

**Conducting the Consumer Survey—A Primer for  
Volunteers with Special Sections on Interviewing and on  
Telephone Surveying**

by

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## PREFACE

As we look at today's world, we see a rather troubled universe which appears to be in shock. Yet it has relative affluence if compared to other times, a lack of warfare and more talented people than ever before; one wonders why man and his collective organizations appear to be so dependent and seemingly helpless. Perhaps, this is not due so much to his lack of wealth and availability of resources but more to the individual's lack of feeling represented and important. Individuals are expressing to us in many ways that they are satisfied with both the national quality of life and their own quality of life. Inflation, energy crunches, the disappointments in government, corporations and other enterprises, etc. almost appear to result in a malaise. Yet, we find most individuals indicating their personal future is better than the nation's or the universe's. Individuals have a need to be involved and to be represented. There seems to be little doubt about the individual wanting to feel both represented and important. Individuals in their purchases, job behavior, voting and consumption do voice their individuality. Surveying can help them and you by giving them a means to express themselves other than by a yes or no, a non purchase or purchase, usage or no usage, etc.

We were stimulated to write this survey methodology down as we found in a recent consumer education awareness program on the community level that some of the methodology is not as well known as we thought. What we offer here is only a beginning--a primer and we should caution, rather elementary. But just as you don't have to have a Ph.D. in physics to employ electricity; neither do we feel that you must be a trained mathematician or social scientist to employ surveys. Yet, we would hope you would go further and also would employ experts when available.

Most of all we would encourage you to do consumer surveys so you can better understand, serve and enlarge your community.





### IS A SURVEY NECESSARY?

Surveys are limited by time, money and the personnel involved. A commitment must be made that the survey is necessary and desirable.

Occasionally, a leader unwilling to make a decision will commission surveys to (a) postpone the inevitable or (b) to wear down the opposition. One study indicated that the majority of top executives in a company which conducted an internal survey to decide whether it needed a computer had already decided to have a computer. The survey we are dealing with is for information, not for therapy. As we will point out in interviewing (Appendix A) studies have their therapeutic values but these are only secondary results.

Surveys are expensive---if not in money---in effort and generally in both. There must be a commitment to what is needed and the study must be seen through. Nothing is more odious than the uncompleted survey.

You may find out others have already discovered the answers. Good, incorporate this and go on to another part of your program. You may find that timing makes it impossible to do a survey by the time limits imposed. If so, recognize it and don't begin. You may find an adequate study has already been done.

Surveying should be like a lariat; the rope must have all the interdependencies perfectly formed including the feedback loop so that a survey is worth the effort.

### ANYONE CAN DO A SURVEY?????? Yes, but.....

Today, we find surveys being done by practically every group in our country from Fortune's 500 largest corporations to volunteers with various community service organizations. Censuses have been used before the time of Christ by governments and armies. Surveys are a part of western civilization as households find themselves polled on diverse subjects from TV listernship to medicines used for gastrointestinal disturbances. It is seldom a week goes by that surveys of business, leaders, citizens and other individuals are not reported in the media. Part of the American creed appears to be communicating our thoughts.

We find that the vast majority of persons who want to be good interviewers can be trained to be good interviewers. We find many volunteer groups doing excellent surveys in their organizations and in their community. We do find that surveying is hard work, requires following certain steps and that there is a great variety in the results. The same things can be said about professionals doing surveying. Many individuals consider surveying to be more of an art than a science, but to most practioners it includes the aspects of both art and a science. Certainly, surveying requires much diligence and practice to accomplish desirable results.

## WHY DO A SURVEY?

M.L. Wilson, former undersecretary of agriculture, likes to refer to democracy as embodying how the public business was defined and carried out . . . that individuals must have the maximum opportunity for self-expression. George Gallup in the 1960's eloquently pointed out in his book, The Miracle Ahead, how the public in many cases was ahead of the Congress about the necessity of making hard decisions such as the acceptance of the draft in pre-World War II peace time, stands against McCarthyism, need for sanitation or pollution controls, etc.

Although these discourses about democracy will appear to be esoteric when compared to a survey on how individuals feel about garbage pickup in their home community, yet, the test of an institution is how it responds to these small but vital matters of the quality of life.

