GLOBAL EDITION

Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences

NINTH EDITION

Howard Lune • Bruce L. Berg

Pearson

Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences

NINTH EDITION

GLOBAL EDITION

Howard Lune
Hunter College, CUNY

Bruce L. Berg
California State University, Long Beach

Pearson

Harlow, England • London • New York • Boston • San Francisco • Toronto • Sydney • Dubai • Singapore • Hong Kong
Tokyo • Seoul • Taipei • New Delhi • Cape Town • Sao Paulo • Mexico City • Madrid • Amsterdam • Munich • Paris • Milan

the word *why*, in American culture, tends to produce in most people a negative response. One possible explanation has to do with the punitive connotation of this question, as in "Why did you do that wrong thing?" Consequently, when subjects mention some form of conduct or an attitude and are then asked by the interviewers, "Why?" they may not respond accurately or completely. Yet, if asked in response to these same statements, "How come?" they may offer more thorough responses in a more relaxed manner.

Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin (1948) similarly found that when affective topics were considered, neutralizing the sense of the questions (reducing their affects) improved the likelihood of a full answer. They cited, as an example, asking subjects in a study of human sexuality, "Do you masturbate?" Virtually all the initial respondents answered immediately, "I never masturbate." Yet, when the question was reworded—"About how many times a week would you say you masturbate?"—suddenly many respondents were willing to offer responses. The second version of the question tends to neutralize or normalize the affect (sensitivity) of the question. Asking how often one masturbates implies that others do so as well, thereby reducing the affect of the word and concept *masturbate*. (Apart from the issue of question wording, it also matters who is asking and how the subject perceives them. As an instructor, I would not allow a lone female college student to interview men about their sexual practices, including masturbation. It would invite risks to the students as such questions would typically only come up between people with very few personal barriers between them, and generally threaten the validity of the responses. I wouldn't recommend having men ask women about their sexual practices either, though the risks are not identical.)

There are also strategies for neutralizing the threat inherent in certain topics. For example, it is unlikely that you would elicit helpful answers from police officers if you were to ask them, "What steps would you take to protect yourself from liability if you made a mistake during an arrest?" The question itself implies that the informant has or would both make mistakes and try to cover them up. Furthermore, the topic potentially involves illegal activities. In contrast, consider the following question: "If a fellow officer admitted to you that he or she had made a mistake during an arrest, it would raise a host of questions about how to handle it. Some of those questions involve the officer's liability. How do think you might advise them in order to protect themselves in this respect, separate from all of the other issues that need to be considered?" Such a question makes the issue more abstract, removes the personal risk, and still admits that the whole hypothesis involves treading some dangerous waters. The point is that there are valid pieces of information that we might want which refer to threatening contexts. We have to think about ways to take the question out of that context in order to remove or reduce the threat to get at the information.

4.7.2: The Double-Barreled Question

Among the more common problems that arise in preparing guidelines or schedules is the double-barreled question. This type of question asks a subject to respond simultaneously to two issues in a single question. For instance, one might ask, "How many times have you smoked marijuana, or do you not use drugs?" It should be noticed that the two issues in this single question are slightly unrelated. In the first clause, the question asks the frequency of marijuana usage. The second clause confuses the issue and asks whether refraining from marijuana also means refraining from other substances. By lumping the two together, the researcher is creating a false dichotomy—the idea that it has to be one or the other—without providing any opportunity for an informant to separate the two. This "error" is sometimes introduced deliberately in "push polls," where the goal is to force respondents to give a particular desired answer. In that situation, the question might resemble this: "Do you favor collecting DNA samples from teachers for background checks, or do you not care what happens to other people's children?" Often, however, the error is accidental and less obvious.

The logical solution to the double-barreled question, of course, is to separate the two issues and ask separate questions. Failure to separate the two issues may yield some answers, because people tend to be obliging during interviews and may answer almost anything they are asked, but analysis of a response to a double-barreled question is virtually impossible.

