

COMPARISON OF RESEARCH METHODS

Research Method	Difficulty	How to do it	Benefits	Pitfalls	How to present it
Observation	easy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involves watching and listening to an activity or session, • taking notes, photos and numbers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be done while participating in activity • Quick and cheap. A photo can give you a lot of information (numbers, age, gender, etc) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If more than one observer is carrying this out, you'll need a framework to keep consistency • Being observed can alter people's behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a photo album on your website • To inform full reports or case studies
Written survey or questionnaire	medium/difficult	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create exact questions you need and cover all bases • Capture quantitative and qualitative data • Responses can be named or anonymous • Give as handout, by post or email 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capture information consistently • Data entry can be simple • Easy to carry out • Useful when the thing being measured is well understood • Useful for capturing lots of demographic data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be difficult to create the right questions (and to keep short) • Can have low response rate • Responses can be biased by the questions • Language, literacy and expressions can be an issue for some people • Format doesn't lend itself to capturing stories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In graphs, charts & tables • To inform full reports
Face-to-face survey or interview	medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be based on written survey so that all interviewees answer the same questions. • Interviews can also be less structured to weight different areas of importance • Can form the basis of case studies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be personalised, and elicit more in-depth responses. • Face-to-face interaction allows you to clarify questions, ask follow ups and ensure all questions are answered. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource and time consuming • Language might limit who you can talk to • Requires skilled interviewers • Might be difficult to summarise findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In graphs, charts & tables • To inform full reports or case studies
Poll	easy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a short-list of options to choose from • Ask people to vote in a range of ways and over time if needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick, with high returns • Doesn't rely on high literacy or language skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only captures answers on a small number of questions • People can be biased by seeing previous votes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In photos of vote (if done with counters) • In graphs, charts & tables • To inform full reports

Research Method	Difficulty	How to do it	Benefits	Pitfalls	How to present it
Feedback form/comment book	easy	Collect comments in post-card-sized forms on one or a small number of questions Ask a mix of quantitative and qualitative data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick to capture - high response, especially with some face-to-face interaction • Can be cheap or free (post-cards or website comment form) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extrapolating from small number of comments is dangerous • Responders might highlight good things rather than bad (especially if comment book is public) - echo chamber effect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To inform full reports • As a base for case studies (if you capture email/phone details of respondents)
Focus Group	difficult	Collect data through group interaction on a particular topic They can generate wider discussion and encourage action The facilitator needs to be highly skilled to get the most out of a focus group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-depth discussion and new points of view • Can be more efficient than one-to-one interviews • Quick results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small sample size might not be representative • Responses depend on group dynamics, confidence and language • Responses can be affected by public discussion • It can be difficult to compare results across sessions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To inform full reports • As a base for case studies
Other research/records	medium	These can be existing datasets, reports or case studies compiled by you or an external body They can inform your initial planning by suggesting questions to cover, or they can add data to back up your reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be useful for giving background information • No cost to reproduce (although accessing databases or journals might have a cost) • Can help locate your project in a wider context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be out of date, or not relevant to your project • Might not measure the things you need for your project • Can give a false sense of authority if compiled by government or other official body • Comparison with your data may be difficult or unreliable • Can be misleading unless fully explained 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To add value to your data in full reports • To make a case for the need of your project in funding applications • To introduce the topic to stakeholders