misunderstood.

H) Probing

A probe is a follow-up question to an item in the survey that requires more clarification from the Respondent. Probes are most frequently used when a Respondent answers "don't know" to a close- or open-ended question.

An Interviewer should select probes that are neutral, supportive of the Respondent, and productive of more information. A statement like, "Then what you really mean is..." does not convey neutrality.

Probes have the following functions:

1. To expand on the information the Respondent has given.
2. To obtain specific information on a broad subject.
3. To clarify what a Respondent has said.

Probes are necessary when:

1. Respondents have difficulty putting thoughts into words.
2. Respondents' answers may be unclear or incomplete.
3. Respondents feel insecure about giving a "wrong" answer.

Some appropriate probes are:

1. Could you tell me a little more about that?
2. How do you mean, exactly?

3. Would you say that is closer to 5 or 6?

✓ *Example:*

Interviewer: What is the most important problem facing our nation today?

Respondent: The economy.

Interviewer: What about the economy is a problem?

Respondent: No one can get a decent job. Everyone is unemployed.

Comment: If the probe was not given we would've never known that the Respondent really thought the most important problem was the "lack of good jobs." Using probes is an essential part of good interviewing technique.

l) Recording a probe

When you use a probe on an open-ended question during a survey, type a capital "P" at the end of the answer followed by two backslashes to return to the next question.

To summarize:

DO

- Do use neutral probes.
- Do use more than one probe if you feel it is necessary.
- Do try to make Respondents comfortable about answering questions.
- Do type in what the Respondent has said verbatim.
- Do indicate that you probed.
- Do work at turning "don't knows" and refusals into answers.

DON'T

- Don't bias the Respondent's answer.
- Don't suggest answers to the Respondent, we want his/her opinions not yours.

- Don't record answers in shorthand or other abbreviated forms.

J) Handling other situations

✓ *Example 1:*

Interviewer: How would you rate the job Bob Taft is doing as governor of Ohio? Would you say excellent, good, fair, or poor?

Respondent: I don't know, I'm not really up on Taft – maybe I shouldn't answer these questions.

Interviewer: How would you rate Bob Taft – excellent, good, fair or poor?

Respondent: I really can't answer your questions why don't you call back when my wife is home.

Interviewer: Could you please tell me if you think Taft is doing an excellent, good, fair or poor job?

Comment: This Respondent lacks the confidence to answer the question. The Interviewer should have helped the Respondent feel more comfortable by suggesting that the survey is not a test and it is only the opinions of the Respondent the Interviewer is interested in. Instead, the Interviewer kept pounding the Respondent with the question. This technique would increase the anxiety of the timid Respondent and affect the rest of the interviewing session.

✓ *Example 2:*

Interviewer: How helpful was the information you received from Job Corp? Was it very helpful, somewhat helpful, not very helpful, or not at all helpful?

Respondent: Are you talking about the school or the employment office?

Interviewer: Was it very helpful, somewhat helpful, not very helpful, or not at all helpful?

Respondent: Well, if you are talking about the school it was very helpful. If you are talking about the employment office, not very helpful at all. (Interviewer enters the approved response and continues).

Comment: The Interviewer was not listening to the Respondent. When the Respondent asked a question the Interviewer just moved along with the survey without acknowledging the Respondent. The Respondent needed clarification, yet the Interviewer entered the first answer that was heard without following up to determine if the Respondent and Interviewer were discussing the same program.

✓ *Example 3:*

Interviewer: Taking into account all of your experiences with your counselor. If you were filling out a report card what grade would you give them for how well they did their job? A, B, C, D, or F?

Respondent: I don't know, I only met with her once.

Interviewer: Your opinions are very important to us as they will help make the program better for others. So take your time and think about the one visit that you did have. Now do you think you would rate them an A, B, C, D, or F?

Respondent: She did help me write a resume and find a job. I

Comment: The Interviewer was able to make an uncomfortable Respondent relax. The Respondent was given time to think about his response without the Interviewer intimidating or making the Respondent feel uncomfortable.

✓ *Example 4:*

Interviewer: Overall, are you *worse off* or *better off* in your current job than in your last job before participating in the program?

Respondent: That's a dumb question. I told you earlier that I was laid off from a job I worked for over 20 years. Now I'm a crewmember at McDonald's.

