

# Lecture 5: Survey Research and Interviewing



# Aims of this Lecture

- An introduction to a wide and complex body of material
- Understand basics of questionnaire design and survey management
- Acquire knowledge and skills related to obtaining relevant information and record responses correctly
- Establish standards of value neutrality, ethics, anonymity and confidentiality
- Learn enough about these subjects to get professional help with the details

# Contents of this Lecture

- Surveys
- Questionnaire design
- Interviews
- The interviewer
- Asking questions
- Interview questions
- Interviewers' principles of performance

# Main Source

Sarantakos, Sotirios  
(1998).

*Social Research.*

Melbourne:  
Macmillan  
Publishers.

Second edition.



# Some Terms

Interviewer

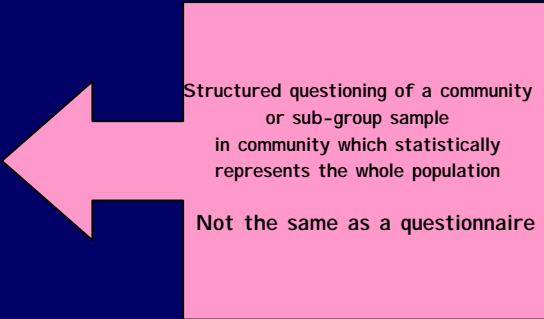
Respondent  
Interviewee

Survey

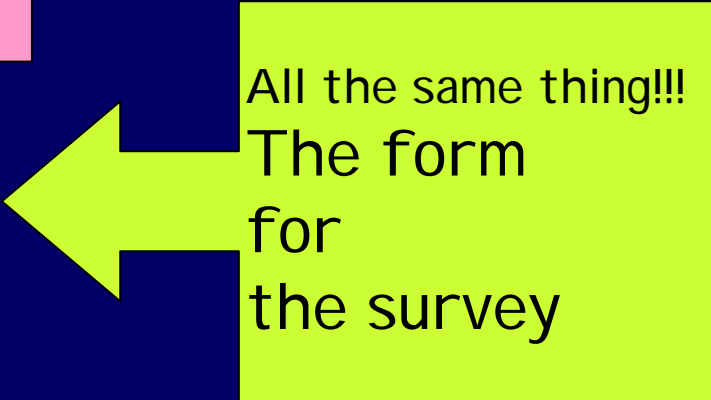
Questionnaire  
Survey instrument  
Interview schedule



The same thing!!!



Structured questioning of a community  
or sub-group sample  
in community which statistically  
represents the whole population  
Not the same as a questionnaire



All the same thing!!!  
The form  
for  
the survey

Surveys

# What is a survey?

Structured questioning of a community or sub-group sample in a community which statistically represents whole population

OR

A method of data collection employing a systematic and structured verbal or written questioning

# Survey or Questionnaire?

## Survey

structured questioning of a community or sub-group sample in community which statistically represents whole population

## Questionnaire

- Interview schedule
- Survey form
- Survey instrument

# Purpose of Surveys

To gather information  
about objective  
characteristics or attitudes  
in a community

# Types of Surveys

- face-to-face interviews
- telephone surveys
- self-complete questionnaires
  - Drop off and pick up
  - Mail back
- Surveys in meetings

# Uses of Surveys

1. To generate data or statistics: on level of use of a facility
2. To gain insight into people's perceptions and behaviour: reasons for not using a facility
3. To aid forward planning: how should facility change to meet your needs
4. To evaluate options: which proposed sites is most suitable for a new facility

# Benefits of Surveys

- ✓ Provide hard data for analysis of community characteristics
- ✓ Satisfy a political need to gauge a likely public reaction to a proposal
- ✓ Provide data to document likely impacts of proceeding in a certain direction
- ✓ Can give "silent" majority a voice
- ✓ Can test views expressed by groups claiming to represent community

# Survey Participants

Sample of population or sub-group selected randomly to reflect whole community

OR

Self-selection by interested individuals, e.g., respondents to mail back or pick-up/drop-off forms

# Resources Required

- Skilled social researcher to design questionnaire, select statistically valid sample, analyse findings and interpret them
- Appropriately trained interviewers with good interpersonal skills

# Survey Monitoring

- monitor interviews to ensure:
  - research issues specified are being covered
  - information gathered is being thoroughly and accurately recorded and collated
- also important to be able to help interviewers