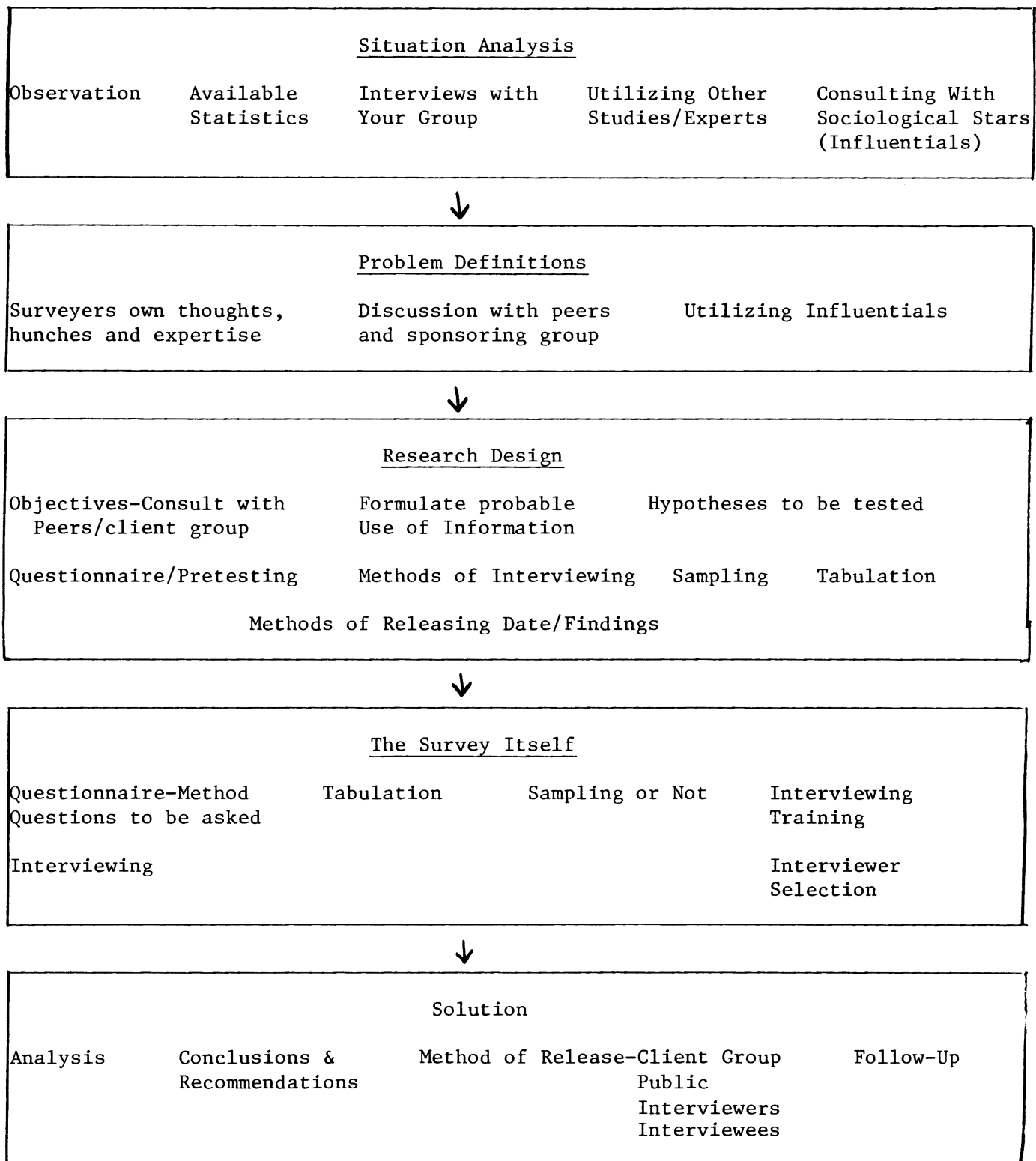
We all, at times, are drawn into the arena of asking what people think. How do they act? Many times, we are called on to make very subjective decisions. (i.e., People are thinking a great deal about sewing? Freezing foods? Growing gardens?) Why? Because that is what they call me about. The food store owner is asked what people spending their money on. He may say there is a shift to pork and chicken, away from beef. A tendency toward less prepared or pre-frozen foods. A club program leader is asked what preferences people have for meetings and she may answer light, entertaining meetings. Their answers may be both right and wrong. They are based on information they have received. The extension agents with the calls about particular self-help projects may not be privy yet to the fact these consumers are trying to be more self-sufficient and also economize. The grocer may only be privileged to know about the consumers who continue to come to honor his establishment; the market may be growing but the buyer is going elsewhere for it. Or perhaps the money is really going to transportation, energy and medicine disproportionate to the immediate past. The club woman may only know what those who attend respond to. It may be an elementary thing such as the date chosen interferes with other social activities of the community, not the program content.

One community education program was designed to provide lower income housewives with training in specific skills such as secretarial, cake-decorating, welding, etc. which a survey had shown they desired. Yet, despite the expert planning, the community classes never reached the projected sizes. Later, it was found that many of these prospective students lived away from public transportation and just couldn't come to the regional center as they were members of one-car households whose husband's work interfered with their coming.

The point is that many of us make decisions and assumptions based on limited observations. We may be better off to make a survey to ascertain what people are thinking, doing and feeling. Surveys are only a tool but their careful usage can enable one to have key information to plan programs, increase participation, pinpoint reactions and further everyone's goals. We find individuals to be more helpful, more candid and more thoughtful than what one is led to believe.