4.7.3: Complex Questions

The pattern of exchange that constitutes verbal communication in Western society involves more than listening. When one person is speaking, the other is listening, anticipating, and planning how to respond. Consequently, when researchers ask a long, involved question, the subjects may not really hear the question in its entirety. Their response, then, may be only to some small portion of a greater concern woven into the complex question. Thus, keeping questions brief and concise allows clear responses and more effective analysis of the answers. In my experience, if you ask a subject about two things at once, he or she will tell you about the second of them, losing sight of the first.

4.8: Pretesting the Schedule

4.8 Report the role of a pretest of the interview schedule for saving on future time and cost

Once researchers have developed their instrument and are satisfied with the general wording and sequencing of questions, they must pretest the schedule. Ideally, this involves at least two steps. First, the schedule should be critically

examined by people familiar with the study's subject matter—technical experts, other researchers, or persons fitting the type to be studied. This first step facilitates the identification of poorly worded questions, questions with offensive or emotion-laden wording, or questions revealing the researchers' own biases, personal values, or blind spots.

The second step in pretesting before the instrument can be used in a real study involves several practice interviews to assess how effectively the interview will work and whether you will obtain the information you seek. You should record and transcribe the practice interviews and compare the transcripts to the interview guidelines. Make note of any point at which you had to clarify or repeat a question; you may want to modify the wording. At what points, if any, did your subjects become reticent, angry, defensive, or otherwise upset? Those sections might need to be moved, reworded, regrouped, or more carefully introduced. There might be follow-up questions that you found useful in more than one interview. They should probably be added to the guidelines. In general, look for evidence that your research subjects were more or less motivated, more or less likely to go off topic, or likely to give very short answers. Most importantly, look for signs that your questions had a different meaning to your subjects than that which you intended. Finally, you should code the practice interviews as you would any "real" data and attempt to analyze the patterns of responses. (See Chapter 11 for more on text analysis.) Ask yourself whether, if you had more data like this, you would know how to answer your research question.

A careful pretest of the instrument, although time consuming in itself, usually saves enormous time and cost in the long run.

4.9: Long versus Short Interviews

4.9 Evaluate the considerations while deciding on the length of the interview

Interviewing can be a very time consuming, albeit valuable, data-gathering technique. It is also one that many uninitiated researchers do not fully understand. This is particularly true when considering the length of an interview. Many quantitative researchers who dabble at interviewing, as well as those who are used to making uninvited "cold calls" for research, are convinced that interviews must be short, direct, and businesslike. Some who use interviews over the telephone even recommend keeping them to no more than about five minutes (Hagan, 1995). As a result, one issue surrounding interviews is exactly how long or short they should be.

There are several ways to answer this question, but all will immediately direct your attention back to the basic research question(s). If potential answers to research questions can be obtained by asking only a few questions, then the interview may be quite brief. If, on the other hand, the research question(s) are involved or multilayered, it may require a hundred or more questions. Length also depends on the type of answers constructed between the interviewer and the subject. In some cases, where the conversation is flowing, a subject may provide rich, detailed, and lengthy answers to the question. In another situation, the subject may respond to the same question with a rather matter-of-fact, short, cryptic answer.

Obviously, the number of questions on the interview schedule is at least partially related to how long an interview is likely to take. On average, an interview schedule with 165 questions is likely to take longer than one with only 50 questions. Yet, there are several misconceptions about long interviews that sometimes creep into research methods classes. For instance, some researchers believe that most subjects will refuse to engage in an interview once they know it may last for two or more hours. Others maintain that subjects may not remain interested during a long interview, and it will end in a withdrawal. Or, conversely, some researchers believe that short interviews do not provide any useful information. In fact, I am certain that such conditions do occur. However, they do not represent binding rules or even terribly viable guidelines.

Interviews, unlike written surveys, can be extremely rewarding and interesting situations for both the interviewer and the subject. Believing that subjects would quickly weary with a written survey containing 175 questions may be true. I for one find such a situation boring. However, talking with an interviewer about things that matter to the interviewee, and doing so in a way that provides him or her with appropriate feedback, often provides subjects with a kind of intangible yet intrinsic reward. It is common for subjects to comment after a long interview that they did not actually realize so much time had already passed. I liken this to reading a good book. At some time or another, most of us have begun reading some exciting or engaging novel and not realized that hours had actually passed. So it is with a well-run long interview. Even after several hours, there is often a feeling that only minutes have passed. (A lot of minutes, but still less than hours.)