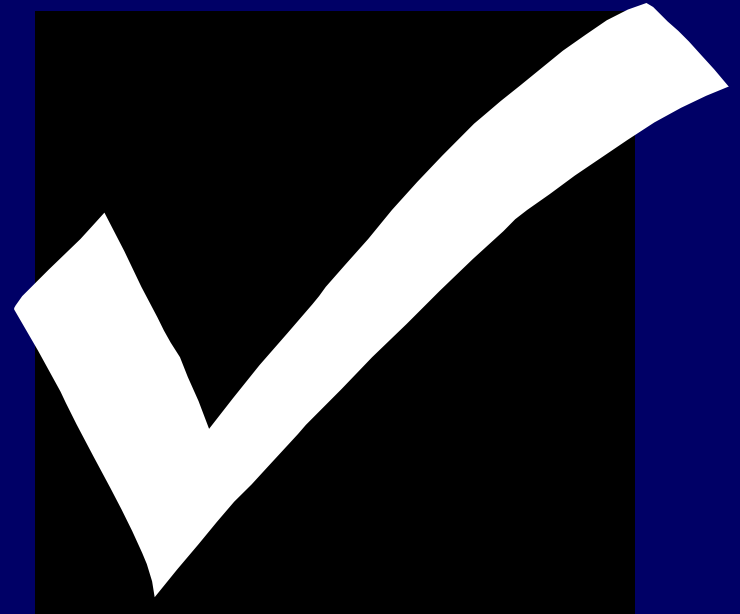


# 15 Steps in a Survey

1. decide on data or information to collect
2. determine whether a survey is most appropriate way
3. determine appropriate survey methodology, survey design and methods to be used
4. decide whether to use interviewer or a self-completed approach
5. design survey instruments (questionnaires) and all associated materials, like letters of introduction
6. pilot-test them: no component of a survey should be used until it has been thoroughly pilot-tested
7. May mean several "practice runs"
8. redesign questionnaire based on results of pilot tests
9. advise local council, relevant agencies and police
10. train survey conductors (interviewers and others)
11. conduct survey
12. tabulate, analyse, and interpret information
13. prepare draft report on survey
14. evaluate overall processes, as well as information generated
15. prepare a brief summary report for respondents

# Survey Tips

- ❑ keep questions unambiguous
- ❑ choose sample well
- ❑ keep questionnaire brief
- ❑ avoid collecting duplicate data
- ❑ select most appropriate survey method for your needs



# Survey Warnings and Advice

- be meticulous about methodology: must be capable of close scrutiny
- keep questions unambiguous
- choose sample well
- keep questionnaire brief
- select most appropriate survey method
- for CALD communities, may need to translate questionnaires or use bilingual interpreters as interviewers



# Survey Warnings and Advice

- seek expert advice on appropriate research approaches:
  - not acceptable within some traditional cultures for women to be interviewed without a man present
- avoid collecting data available elsewhere (e.g., census data)
- avoid collecting duplicate data
- always provide contact details
- be conscious of privacy and confidentiality issues
- ensure no individual, identifiable information is publicly released



# Try to avoid. . .

- ◇ questions on complex issues about which local people lack information
- ◇ responses reflecting short-run considerations to the neglect of long-term problems
- ◇ using surveys to hide from controversy and responsibility

# Try to avoid. . .

- ◇ question wording—what is said or not said can be misleading
- ◇ sensitive issues and questions that tend to elicit silence or misleading answers
- ◇ antagonising people who consider interviews an invasion of privacy

# Ethical Considerations

- ❖ No harm should come to the respondents as a result their participation in the research
- ❖ Interview may need to be abandoned rather than risk upsetting the respondent further

# Questionnaire Design



# Survey or Questionnaire?

## Survey

structured questioning of a community or sub-group sample in community which statistically represents whole population

## Questionnaire

- Interview schedule
- Survey form
- Survey instrument

# General Considerations of Questionnaire Design

1. Build-up of question sequences or modules within questionnaire
2. Order of questions for each variable (using approaches like funnelling)
3. Type of question used: free-response or closed (pre-coded)

# Interview Questionnaire Design Criteria

## 1. EASY FOR RESPONDENT TO UNDERSTAND AND ANSWER

- avoid unfamiliar words

## 2. EASY FOR INTERVIEWER TO ADMINISTER

- signposts for filter questions
- easy to record answers

## 3. FLOW, STRUCTURE, LENGTH

- to keep respondent's interest
- first questionnaire to set tone
- avoid tedium
- topics flow easily

# Format of Interview Questions

## SIMPLICITY

- Can respondents understand questions?

