

Data Collection Methods

Method Type	Options within Type	Advantages of Type	Limitations of Type
Observations	• Observer as participant • Participant as observer • Observation without participation	• First-hand experience • Recording of information as it occurs • Rapid learning of unfamiliar social worlds • Rich description for analysis	• Researcher may be intrusive • Good observation and personal skills required • Access to some sites may be problematic • Validity issues harder to satisfy
Individual Interviews	• Members of a population • Informants within the setting • Experts in the topic • Structured or unstructured • Face-to-face, phone or email interviews	• Knowledge of participants' perspectives and experiences • Allows control over topics addressed	• Depends upon knowledge and articulation of respondent • Could be misleading in some circumstances • Selection bias issues must be addressed
Focus Groups		• Group interaction is useful for some topics, such as shared experiences • Efficient way to interview	• Dominant individuals can influence results • Must be careful in selecting issues/ participants
Documents	• Public (newspaper articles, advertisements, government reports) • Private (letters, email, diaries) • Organizational (minutes, client records, budgets)	• Written material is ready for coding • Can provide valuable context	• Must interpret carefully as to circumstances of production and intended use/audience • Validity issues are trickier
Audio-Visual	• Photographs • Videotapes • Art objects • Film	• Unobtrusive way to collect data • Creative and compelling	• May be difficult to interpret • Validity issues harder to satisfy