Certain types of research lend themselves to longer interviews than others. For example, when one conducts a *life history*, the researcher is interested in the life events of those being interviewed (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). In this case, the interview may go on for a very long time, perhaps carrying over to several separate sessions on different days. In other cases, the interview may involve a single topic and require only a brief interview situation.

Length is a relative concept when conducting interviews. Some topics and subjects produce long interviews, while others create short ones. Furthermore, different styles of interviewing, such as interactive or interpretive orientations, that require the development of a *relationship* between researcher and subject, may last not only long durations but also multiple sessions (Hertz, 1995; Kvale, 1996; Miller, 1996). What is important to remember is that simply because an interview contains many questions or only a few does not in itself immediately translate into a long or short interview.

Of course, budgeting is also a factor when designing large interview research projects. It's one thing to place an ad asking people to talk with you on the phone for five minutes, or attempting to recruit an entire family or group of people at once to sit down for a conversation. It is an entirely different matter to ask each informant to commit one to two hours to your research. There is, however, a simple and time-honored method of easing this request: Give them money. Payments for an informant's time are usually small. But symbolically, it is important to offer something in exchange for another person's time.

4.10: Telephone Interviews

4.10 Determine the advantages and disadvantages of telephone interviews

Related to the question of interview length is the role of telephone interviews in qualitative research. To be sure, telephone interviews lack face-to-face nonverbal cues that researchers use to pace their interviews and to determine the direction to move in. Yet, researchers have found that, under certain circumstances, telephone interviews may provide not only an effective means for gathering data but also in some instances—owing to geographic locations—the most viable method. In fact, the primary reason that one might conduct a qualitative telephone interview is to reach a sample population that is in geographically diverse locations. For example, if an investigator is interested in studying how nursing home directors define elder abuse, he or she might consider conducting in-person interviews with some sample of nursing home directors. However, given that nursing home facilities may be at some distance from one another, or that such research can include facilities throughout the country, conducting interviews by telephone may be a logical resolution.

Qualitative telephone interviews are likely to be best when the researcher has fairly specific questions in mind (a formal or semistructured interview schedule). Qualitative interviews are also quite productive when they are conducted among people with whom the researcher has already conducted face-to-face interviews or with whom he or she may have developed a rapport during fieldwork (Rubin & Rubin, 1997). There are several important, necessary steps to accomplish a qualitative telephone interview. First, the investigator must establish legitimacy; next, the researcher must convince the potential subject that it is important for the subject to take part in the research; and finally, the researcher must carefully ensure that the information he or she obtains is sufficiently detailed to contribute meaningfully to the study.

This first step can be accomplished in several ways. For example, the interviewer might mail a letter to the prospective subject explaining the nature of the research and that the subject will be called to set an appointment for the actual interview. The letter should be on official letterhead and may contain supportive documentation (letters of support from relevant or significant people in the community, newspaper stories about the researcher or the study, etc.).

The second step will arise when the investigator initially contacts potential subjects and attempts to convince them to take part. This call will actually accomplish several things. It will allow the subjects to ask questions and raise any concerns they might have about the study or their participation. It will also provide an opportunity for the investigator to gain some sense of the individual and to begin developing a kind of relationship and rapport as well as an opportunity to convince the individual to participate in the study if the individual is resistant.

These calls should be made during normal working hours, and researchers should *break the ice* by introducing themselves and ascertaining whether the individual has received the letter and accompanying materials. Calls can be made approximately 1 week to 10 days following the mailing of the letters of introduction; less if the letter of introduction was e-mailed. After the initial introduction, the researcher might ask if the individual has any questions. Next, using a polite and friendly but firm affirmative statement, the researcher should ask, "When would it be convenient for me to call you back to conduct the interview?" Recognize that not all subjects will immediately agree to take part, and the researcher may need to do a little convincing. This may offer the additional benefit of forging a rapport with the subject.