## PRECISION

- Can we assume that respondents understand questions in similar ways?

## 3. NEUTRALITY

- Do questions avoid implicitly influencing the direction of respondents' answers?

# What can go wrong1

- Subject matter is not sufficiently important to obtain a response
- People may not have enough information to provide considered response – superficial answers may result
- Can only ask a limited range of questions – limited ability to interact and obtain more information

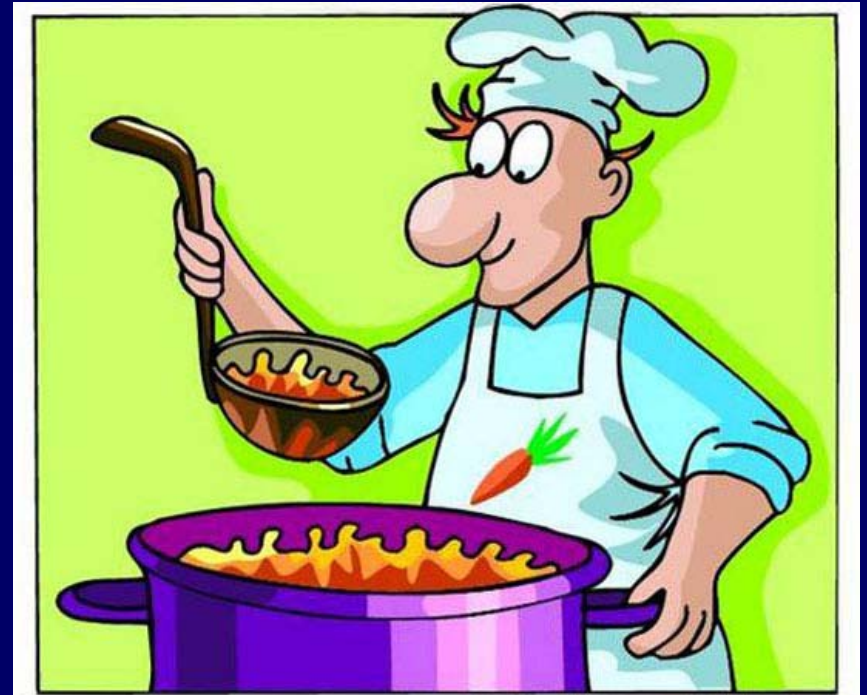
# What can go wrong 2

- Unless a valid sample is obtained, findings can be skewed or questioned
- Dissemination of survey findings may be a two-edged sword, raising false hopes and providing political fodder to others

# Pilot-testing of Questionnaires

## Essential to pilot-test:

- every question
- every question sequence
- every inventory
- every scale in a study



# Pilot-testing of Questionnaires

- ❑ unstructured interviews
- ❑ talks with key informants
- ❑ pilot *ALL* modified questions
- ❑ pilot *ALL* borrowed questions
- ❑ pilot all:
  - ✓ aids
  - ✓ maps
  - ✓ letters of introduction
- ❑ all open-ended questions: close them only when codes are devised
- ❑ make pilot sample as close as possible to sample
- ❑ maintaining interest: quotations (verbatim)
- ❑ drawings

# Interviews

# Interviewing

A form of questioning characterised by verbal questioning as its principal technique of data collection



# Types of Interviews

- **Exploratory interviews**
  - depth interviews
  - free-style interviews (including group interviews)
- **Standardised or structured interviews**
  - public opinion polls
  - market research
  - government surveys

# Interview Characteristics

- one of most popular methods of surveying in social research (combined with questionnaires)
- allow researcher to extract information regarding issues that are less specific, less defined and less objective than self-complete questionnaires
- very structured interview techniques tend to be used for quantitative research

# Advantages of Interviews 1



1. flexible: can be adjusted for diverse requirements
2. high response rate
3. require less patience and time from respondent
4. participatory: provide motivation to finish task
5. interviewer can control environment: useful when environment affects response of respondent
6. researcher can choose and control place, time and date of interview
7. interviewer can correct respondent if they misunderstand question

