In this handout, we will discuss just a few more things you should consider when conducting a survey study.

**MODES OF SURVEY ADMINISTRATION**

Surveys are typically administered in one of three ways:

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| Modes of Survey Administration |
| **Face-to-face interviews.** This involves the oral presentation of survey questions by a well-trained interviewer. Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) software is often used, which reduces some types of interviewer error.  |
| **Telephone interviews.** This also involves the oral presentation of survey questions by a well-trained interviewer, but it is conducted over the phone instead of in person. Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) is often used. |
| **Self-administered questionnaires.** This requires respondents to complete a written questionnaire without any guidance from an interviewer. Sometimes, such questionnaires are printed on paper and mailed out with instructions. Other times, such surveys are conducted via a Computer-Assisted Self-Interview (CASI). |

**Which Mode Should You Use?**

Which mode is best will vary depending on the scope of the study and the following factors.

* Project budget
* Characteristics of the study population
* The sampling frame
* Desired response rate
* Question forms used in the survey
* Content of the questions
* Length of the questionnaire
* Length of data collection period

Questions:

1. Which of the three modes do you anticipate is the most expensive for studies of a comparable size? Least expensive?
2. Can you think of any study populations for which you may want to avoid using a self-administered questionnaire? What about a computer-assisted self-interview?
3. Suppose a typical member of your study population has very low motivation to participate in the study. Which mode of survey administration would probably work the best for getting subjects to respond?
4. Can you think of an example for which the sampling frame will dictate which mode must be used?
5. Which mode do you think will result in the highest response rate? The lowest? Explain your reasoning.
6. Suppose your questionnaire includes several open-ended questions. Which mode(s) do you think would be best for this study? Explain your reasoning.
7. Suppose a questionnaire includes several questions that ask for very personal, sensitive information from the respondent. Which mode(s) do you think will yield the most unbiased results? Explain your reasoning.
8. Which mode do you think works best with a very long questionnaire? Why?
9. Which mode(s) do you think will yield the quickest results? Which will take the longest? Explain your reasoning.

**Special Considerations for Both Face-to-Face and Telephone Interviews**When survey studies are carried out using an interviewer, this interviewer is responsible for both motivating respondents to give accurate, complete answers and for executing the survey in a standardized way. This is not always an easy task! Keep in mind that these modes of survey administration will work best when the interviewers are specially trained. They should be carefully instructed in techniques for eliciting participation, how to ask for more detail when a question answer is incomplete, and even how to make a respondent feel relaxed and comfortable while still maintaining a formal, standardized interviewing environment.

Questions:

1. Some studies with low budgets may resort to using volunteers and/or students to conduct the interviews. Even if these volunteers/students go through proper training, what might be the downside of using them to conduct the interviews?
2. Suppose a survey which is being conducted via face-to-face interviewing asks the following question: “Would you mind if you had a female boss?” How might the gender of the interviewer influence the respondent’s answer? In light of this, do you have suggestions for how to assign interviewers to respondents? Explain your reasoning.

**Special Considerations for Self-Administered Questionnaires**

Since this mode does not involve an interviewer, it is essential that instructions are stated clearly and concisely at the beginning of the survey. Also, the survey layout should be intuitive and easy to read. For example, the layout should include page breaks where it is convenient, or the questions may be printed in bold while the options for answers are printed in regular font.

**TIPS FOR INCREASING RESPONSE RATES**

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| Definition |
| The **response rate** is defined as the proportion of the sample that actually responds to the survey. |

There is no agreed-upon value for what a response rate should be, but obviously, the higher the response rate the better. To increase a survey study’s response rate, you should keep the following tips in mind:

* Make sure to tell respondents why you’re conducting the survey and what you plan to do with the results. If respondents find meaning in the purpose of the study or feel they may benefit from the research, they’re more likely to respond.
* If the results will be kept anonymous, tell this to the respondent. They’re more likely to participate if this is the case.
* Ensure that their results will be kept confidential. Again, they’re more likely to participate if they are assured of confidentiality.
* Ask questions that are minimally intrusive, and don’t ask for personal information unless you need it.
* Create your survey so that it is easy to navigate.
* Avoid writing a questionnaire that is too long.

You may also consider doing the following, if possible:

* Offer incentives for survey completion (money, prize drawings, etc.)
* Offer to share the results with the respondents
* Include a return envelope with paid postage for self-administered questionnaires sent out in the mail
* Follow up with a second mailing (or emailing) for self-administered questionnaires

Question: Suppose a researcher cites that non-response bias is reduced with increased response rates. Do you agree or disagree with their reasoning? Explain.

**PRE-TESTING A SURVEY**

Once a questionnaire has been designed and a mode of administration has been chosen, it is a good idea to pre-test the survey.

For face-to-face and telephone interviews, this may involve asking the interviewers to conduct a small number of interviews and then to discuss the results with the researcher(s). This could potentially help to identify questions that required further explanation, etc., so that issues could be fixed before the actual study was conducted.

For self-administered surveys, researchers could conduct personal interviews with a group of respondents drawn from the study population. They may interview them after the respondent takes the survey on his/her own, or they may observe and ask the respondent to think aloud while they’re answering the questions. This may help to identify potential problems with the clarity of the instructions, question wording, response options, and/or the ease of responding to questions.