

Name of Method	Questionnaires
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<p>Brief Outline of Method</p> <p>A questionnaire is a list of written questions that can be completed in one of two basic ways</p> <p>Firstly, respondents could be asked to complete the questionnaire with the researcher not present. This is a postal questionnaire and (loosely) refers to any questionnaire that a respondent completes without the aid of the researcher.</p> <p>Secondly, respondents could be asked to complete the questionnaire by verbally responding to questions in the presence of the researcher. This variation is called a structured interview.</p> <p>Although the two variations are similar (a postal questionnaire and a structured interview could contain exactly the same questions), the difference between them is important. If, for example, we are concerned with protecting the respondent’s anonymity then it might be more appropriate to use a postal questionnaire than a structured interview.</p> <p>Questionnaires are restricted to two basic types of question:</p> <p>Closed-ended (or “closed question”) is a question for which a researcher provides a suitable list of responses (e.g. Yes / No). This produces mainly quantitative data.</p> <p>Open-ended (or “open question”) is a question where the researcher doesn’t provide the respondent with a set answer from which to choose. Rather, the respondent is asked to answer "in their own words". This produces mainly qualitative data.</p>

Strengths / Uses of Method	Weaknesses / Limitations of Method
<p>1. The researcher is able to contact large numbers of people quickly, easily and efficiently using a postal questionnaire (since all he / she has to do is identify the group that will be targeted and post them the list of questions).</p> <p>2. Questionnaires are relatively quick and easy to create, code and interpret (especially if closed questions are used). In addition, the respondent - not the researcher - does the time-consuming part of completing the questionnaire.</p>	<p>1. The format of questionnaire design makes it difficult for the researcher to examine complex issues and opinions.</p> <p>Even where open-ended questions are used, the depth of answers that the respondent can provide tend to be more-limited than with almost any other method of research. This makes it difficult for a researcher to gather information that is rich in depth and detail.</p>

Continuation of strengths / uses (if necessary)	Continuation of weaknesses / limitations: (if necessary)
<p>3. A questionnaire is easy to standardise. For example, every respondent is asked the same question in the same way. The researcher, therefore, can be sure that everyone in the sample answers exactly the same questions, which makes this a very reliable method of research.</p> <p>4. Questionnaires can be used to explore potentially embarrassing areas (such as sexual and criminal matters) more easily than other methods. The questionnaire can, for example, be both anonymous and completed in privacy. This increases the chances of people answering questions honestly because they are not intimidated by the presence of a researcher.</p>	<p>2. With a postal questionnaire, the researcher can never be certain the person to whom the questionnaire is sent actually fills it in. For example, if your research is concerned with finding-out the opinions of women on a range of issues, it would be less than useful if an unknown number of the questionnaires sent by the researcher were filled-in by men</p> <p>3. Where the researcher is not present, it's always difficult to know whether or not a respondent has understood a question properly.</p> <p>4. The researcher has to hope the questions asked mean the same to all the respondents as they do to the researcher. This is a problem that can - to some extent - be avoided by conducting a Pilot Study prior to conducting the real survey</p> <p>5. The response rate (that is, the number of questionnaires that are actually returned to the researcher) tends to be very low for postal questionnaires. A 20 - 25% return of questionnaires is probably something that most researchers would happily settle for and this may mean that a carefully-designed sample becomes unrepresentative of a target population.</p> <p>6. The problem of the self-selecting sample is particularly apparent in relation to questionnaires. When a response rate is very low the responses received may only be the opinions of a very highly motivated section of the sample (that is, people with strong opinions who take the time and trouble to complete and return a questionnaire).</p>

How **reliable** is this method? [Circle one option]

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Highly Reliable				Neither Reliable nor Unreliable					Highly Unreliable

Briefly explain why you think the method is reliable / unreliable

Postal questionnaires are one of the most reliable research methods because it is easy for the researcher to standardise questions - each respondent answers exactly the same question.

If the questionnaire asks closed questions, the (quantified) questions means there is little or no scope for the researcher to misinterpret the meaning of answers. For example, if an answer is restricted to "Yes / No / Don't Know" it is easy for the researcher to understand the exact intentions of the respondent.

Questionnaires are very easy to repeat ("replicate") because they are easily standardised. Each respondent, wherever they may be, answers the same question and it is easy for another researcher to repeat the research.

How **valid** is this method? [Circle one option]

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Highly Valid				Neither Valid nor Invalid				Very Low Validity	

Briefly explain why you think the method is valid / invalid

Questionnaires, in the main, are generally low in validity because they do not explore questions in any detail or depth.

Complex issues which require a respondent to explain their reasons for believing something are difficult to explore using this method.

Where closed questions are used the respondent is restricted to answering questions using the categories provided by the researcher - there is little or no scope for the respondent to qualify the meaning of their answers.

The questions asked are, by definition, those considered important by the researcher. It is easy, therefore, to miss important information because you fail to ask appropriate questions.

However, the fact that postal questionnaires can be anonymous means respondents may be encouraged to answer questions truthfully in the knowledge they cannot be identified. This increases the validity of their responses.

How easy is it to use a **representative** sample with this method? [Circle one option]

<input checked="" type="radio"/> 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Very Easy				Neither Easy nor Difficult					Very Difficult

Briefly explain why you think it is easy / difficult to use a representative sample with this method

Questionnaires are used extensively as the main method in **social surveys** where it's necessary to get the views of very large numbers of people.

The fact that the respondent does the time consuming work of completing the questionnaire makes it relatively easy to use this method to reach and record the views of such large numbers. The National Census, for example, uses a questionnaire to get the views of approximately 30 million people in the United Kingdom.

How easy is it to **generalise** your findings using this method? [Circle one option]

<input checked="" type="radio"/> 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Very Easy				Neither Easy nor Difficult					Very Difficult

Briefly explain why you think it is easy / difficult to generalise your findings using this method

Since it is relatively easy to reach large numbers of people using a questionnaire, sample sizes can be very large (you can, for example, reach everyone in a target population if you have the time and resources available - as in the National Census which is funded by the government).

With the potential for large sample sizes, questionnaires make it easier for the researcher to generalise their finding from the sample to the target population.