4.10.1: Advantages of the Telephone Interview

Hagan (2006) outlines a series of advantages associated with undertaking telephone interviews. These include reduced staff requirements, a method by which the investigator can easily monitor ongoing interviews to assure quality and avoid interviewer bias, and the ability to reach widespread geographic areas at an economical cost. In addition, interviews can be recorded via an inexpensive patch between the telephone and the recording instrument.

The interview can later be transcribed in the traditional fashion or downloaded into a computer and converted to text (which may need light editing) by a speech-to-text program (Halbert, 2003). Some researchers argue that telephone interviews and surveys, because they provide a kind of instant anonymity, are effective for obtaining hard-to-locate individuals or when asking highly sensitive questions (Champion, 2006; Hagan, 2006).

4.10.2: Disadvantages of the Telephone Interview

There are, of course, disadvantages to using telephone interviews, which for many researchers outweigh the potential advantages. For example, some people have no telephone, and others have unlisted numbers—both groups are effectively eliminated as potential interviewees. Also excluded from the subject pool are those who screen their calls and avoid taking calls from strangers. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, an important disadvantage is that current telephone etiquette generally discourages the interviewer and interviewee to use full channels of communication. In other words, calls are usually audio only; neither can read visual cues offered by the other (either those unintentional cues by the respondent or those intentionally transmitted by the interviewer).

4.11: Computer-Assisted Interviewing

4.11 Describe two approaches for integrating computer-based tools into the interview process

Computer-based tools may be integrated into the interview process in multiple ways. Here, I discuss two approaches. One is through the use of interview-specific software tools commonly referred to as *Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing* (CATI) and *Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing* (CAPI). Each of these tools has long been used in traditional survey research, but both also have potential qualitative applications. The second approach is to adapt everyday Internet-based communications programs for use in interviewing.

4.11.1: Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing

When conducting qualitative telephone interviews, CATI can be very useful. Many call centers rely heavily on such technology to select numbers to call—either randomly or from a database. The programs prevent multiple calls by different workers to the same number, audit and record the time and length of call, and connect all that to a database program or spreadsheet in which the interviewer records responses or response codes. In both research and telemarketing, such programs often also display the script or interview guidelines for the caller.

When the subject answers the telephone, the interviewer begins with an introduction, explains the purposes of the study, and invites the person to take part. Once the subject consents to participate, the interview begins. As the subject answers each question, the interviewer immediately types the response into the computer. In the more common computer-assisted, *pencil-and-paper* surveys, the interviewer chiefly asks the questions, lists the possible answers, and then inputs the subject's responses.

In a qualitative version of CATI, the interviewer asks open-ended questions and types in the full accounts offered by the subject. The advantages to this version include skipping the need to later transcribe the data and allowing the information to be immediately input into a textual data manager (a computer program designed for qualitative textual analysis) or to be coded. Naturally, this requires an interviewer who is skilled in typing and is able to take the equivalent of dictation. However, because not all interviewers have this typing capacity and because it can become quite expensive to hire and train someone to do this, an investigator might opt to simply record the subject during the course of interview. Later, this recording can be transcribed, but during the course of the interview the subject is permitted to speak openly and freely with an added sense of anonymity, since the interviewer does not know who the subject is or what he or she looks like. Again, there is the obvious loss of visual cues because of the absence of face-to-face contact. This can be rectified with CAPI.

4.11.2: Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing

Like CATI, CAPI employs a computer to provide the questions and capture the answers during an interview. In this case, the interviews are conducted face-to-face, thereby restoring the visual cues lost during a typical CATI-type interview. Again, the process can involve either the interviewer asking the questions and typing in the response (as with dictation) or recording the answers. There is also a second style of computer-assisted interviewing called *Computer-Assisted Self-Administered Interviewing* (CASI). In this version of the process, the subject is provided with a computer (a laptop or access to a desktop computer) and allowed to read the interview schedule and type in his or her responses. Again, the advantages to this strategy include having the data ready to be placed into a data manager or coded, as well as offering the subject privacy while responding (there is no interviewer present while the subject types his or her answers).

The disadvantages, unfortunately, are numerous and include the fact that some people cannot type very well and will take a long time to hunt and peck at the keyboard.