# Advantages of Interviews 2



8. face-to-face interview allows identity of interviewee to be known
9. encourages spontaneity: face-to-face interviewing does not allow extended time to answer
10. interviewer can ensure research questions are completed
11. more complex questions can be used with interviewer's assistance
12. provides possibility of greater possible length

# Disadvantages of Interviews



1. More costly and time-consuming than self-complete questionnaires
2. possible bias of interviewer can affect outcome, where it cannot in a self-complete questionnaire
3. Allows interviewee less anonymity: people may be less willing to discuss or respond to sensitive issues
4. Errors may occur in process of recording, evaluation and instruction
5. Errors can undermine interviewee trust in interviewer

# Main Causes of Bias during Interviews 1

- ⊗ Poor maintenance of rapport
- ⊗ Interviewer rephrasing of attitude questions
- ⊗ Altering factual questions
- ⊗ Careless prompting
- ⊗ Poor management of show cards

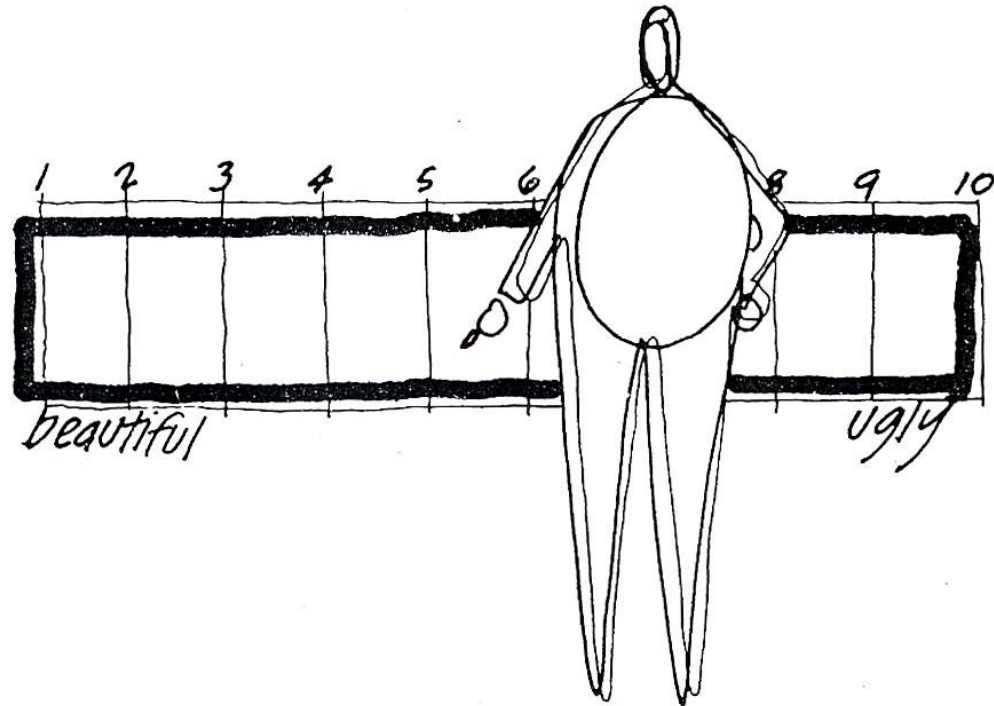
# Main Causes of Bias during Interviews 2

- ⊗ Biased probes
- ⊗ Asking questions out of sequence
- ⊗ Unreliable field coding
- ⊗ Poor management of “problem” respondents
- ⊗ Inadequate management of situational problems or special procedures

# Keep Language Simple



# Semantic Differential Scales



*Semantic differential scales are often used to measure visual and other performance elements of buildings.*

# The Interviewer

# Why use interviewers 1

1. when numerous open-ended questions are asked to improve response rates
2. can give a prepared explanation of purposes of a study more convincingly than a covering letter
3. will more easily reach less well-educated respondents
4. can help respondents with reading difficulties
5. offer standardized explanations to certain problems that arise

# Why use interviewers 2

6. prevent many misunderstandings
7. maintain control of the order or sequence questions are answered
8. feeling interviews are more "valid" in some sense
9. influence respondent's motivation
10. value of personal home visit for assessing environments

# The Interviewer 1



- Choose carefully
  - similar age, ethnicity and gender as interviewee
  - affable, communicative personality (not arrogant)
- dress: not detract attention away from interview
- make explicit effort to communicate in an egalitarian way

# The Interviewer 2



- can enhance research process by following up questions and discussions with prompting and probing
- done so it does not lead interviewee to answer in a certain way
- interviewer discrimination or judgement important

# Interviewer's 10 Central Tasks

1. Selecting and/or approaching respondents
2. Arranging date, time
3. Performing the interview
4. Controlling the interview situation
5. Avoiding bias
6. Recording answers correctly
7. Establishing and maintaining positive relations with the public
8. Bound by wording of questionnaire
9. Strive toward obtaining data uncontaminated by interviewing process
10. Avoid random errors due to carelessness, inaccuracies, misunderstandings, etc.



