




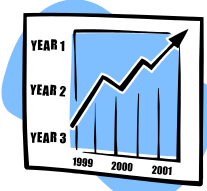
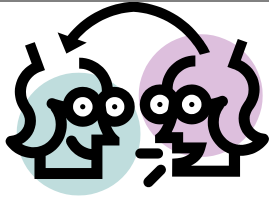


Research methods and approaches

a. Research terminology:

<p>Data</p> 	<p>Information gathered during the research process. 'Raw' data is information which has not yet been analysed.</p>
<p>Empirical Research</p> 	<p>Research based on first-hand gathering of data through interviews, questionnaires, ethnographies, participant observation, action research and so on.</p>
<p>Ethnography</p> 	<p>The direct observation, description and analysis of the activities and behaviour of members of a social group, for instance a youth gang.</p>
<p>Informant</p> 	<p>Someone that participates in a research project, generally through interview. Also referred to as a research participant or interviewee.</p>
<p>Methods</p> 	<p>The tools used to gather research data, for instance a phone questionnaire, face-to-face interview, gathering census data.</p> <p>Different methods are used in quantitative research and qualitative research.</p>
<p>Quantitative Research</p> 	<p>Research discovering facts about social experiences and trends where <i>data is collected through measuring things</i> and is analysed through <i>numerical comparisons</i> and statistical inferences.</p> <p>Data is represented numerically as a percentage, a mean, and average etc. Commonly, data appears as a table, a graph, or a pie or line chart.</p> <p>As data is presented as representative, the <i>sample</i>, that is the source of the data, is extremely important.</p>

<p>Qualitative Research</p>	<p>Research that is not presented as representative but as offering people's <i>reflections or perspectives</i> on an issue or experience. It is traditionally conducted via interviews or observation.</p>
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Data is analysed by themes drawn from informants' descriptions.

Also referred to as 'interpretive' and 'grounded', qualitative research is more interested in questions of how and why than in how many.

Theory



A substantiated (evidence based) explanation for the way something is as it is.

The body of rules, ideas, principles, and techniques that applies to a particular subject.

Transcript



The typed record of an interview obtained from audio or video recordings.

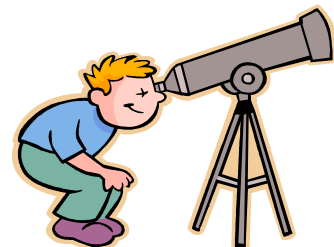
Sample



A group of individuals selected by a researcher because they possess particular attributes of interest to the research project.

A representative sample is one which is representative of a larger group. If the sample is selected carefully, the resulting data can be applied to the group as a whole.

Observation



Observation is the systematic noting and recording of events, behaviours and objects in the social setting chosen for the study. The observational record is referred to as *field notes*, which are detailed, non-judgmental, concrete descriptions of what is being observed. A participant observer is someone who is a part of the activity as well as making the observations.

b. Quantitative methods: the survey or questionnaire

Questionnaires produce quantitative data which is processed and analysed numerically.



Questionnaires can be conducted by mail, telephone, over the internet and face-to-face.



The largest questionnaire in Australia is the *Census of Population and Housing* conducted every 5 years by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. An example of 2006 Census data for Airds can be found at the back of this workbook.

Questionnaires are generally time efficient, cheap and can be distributed to a large number of people fairly easily. It is also possible to select groups of people to survey who are representative of the wider population which means that sample data can be representative of the wider community.

c. Qualitative methods: the interview

Gaining access to people's views and experiences is the key to qualitative research. Although there are many different qualitative methods, the *interview* is the most common.

Interviews are usually undertaken face-to-face, although telephone interviews are sometimes used. The interview is recorded for later transcription (typing up raw data) and analysis. Recording an interview prevents important things the informant has said from being missed.

Interviews can be time consuming, and at times emotionally draining for both the researcher and the informant.

Styles of interview:

1. Structured interview: most resembles the survey method discussed above except that the interviewer completes the questionnaire in a face-to-face encounter with the participant.

2. Semi-structured interview: not as structured but includes a series of questions as well as prompts which encourage the participant to expand on their answers. For instance 'Can you give me an example of that?' or 'Why do you think that?'

3. Unstructured interview: this is the most open type of interview. Open-ended questions and prompts are used to explore an issue with the informant, but these are not necessarily prepared before the interview. As the informant is more able to guide the interview it is often used to enable people to tell their life story.

4. Group Interview / Focus Group: A focus group usually involves up to ten people who have a similar interest or experience. This form of interview can be very lively as the participants can redirect the discussion to their own interests. It tends to generate a large amount of data as participants stimulate discussion amongst themselves. This method is generally the hardest style of interview to arrange, conduct, record and transcribe.

Interviews commonly involve the following questions styles:

- Background demographic: *How old you are?*
- Descriptive: *How would you describe yourself?*
- Structural: *If you had to put yourself into a social class, what would you say?*
- Opinion: *How successful do you think the youth leadership program has been?*
- Feelings: *How did failing that exam make you feel?*
- Knowledge: *How do you begin each 'outreach' evening?*

d. Other methods

There are many ways to collect the information needed for research and new creative ways are constantly being explored by researchers at SJSC.

Example: Photo-elicitation interviews

The 'photo elicitation' interview is a research method ideally suited to young people who may be reserved or have difficulty expressing themselves verbally. It is being used to both encourage and empower young people to express their feelings and talk about their experiences through the use of photos they have taken.

"Photo elicitation lets children set the linguistic level in accord with their ability. The children decide what they want to say and how to do so. The researcher typically does not have a structured or complex interview schedule but rather lets the photographs and child's insights lead the way for conversation and sharing.

In photo elicitation, children's cognitive development is matched with the type of information that may be elicited. Photography stimulates kids' memories in ways that are different from verbal-based interviews ... Using photos can improve the interview experience with children by providing them with a clear, tangible, yet non-linguistic prompt."

From Marisol Clark-Ibanez (2007) Inner-city. In Sharper Focus in G. S. Stanczk (e) *Visual Research Methods*, Sage Publication.

Evaluation research

Evaluation research involves examining the *value* and *benefits* of a program as a means of contributing to its *improvement*.

The evaluation partnership

The evaluation is based on collaborative research between researchers from the university and members of the contracting organisation.

The evaluation is conducted by negotiation, with respect being given to the organisation's goals and ethos and to the needs of the researchers and the people or organisations being researched.

The evaluation is a learning experience for all partners. The researchers / evaluators respect the expertise and wisdom of the organisation's members and these members respect the knowledge and competence of the researchers.

The role of the evaluator

The evaluator's role is generally that of an independent consultant, but with the flexibility to become a participant when the study requires.

The role involves collaboration with stakeholders to ensure that their interests and priorities are covered within the study.

The evaluation research project

An evaluation research project is generally required to assess the key objectives and activities of a program against performance measures.

The steps involved in the evaluation research project are:

- i. Develop the evaluation questions
- ii. Negotiate, plan and design the evaluation research plan
- iii. Submit the proposal to an ethics committee for ethics approval
- iv. Undertake research activities to collect data
- v. Analyse the data and information collected

Report on the evaluation