Some people may feel self-conscious about being poor spellers or writers, or just not like to write and, thus, use only very brief responses rather than fluid full accounts. Other subjects may be disinterested or in a hurry and choose to either skip questions or write only very short answers to save time. Some subjects may be weak readers or illiterate, further complicating the process. For this last category of subjects, some advances have been offered. Turner and his associates (1998), for example, have employed what they coined *Audio-CASI* as a strategy. This technique similarly employs a laptop computer with the questions on it and the ability of the subject to provide answers, but in addition this technique uses a headset and an audio version of the survey that is played for the subject to hear. Although Turner and colleagues (1998) used this technique with a survey-type questionnaire, the same process could be adapted for a more open-ended qualitative interview.

4.11.3: Web- and E-mail-Based In-Depth Interviews

Computer-based conversations can take place either synchronously or asynchronously. *Synchronous environments* include chat rooms and real-time threaded communications. Such environments provide the researcher and respondent an experience similar to face-to-face interaction insofar as they provide a mechanism for a back-and-forth exchange of questions and answers in what is almost real time. If desired, video cameras attached to the computers or phones can allow the researcher and respondent to actually see one another.

While this type of interview interaction is not identical to a more traditional face-to-face interview, it does approach it in a number of ways. For example, when a respondent answers a question, the interviewer has the ability to ask probing questions to elicit additional information or to run in an entirely different direction, similar to the interviewer's ability in a face-to-face interview. Consequently, a researcher can delve as deeply as he or she chooses into an area either structured into the interview schedule or arising spontaneously in the course of the interview exchange.

Asynchronous environments include the use of e-mail, message boards, and privately hosted bulletin posting areas. Asynchronous environments are commonly used by investigators undertaking survey-based research (Bachman & Schutt, 2003; Champion, 2006). Bampton and Cowton (2002, p. 1) suggest that qualitative researchers can also take advantage of what they term the "e-interview." They describe the benefits of conducting e-mail-based qualitative interviews:

> The asynchronicity of the e-interview has several consequences. There can be pauses in face-to-face interviews, of course, but in an e-interview the delay in interaction between researcher and subject can range from seconds (virtually real time) to hours or days. In our own research some of the replies came back surprisingly quickly, but the important thing is that the interviewee was not committed to replying promptly. In this lies one of the major benefits of the e-interview, in that busy subjects—and busy researchers, for that matter—do not have to identify a mutually convenient time to talk to each other. Nor do they each need to find a single chunk of time in which to complete the full interview, since as an interview—rather than something more akin to an e-mailed questionnaire—there should normally be more than one episode of question and answer. Indeed, such iterations are fundamental to the communication having the dialogic or conversational characteristics of a good interview.

For many people throughout most of the world, the use of e-mail has become a common and comfortable activity. Transferring this comfort to the interview situation, then, can similarly provide a benefit for qualitative interviewing (Stromer-Galley, 2003). Another advantage of the e-interview is that e-mail questions transmitted to an individual are effectively private: No one else online can add to, delete, or interrupt the exchange. Of course, there are hazards and disadvantages to working online, not the least of which is the difficulty in protecting confidentiality. E-mails and other files are never completely safe from hackers and other misuse. Even after a researcher has completed their work and deleted their files, backup copies may remain on shared servers that are outside of the researcher's control.

Setting meeting times for interviews and conquering distance problems have long been problems when conducting qualitative interviews. E-mail interviews eliminate these issues by permitting subjects to answer in their own time and literally from across the country or even the world. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) also suggest that fatigue can be a problem in lengthy interviews, and this too is eliminated in the e-interview. As of this writing, however, I do not see any advances in interviewing using texting, though smart phones have been integrated into many other forms of research.

Asynchronous environments such as e-mail and bulletin boards naturally have drawbacks when it comes to conducting qualitative interviews. One obvious drawback is the loss of visual cues—both those that occur between interviewer and respondent as part of the conversational flow of the interview and those that serve as social markers in the interaction, such as age, gender, race, dress style. (This may also be an advantage, as it eliminates layers of expectations and prejudices.) Also lacking is the spontaneity of probing and chasing down interesting topics that inadvertently arise in the course of the interview. Finally, interview subjects are limited to those who have access to both a computer and an e-mail account, as well as to those who are literate enough to express themselves in an e-mail format.