# The Interviewer as Juggler



- Time
- Rapport
- Interest
- Pace and tempo
- Confidentiality
- Trust
- Comfort
- Spontaneity
- Open-ended questions
- Prompts
- Probes
- Show cards

# Asking Questions

# Cover Letter

## Explains:

- Main objective and social significance of the study
- Requirements for completion such as maximum time, etc.
- Research team and sponsors
- Reasons why respondent should complete the questionnaire
- Assurances of anonymity and confidentiality
- Issues related to ethics

# Before interview begins . . .

- Check respondent has enough time for interview (or reschedule)
- Deal with second person if present
- Establish yourself comfortably
- Respondent is comfortable
- They cannot read questionnaire from where they are sitting



# Before interview begins . . .

- Their glasses nearby for reading show cards
- Adequate light
- Away from radio, TV., stereo or they are turned off or turned down
- Close enough to hear you
- Neither of you has glare from window in your eyes

# Process of responding

## Search process:

- ❖ Mental template **must be formed**: essential meaning of question formulated as an instruction to the brain to start searching
- ❖ Half-formulated answer passes through a number of filters
- ❖ *Hmmmmmm. . .*
- ❖ Finally answer comes out that can be understood and coded by interviewer
- ❖ Written down



# Interviewer-Respondent Relationship

- Clothing and grooming: neutral dressing: similar to respondent
- Not appear to be the wise judge but **an interested researcher who wishes to learn from the respondent**
- Do not appear to reward or punish respondents or encourage or discourage certain types of answers
- Neutral, receptive and eager to know the view of the respondent (find it interesting and valuable)

# Respondents' Needs in Interviews

## Ethics:

- privacy
- confidentiality

## Time:

- boredom
- repetition
- irritation
- Taxing memory
- Hypothetical questions
- Embarrassment (code cards)
- Do not take name if not required
- Something to equalise the transaction



# If a second person is present

- Try not to involve them in the interview
- Do not look at them if they try to interrupt
- Focus on the respondent
- Explain that two respondents will lead to a biased answer and result
- This is a gender issue so handle carefully so as not offend people

# Conduct of the Interview

- ✓ Do not change the **wording** of any question
- ✓ You can change linking phrases but only if they do not change the **content** of the question
- ✓ Do not give respondent any clues about your attitudes and expectations
- ✓ Do not talk about your background or family until **AFTER** the interview has been concluded
- ✓ Do **NOT** tell respondents what you think

# Timing Issues

- ❑ Order of questions matters
- ❑ Spontaneity matters
- ❑ Keep up pace and tempo of interview
- ❑ Keep respondent from getting bored
- ❑ Keep to promise about how long interview will take (or reschedule)



# Social desirability bias

- mode of questioning can affect degree of social desirability bias
- face-to-face methods like interviews: more likely to provoke respondents to put themselves in a better light
- *“How old were you when you first started to masturbate?”*
  - make respondent feel that behaviour is quite common and well known and can be discussed in a matter-of-fact way

# Inter-coder reliability 1

- ❑ Problems of consistency between interviewers (coders)
- ❑ May produce a hidden systematic bias
- ❑ More complex the coding frame, greater risks of inconsistency and bias

# Inter-coder reliability 2

## □ What to do:

- Design code categories unambiguously
- Train coders generally and specifically
- Close supervision and frequent checks
- Check-coding batches of questionnaires
- Software can detect conscious errors (cheating)

# Dealing with flippancy

- Ω Frivolous
- Ω Offhand
- Ω Dismissive
- Ω Superficial
- Ω Facetious
- Ω Jokey
- Ω Glib

Deal with this seriously  
by showing you are aware  
respondent is being flippant



# Interviewer Bias 2

Can cause problems and distortions which researcher must isolate or at least control

