

Research Methodologies Comparison Sheet

Choosing the methodology that helps you get the info most effectively

What kinds of methods are there?

Survey: uses a questionnaire with intentionally worded and arranged questions. It can be open to random or selected people, either in person, by mail, or on the Internet.

Interview: consists of one person asking questions to another to obtain personal responses through conversation.

Focus Group: can be also called “group interview.” In a smaller group of people from the whole target population, the conversation focuses on a topic.

Observation: is conducted by taking detailed notes of things that stand out to you—what you hear, smell, touch, see, taste, and feel. It is done over a period of time at a particular location(s).

Photo Voice: uses cameras to take snapshots of issues that you are facing. Each photo is then captioned to tell a story.

Survey	
☺ Pros ☺	☹ Cons ☹
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can help you understand the <i>who, how many, and how much</i> of the experience • Can get the solid numbers to prove your claim • Results speak to logic • Relatively cheap • Easy and quick for people to take • Can describe large populations • Can reach out to many people and build membership • Relatively easy and quick to analyze the data • Can be used for many purposes: opinion polls, community needs assessments, program evaluations, etc. • More generalizable than other methods • Can test hypotheses • Can be translated in advance • Can be built upon previously conducted research • Easier to maintain confidentiality • Can be done online (surveymonkey.com) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May require a lot of time and people power • Doesn't provide details and stories • May miss the nuanced feelings and attitudes • Relies on the respondents' honesty and accuracy in reporting • Needs specific research question(s) ahead of time • May require literature review • Less likely to create deep human connection • Results don't speak to emotions • Doesn't lead directly to empowerment • Limits elaborative discussion • Respondents may feel pressured • Respondents may tell you what you want to hear, not what they feel • Hard to understand for some people • Reminds youth of school and exams • A free account has a limit for the number of questions

Interview	
☺ Pros ☺	☹ Cons ☹
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can help you understand the <i>how</i> and <i>why</i> of the experience • Can foster connections and relationships • Can capture personal stories and experiences • Can go deeper with probes • Questions can be tweaked • Can be done without much existing literature • Can get more background info/demographics • Allows for more comfort • Can catch subtle gestures and facial expressions • Can get serious responses, which are more reliable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time-consuming • Can reach out to a limited number of people • Requires “people skill” to establish trust • Participants may get defensive • May require some recording devices • Questions can be loaded or leading • Requires time and/or people for transcription • Less generalizable • Difficult for the data to be representative of a group • May need to compensate the participants • May require on-site translation • Harder to maintain confidentiality

Focus Group	
☺ Pros ☺	☹ Cons ☹
<p><i>In addition to the pros of interview...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants can relate to each other • Allows for elaborate discussions • Can build momentum by connecting energy • Can get varied perspectives at once • Can lead to action • One researcher vs. many participants may reduce pressure • Safe/welcoming environment • May help you get more info than you expected 	<p><i>In addition to the cons of interview...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can't reach as many people as surveys • Requires strong facilitation skill • May require a particular set-up: interactions, group activities, etc. • Difficult to coordinate and meet everyone's needs: time, place, safe environment, accessibility, etc. • Even harder than interviews to maintain confidentiality • Participants may not be honest or remain silent about things that are usually considered unacceptable

Observation	
☺ Pros ☺	☹ Cons ☹
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can document what’s going on at the moment • Can pick up body language and vibe • Comes from the observer’s own perspective (can also be a con) • Can get “facts”—what you see, what exists • Can include some numbers and stories (mini-survey/interview) • More effective when you are an insider of the community or you have access to the community • More effective when you have a lot of previous knowledge about the issue/situation/community and know what to look for • Can help you have more profound understanding of own surroundings • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be biased—you may see what you want to see and miss something • May require access to the space/community • May need connection to the gatekeeper • Needs to strategize on who would be the right person to ask (imagine how and by whom you will be introduced to the community—leader, boss, mom, gov’t official, etc.?) • You may not know what to look for as an outsider • Require extensive note-taking • A lot of room for interpretation • We see what we wanna see • Can’t judge book by its color/can give to stereotypes • I can be biased in how I perceive things • How do I know if I’m not LGBTQ?

Photo Voice	
☺ Pros ☺	☹ Cons ☹
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great tool for participatory research • Creates symbolic value • A picture can paint 1.000 words • Effective photos have comparison photos • Can send powerful messages • Makes you notice things you wouldn’t have before • Good way to start conversations • Can go deep with one photo 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to make assumptions without all info • People might say what you want to hear • Pictures can be demoralizing—may need to pick inspiring pictures as well • Photos can be staged (can also be a pro depending on the strategy) • Room for bias—you may only take photos of what want you to see • Better to use as step 2, to prove more after survey, etc. • People might not be interested in photos • Requires cameras and technological skills • Insinuating something that might not be true