Interviewer: I don't have anything to do with the questions, I am only paid to read them, that is all.

Comment: The Interviewer has just trivialized the question and made it sound as if the interview is not important. The Respondent may now feel that his input is not important as well. A more appropriate response would have been: "Let me make a note of your concern for the researcher. Now, let me read the question again."

IV. INTRODUCTIONS

The most important part of the interview is the introduction. A strong introduction can win a Respondent's confidence and cooperation; a bad introduction can turn a possible completion into a refusal.

✓ *Example:*

Hello, my name is (first name) and I am calling from an independent research firm. We have been contracted by the United States Air Force Reserve to conduct a series of telephone interviews with people who have recently joined the Air Force Reserve. The survey takes about 10 minutes to complete and all your answers are strictly confidential.

1. An introduction does the following:

- Tells the Respondent who is calling.
- Tells the Respondent why you are calling.
- Tells the Respondent the time commitment required.
- Assures the Respondent's confidentiality.

2. Basic rules for introductions:

- Read the introduction as worded the first time. If this is a second or third call you may need to change the introduction to meet the previous attempts.
- Never lie about the survey. Don't say it takes 5 minutes to complete when it really takes 15.
- Answer any questions the Respondent may have about the survey.
- Go directly into the first question from the introduction. **Do not** pause after the introduction and **do not** ask if it is okay to proceed.
- Always assume that right now is a good time to conduct the interview.

- If it is not a good time, try to get the Respondent to provide a date and time which is better for him or her.
- Try to sound upbeat and interested in what the Respondent says.
- Do not add more information to the introduction.
- Do not make the introduction longer than what it is, this can bore or annoy the Respondent.

3. Addressing Respondent concerns:

How did you get my number, name, etc.?

(For RDD survey) A computer uses exchanges obtained from telephone directories creates all of the phone numbers we use. In this way, all phone numbers are eligible, listed and unlisted alike. Your phone number will not be given to any other organization and we will destroy our copy at the end of the survey.

Will my name be used?

No names will be used at any time in this study – it is completely anonymous.

Is this confidential?

Yes! After the interview is completed the answers are put into the computer without phone numbers. Then the surveys are destroyed. All information we release is in the form of a certain percent said "yes" and a certain percent said "no." In this form no individual response can ever be identified.

Why do you need to know who has the next birthday?

(For RDD survey) Different households have different numbers of people living in them. And if our survey is to be truly representative of all the people in the state then in some households I need to talk to a man and in others a woman. We have found that the best way to randomly choose a person from the household is to use this birthday method.

Who is sponsoring this survey?

Example: This survey is being sponsored by the Central Ohio

Transit Authority.

Who is the person responsible for this survey?

The person is..., a researcher for the I am sure she would be happy to talk with you. Her number is ... and she can be reached between 9am and 5pm

4. Overcoming objections

Sometimes a Respondent will provide you with reasons for not wanting to participate in the survey. Here are the reasons that are given most often and some suggestions on how to counter the objections.

Too busy

This should only take a few minutes. Sorry to have caught you at a bad time. I would be happy to call back. When would be a good time for me to call, in the next day or two?

Not interested

It's really important that we get the opinions of everyone in the sample otherwise the results won't be very useful. So, I'd really like to talk to you.

Objects to surveys

We think this particular survey is very important because the questions are ones that people want to know answers to, so we would really like to have your opinion too.

Bad health

I'm sorry to hear that. Have you been sick long? I would be happy to call back in a day or two. Would that be okay? IF LENGTHY OR SERIOUS ILLNESS, excuse yourself and indicate that they will NOT be called again.

Too old

Older people's opinions are just as important in this survey as anyone else's. In order for the results to be representative, we have to be sure that older people give their opinion. We really do want your opinion.

Don't know enough, feel inadequate

The questions are not at all difficult. They are mostly concerned about how you feel rather than how much you know. Some of the people we have already interviewed had the same concern you have, but once we got started they didn't have any difficulty answering the questions. Maybe I could read just a few questions to you and you can see what they are like.

Invasion of my privacy

I can certainly understand, that's why all of our interviews are confidential. Protecting people's privacy is one of our major concerns and to do it people's names are separated from the answers just as soon as the interview is over. And, all the results are released in a way that no single individual can ever be identified.