## ➤ Quality of the interviewer

- Lack of administrative or professional abilities, sloppiness, omitting or misreading questions, reading them out of order, recording wrong answers, misunderstanding respondent, leaving questions unanswered

## ➤ Misconduct

- Intentionally alter or omit answers, reword questions, replace respondents or cheat by not contacting respondent and answering questions personally

# Interviewer Bias 2

## ➤ Presentation

- Appearance, tone of voice, attitude to respondent and research, reactions to answers or comments made

## ➤ Expectations

## ➤ Probing

- Improper probing can lead to distortion

# Interviewers' Tips

- Introduction
- Trust
- Transition phrases
- Code cards and visual aids
- Filter questions in sets
- Need to feel interested and show attention

# Interview Questions

# Three types of questions

- 1. Factual questions:** read out the questions as printed on the schedule
- 2. Attitude and opinion questions**  
interviewers are forbidden to explain or reword in any way (perceptions, etc.)
- 3. Classification questions** (e.g., respondent descriptors, household composition): interviewers expected to devise their own probes to ensure correct information is obtained

# Types of Questions

- Open-ended questions
- Closed questions
- Funnel questions
- Filter questions
- Questions with probes



# Open-ended Questions

## Advantages

- Allow freedom to express feelings and thoughts, esp. on complex issues
- Offer more details than pre-coded questions
- Offer information in areas not foreseen by researcher
- Allow conclusions about respondents' ways of thinking and logic
- Allow respondent to show creativity, self-expression and initiative

# Open-ended Questions

## Disadvantages or limitations 1

- Not very suitable for sensitive questions
- Non-directive
- Hard to code
- Hard to quantify
- Hard to analyse
- Inter-marker correlation problems

# Open-ended Questions

## Disadvantages or limitations 2

- Produce large amounts of information (time issues)
- Time-consuming
- Allow no accurate comparisons
- Can offer useless or irrelevant information
- Not suitable if respondents have problems articulating well
- Require additional processing if statistical analysis is intended

# Closed (or pre-coded) Questions

## Advantages

- ❑ Easy to administer, code and answer
- ❑ Allow comparisons and quantification
- ❑ Help produce fully completed questionnaires
- ❑ Avoid irrelevant answers
- ❑ Statistical accuracy
- ❑ Less emotional content
  - . . . and therefore less prone to bias

# Closed (or pre-coded) Questions

## Disadvantages

- ❑ Need detailed pilot-testing to develop responses
- ❑ Difficult in covering all possible answers
- ❑ Restriction of freedom, creativity and expressiveness of respondent
- ❑ High chance of guessing answers
- ❑ You determine questions
- ❑ May not be most relevant questions
- ❑ “Factual” /non-emotive questions only  
... therefore not fully reliable

# Funnel Questions

# Example of a Funnel Question

1. *What sorts of people live around here?*
2. *Are they similar sorts of people or different sorts of people?*
3. *Do you think it's better if a suburb has the same sorts of people or different sorts of people living in it?*
4. *Do you think that this suburb would be better if it had the same sorts of people or different sorts of people living in it?*
5. *Do you think that there should be a mix of public tenants and owner occupiers in this suburb?*

## **IF YES:**

6. *What do you think the proportions of public tenants and owner occupiers should be?*

# Props (tools) for interview surveys

- specific instructions to ensure consistent approach by all interviewers
- questionnaires
- clipboards, identification cards and letters of introduction for interviewers
- letter explaining background and purpose of survey and how information will be fed back to respondents
- tape recorders?
  - can be off-putting
  - generate a great deal of extra work in transcription stage



**Interviewers'**

**Principles of Performance**

# 1. Rapport



# Interviewers' Principles of Performance 1

## Rapport

- ❑ Keeps respondent motivated
- ❑ Respondent will not take task seriously if good rapport not sustained (may start guessing, joking)
- ❑ Can delay interview if too "personal" or social worky
- ❑ Help respondent "play the role of a good respondent"
- ❑ Remain detached and professional but relaxed and friendly
- ❑ Do not appear cold or "official"
- ❑ Deal tactfully with personal comments
- ❑ Find ways of coping that do not offend or bias respondents

# Interviewers' Principles of Performance 2

## Prompts and show cards

- ❑ Respondent can see answer categories and keep them in mind while answering the question
- ❑ Interviewer may need to manipulate several sets of prompt cards
- ❑ Help respondents who cannot locate their spectacles
- ❑ Get cards back at end of interview