TRYING IT OUT

Suggestion 1

Develop a semistandardized interview on child-rearing practices. List five conceptual areas that are relevant to the topic. Next, make a sub-list of important areas of inquiry under each of these. Then create one question per item in the sub-lists that will help measure data. Make sure that the questions in the interviews are of different types. Finally, think about the order of questions that would make the most sense if you were to interview new parents on their child-rearing practices.

4.12: Conducting an Interview: A Natural or an Unnatural Communication?

4.12 Evaluate why the research interview is not a natural communication exchange

Everyone actually has received some training and has experience in interviewing. Children, for example, commonly ask their parents questions whenever they see or experience something different, unusual, or unknown. In school, students ask their teachers questions and respond to questions put to them by teachers. People regularly observe exchanges of questions and answers between teachers and other students, siblings and parents, employers and employees, and talk show hosts and guests, as well as among friends. Thus, one might assume that since everyone has received tacit training in both asking questions (sending messages) and answering questions (receiving messages), the research interview is just another natural communication situation. But the research interview is not a natural communication exchange.

Beyond acquiring the ability to send and receive messages while growing up in society, people also learn how to avoid certain types of messages. Goffman (1967) has termed this sort of avoidance *evasion tactics*. Such tactics may involve a word, phrase, or gesture that expresses to another participant that no further discussion of a specific issue (or in a particular area) is desired. Conversely, people also usually acquire the ability to recognize these evasion tactics and, in a natural conversational exchange, to respect them. This sort of deference ceremony (Goffman, 1967, p. 77) expresses a kind of intrinsic respect for the other's avoidance rituals. In return, there is the unspoken expectation that this respect will be reciprocated in some later exchange.

As anyone who has ever conducted an interview or watched a political debate already knows, this sort of deference ceremony simply cannot be permitted during the course of a research interview. In fact, a subject's evasion tactics during the course of an interview are among the most serious obstacles to overcome—but overcome them you must! At the same time, you do not want to jeopardize the evolving definition of the situation, the potential rapport with the subject, or the amount of falsification and gloss a subject may feel compelled to use during the interview. As Gorden (1987, p. 70) suggested, "If all respondents said nothing, responded with truth, or said 'I won't tell you!' the task of the interviewer would be much simpler. Unfortunately, the respondent can avoid appearing uncooperative by responding voluminously with irrelevancies or misinformation, and this presents a challenge to the interviewer." In other words, the interviewer must maneuver around a subject's avoidance rituals in a manner that neither overtly violates social norms associated with communication exchanges nor causes the subject to lie.

Qualitative interviews may appear to be similar to ordinary conversations in some ways, but they differ in terms of how intensely the researcher listens to pick up on key words, phrases, and ideas (Rubin & Rubin, 2004). They differ also in terms of the kinds of nonverbal cues that the investigator will watch for in order to effectively identify the interviewee's emotional state, deference ceremonies, and even lies. One way these obstacles can be handled is through use of the dramaturgical interview.

4.13: The Dramaturgical Interview

4.13 Explain how the design of the dramaturgical model benefits the research interview process

There are a number of necessary terms and elements connected with understanding the dramaturgical interview and learning how to maneuver around communication-avoidance rituals. Central to these is the differentiation between the *interviewer's role* and the *roles an interviewer may perform*. As De Santis (1980, p. 77) wrote, the interviewer may be seen as "playing an occupational role," and "society can be expected to have some knowledge, accurate or inaccurate, about the norms which govern the role performance of various occupations." For instance, in our society, one might expect a farmer to wear jeans, not a suit, while working in the field (or relaxing at home), while some teachers can get away with Hawaiian shirts. Similarly, one can expect certain things about appearance, manner, style, and language connected with other occupational roles, including that of an interviewer.

The implication is that preconceived notions do exist among interviewees, but these notions are malleable. There can also be preconceived notions of subjects on the part of interviewers. Whether acknowledged or not, "There is always a model of the research subject lurking behind persons placed in the role of interview respondent"