Objects to telephone surveys

We have just recently started doing our surveys by telephone, because this way is so much faster and it costs a lot less, especially when there aren't very many questions like in this survey.

A final point to be made in this section is the importance of reassuring the Respondent regarding the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. Emphasize the importance of their responses to our survey, and that they will be used solely for scholarly purposes. Our goal is to do everything we can to reassure the subject and to get the interview. The key is to try everything, but don't alienate the Respondent.

V. CALL SHEETS & DISPOSITIONS

A) Why record each call on a call sheet?

It is important to record the outcome of each call for several reasons:

1. The next Interviewer who calls this number will need information on how to handle the case. Has a Respondent been chosen, and if so, what is the Respondent's name or identifying information? Has there been a refusal or objection? What tactics have been used to turn this interview into a completion? Write down any information that you would want to know if you were the next caller.
2. The Supervisor will determine whether an Interviewer should continue to call this number.
3. If the number should be called again, a Supervisor may have suggestions on when a Respondent is most likely to be available.

B) Guidelines for recording call sheet info:

1. Record all calls that are made for each number or Respondent even if it is a busy or there is no answer.
2. Record any information you can give about the household or the Respondent that you think might be relevant for a future Interviewer.
3. If the call results in a refusal, write exactly what the Respondent or Informant said on the refusal form in the computer.

C) Manipulation of call sheets:

1. The more numbers you call the more interview completions you will get.

2. If you get a busy signal, record the busy then set the call sheet aside and call back in 5-10 minutes. Make sure you record the second call on the call sheet as well.
3. Leave a message on answering machines when appropriate. Tell them that you are calling to conduct a survey and that you will call them back.
4. Keep your call sheets organized. Separate completions from call sheets with callbacks designated for specific times.
5. Make sure you always call back your callbacks at the right time. If you cannot call back, ask a Supervisor for someone else to call.
6. Match call sheet dispositions with computer dispositions. Be sure to write all call back outcome information on the call sheet.

D) Scheduler

When a survey is done on the scheduler there are some different things that you need to watch out for. You must be sure that you understand all disposition codes. Any confusion regarding disposition codes can result in cases coming up at the wrong times or not coming up at all. You also need to understand how to set a callback with a Respondent in military time and place information in the correct categories.

VI. JOB POSITIONS & DUTIES

- 1) Interviewer Probation (base pay rate)** – During the first 30 days the Interviewer is evaluated for a potential raise. Some evaluation areas include: attendance, completion & refusal rates, call sheet manipulation, telephone professionalism, attendance, and other basic Interviewer duties.

Based on the Performance Review results the Interviewer will remain on probation for an extended period, or will be taken off and moved to Interviewer status.

- 2) Interviewer** – Expected to perform all of the duties as stated in Interviewer Probation. These Interviewers work alone to handle most problems with assistance from posted notes and occasional assistance from a supervisor, or other assistant in uncertain and extreme situations.
- 3) Refusal Converter** – Increasing completion rates by calling to convince uninterested Respondents to complete a survey. Must successfully complete a training session and a two (2) week probationary period to receive the potential raise.
- 4) Senior Interviewer** – Assures survey unit quality control, duties include: focus group recruiting, pre-testing, monitoring, verifications, and sorting call sheets. Must successfully complete a training session and a one (1) month probationary period to receive the potential raise.
- 5) Trainer** – Assisting new Interviewers with computer training, disposition codes, and offering occasional assistance with their work. Must successfully complete a training session and a one (1) month probationary period to receive the potential raise.
- 6) Assistant Supervisor** – Implements basic supervisory procedures and techniques. Has extensive knowledge in focus group recruiting, pre-testing, quality control, refusal converting, and training. Must successfully complete a training session and a one (1) month probationary period to receive the potential raise.

OTHER POSITIONS

1) Coder/Data Entry – Coding and entering open-ended responses to surveys using a computer based program and/or equipment. Coders/data entry associates must successfully complete a training session and a two (2) week probationary period to receive the potential raise.

NOTE: *Because we are a project driven company, there may be times when we are slow or have layoffs. The interviewers with the highest quality of work will be given priority scheduling to work on the remainder of the projects. SRG is under no obligation to rehire former employees or bring back employees who have worked on previous projects.*