# 3. Probes



# Interviewers' Principles of Performance 3

## Probes

Follow-up questions after respondent has given a first answer to the main question

- ❑ Clearly indicated in questionnaire IN CAPS
- ❑ Some general, non-directive and some non-specific
- ❑ Others may require several follow-up questions
- ❑ Write down *verbatim*
- ❑ Be very careful not to second-guess or interpret what respondents "really mean"
- ❑ **Major source of interviewer bias**

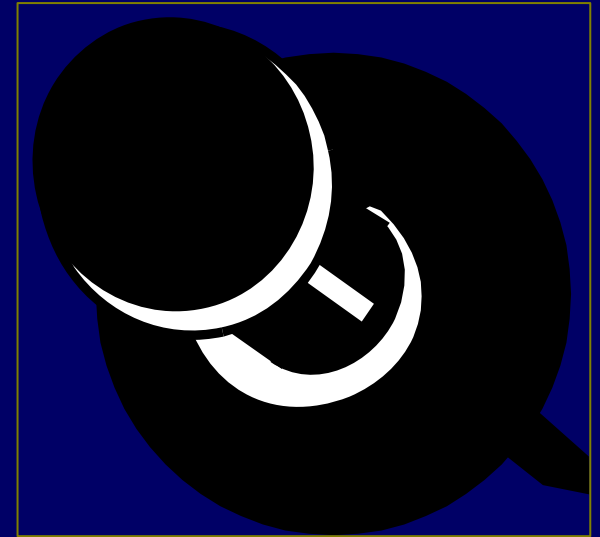
# Probe Examples

1. How would you say that this area differs from the others around it?

(PROBE: WHAT KIND OF AREA IS IT?)

ARE THE PEOPLE ANY DIFFERENT?

WRITE IN VERBATIM)



# Verbal Probes

Use with care so as not to introduce bias

- An expectant glance
- "*mmmmmm .....*"
- "*... what other reasons ....?*"
- "*please tell me more ...*"
- "*I'm interested in all your reasons ...*"
- "*Exactly what do you mean by ...?*"

# Interviewers' Principles of Performance 4

## Field coding and calculations

- Record response by ticking boxes or circling response category
- Sometimes they are read out to respondent
- Need detachment, care and sensitivity

# Interviewers' Principles of Performance 5

## Question order

- When respondent digresses to a broader question . . .
- Keep respondent to the point
- BUT try not to lose rapport
- **NEVER** leaf through questionnaire, as contextual effects of preceding questions will be lost
- Deal with respondent impatience:  
*"I've already told you that!"*

## Routing instructions

(or filter questions)

- Directions to interviewer to go to a different part of the schedule
- Usually take a conditional form:  
*"if YES, go to Question 36."*

# Example of a Routing Instruction or Filter Question

Q5 Below is a list of activities that people may do in their spare time. For each of these activities, could you please indicate how interested you and your household would be in doing these?

**(PLEASE TICK ONE BOX FOR EACH)**

|   | Very interested | Somewhat interested | Not really interested | Not at all interested |
|---|-----------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Golfing                                       | 1               | 2                   | 3                     | 4                     |
| Fishing                                       | 1               | 2                   | 3                     | 4                     |
| Walking                                       | 1               | 2                   | 3                     | 4                     |
| Cycling                                       | 1               | 2                   | 3                     | 4                     |
| Recreation at parks / reserves                | 1               | 2                   | 3                     | 4                     |
| Boating                                       | 1               | 2                   | 3                     | 4                     |
| Eating / coffee / shopping in the town centre | 1               | 2                   | 3                     | 4                     |

Q6 Do you or any other members of the household ever go fishing?

**(PLEASE TICK ONE BOX)**

- Yes    1            **Go to Q7**
- No     2            **Go to Q9**

# EXAMPLE OF A FILTER QUESTION

29. Do you eat lunch here daily?

1 Yes

2 No

If no, go to Q. 32.

If yes:

30. What do you think of the lunch?

31. What would you prefer to have for  
lunch?

32. What time of day ...?

# Interviewers' Principles of Performance 7

## Language

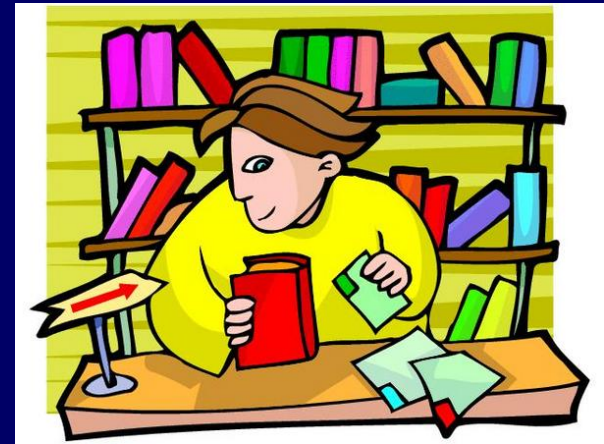
Be alert to problems of alternative usage of some words or phrases



# Interviewers' Principles of Performance 8

## “Problem” Respondents

- older people may not want to admit forgetfulness
- members of CALD communities
- some topics may turn out to be unexpectedly self-incriminating
- “knowledge” questions may be embarrassing
- \* interviewer must never show surprise at wrong answers



# Interviewers' Principles of Performance 9

## Situational problems

- “helpful” husband who may interfere or correct respondent at home
- Need to handle this diplomatically but stop the behaviour



# Interviewers' Principles of Performance 10

## Impression management

Interviewer creates immediate impression on a potential respondent before she opens her mouth:

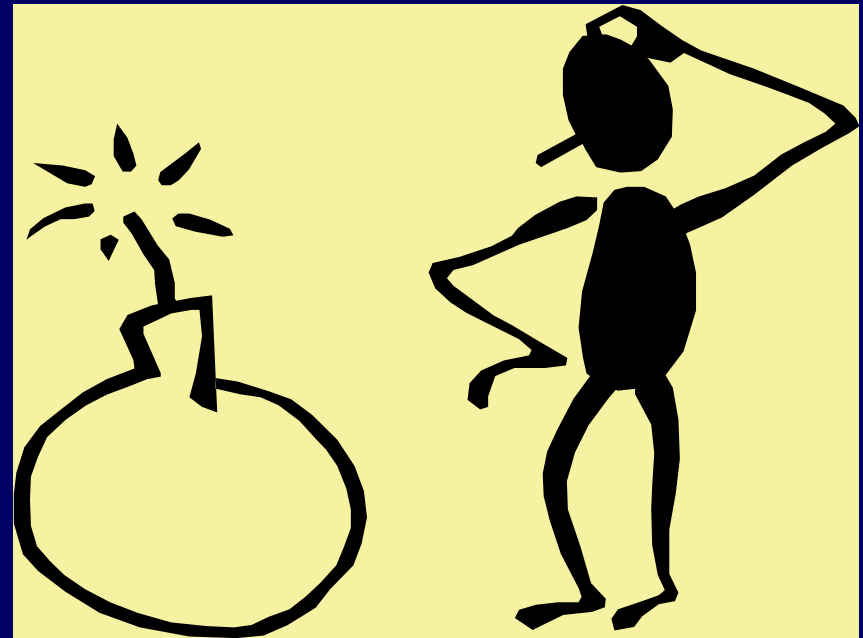
- Mode of dress
- Accent
- Apparent age
- Hairstyle
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Whole presentation of self



# Impression Management

## What to do?

1. Be aware of process of impression management
2. Refrain from expressing your distinctive style and personality
3. Avoid flamboyance and subdue other factors
4. Try to create the "right" image



# Your Information Needs as Interviewer/Project Manager

- 2 concerns:
  - accuracy
  - lack of bias
- final tabulations
- cross checks
- “funnel” questions
- “touchy” questions: put last (age, income, loneliness...)
- pilot or pre-test all questions

# Data Processing Requirements

- Stephanie Chang will speak about this
- keyed in : logical order
- avoid secondary coding
- one column for each question
- Pre-printed for direct keying; cuts handling
- error
- cost
- bulk
- personal relations!



# A Great and Wonderful Scientific Discovery

Once upon a time there was a researcher who made a great and wonderful scientific discovery.



This valuable discovery, however, eluded all attempts to turn it into a product.



He discovered the principle of sanity and beauty.



"What good is sanity and beauty if it doesn't bring prosperity?" cried the funding committee.

"What good is prosperity if it doesn't bring sanity and beauty?" responded the researcher.

This produced a wealth of shrugging.