This publication deals with surveys and surveying; its emphasis is on interviewing, methodology and utilization under the assumption that the usage is for a vital purpose and that understandably that surveys are only one ingredient for increasing consumer participation and involvement. Surveys by plumbing the needs, wants and opinions of consumers can make your project more realistic and humanistic.

The Practice of Consumer Surveying



## THE TEMPTATION TO DO EVERYTHING OR SITUATION ANALYSIS AND PROBLEM DEFINITION

Our long range goal is often to help individuals have a better life but to enable us to do this we probably will have to work on some rather elementary things such as how do we help consumers adjust to inflation.

We need to do a situation analysis which may use current statistics, other studies, advice of so-called experts or sociological "stars" (influentials), observation of the current scene and quite possibly a combination of all five parts.

A key part is to find out what statistics relating to this area are available. The local extension agent, your planning district, your local library, your local chamber of commerce and the landgrant college are all starting points for asking about data regarding your community and the problem. Our federal government both by the constitution and later laws is requested to provide certain statistical information, particularly in regard to population, housing, income and educational levels. Most school districts are quite aware of the current population both by year born and educational level. Depending on the problem involved, you may find business and non-profit groups also have good knowledge of your community.

Many studies are relatively unknown. Some will be found in the local library or at one of the foregoing institutions. Don't be hesitant to add-on or leap-frog utilizing other studies as a basis if you feel they are sound.

Utilization of influentials or experts is another method to test the current state of knowledge and these persons can be immensely helpful in opening doors not only to past research, but to current thinking and possible new research.

However, there comes a point when you or your group must decide on what the problem is. You must funnel the situation analysis down to where you can describe the problem you wish to attack. Some individuals feel it is wise to write up the situational analysis. Writing down one's thoughts can be a clarifying procedure.

Next, you may care to test your beginning problem statement and the situational analysis on yourpeers. Don't be thin skinned but neither be a Casper Milktoast. You should accept constructive criticism willingly. Don't forget that incorporating the thoughts of others not only broadens and improves your study but makes the acceptance of the study more probable.

Choosing your objectives is generally a logical extension of the situation statement, problem situation and its solution. The problem may be that (1) older person's income is keeping pace with inflation for the majority but those who have emergencies such as sickness and hospitalization, finding new residences, crime or dependents are not keeping up. Your objectives might be to find out (1) how older people are adjusting to inflation, (2) what tactics appear to be helping older persons (3) what individuals do not appear to keeping up with inflation and (4) why.

Generally, there is a temptation to include too much in a study. This complicates not only the collection but the tabulation and the analysis. You may not only confuse response but also your findings. The majority of studies have materials involved which are underanalyzed. As we will find later, this may be necessary for interview rapport for limited weighted questions, but often it is for other reasons. Think heavily on the subject; do we need to do this? Is it essential?

Now that we have done our observations, our review of the literature and available statistics, and have tested our objectives on our peers, we need to try this out on our "influentials." You may first want to have them assess the situation.

By "influentials," we mean the individuals who by their intellectual, or financial or historic role have knowledge and influence in this area. Practically all groups and all areas have within them individuals who have varying amounts of comprehension and power. Some surveyors only utilize these "influentials" to assess the situation; others utilize them in planning the survey, formulating the questionnaire and later in assessing the results. These individuals can be a great help to you in both appraising the area and later in distributing the results. If your work later is relatively unused, it can be a grave disappointment and waste of energies.

In all of these events, be certain to write down the situation analysis. Writing things down is a good review of what is happening and allows your mind to discriminate.

Using the same procedures, we establish the objectives. We first utilize our own knowledge and hunches, then we consult with the literature and available experts, then we work with our influentials and later with our peer group. Be discussing the objectives with third parties as they become more clear and we can defend our objectives.

#### THE SURVEY ITSELF

Assuming, we have decided on doing a survey and that we have decided on our objectives, we now come to the actual mechanics of doing the survey.

We now have to decide on a survey format which will answer your objectives which means we have to decide on the methodology, including the population to be studied, the method of interviewing, the questionnaire tabulation, analysis and method of presentation.

The population to be studied may mean all the people in Floyd County, those buying gas or those driving cars, but it must mean a specific and definable group. While appearing simple, populations are often confusing as you may find that the people involved may not be simply defined, (i.e., persons shopping in downtown Richmond may include many outside the legal city limits, or individuals fishing in Bath County may include those both

with and without licenses and persons from outside the county. If you care to interview person's experiencing outdoor recreation in X area, you may find it easier to interview individuals at certain outdoor points, etc.) Here again, the researcher must make a judgement decision based on objectives but it must be logically consistent with the rest of his/her program.

We also have decided on where and who to interview. If we want to know how the household cook utilizes dry instant milk, we have to get into contact with him or her but not with non-cookers. (Some interesting marketing studies have been made on the different views held by the user of a product and the buyer of the product within the same household.)

#### TO SAMPLE OR NOT TO SAMPLE

The question of sampling is a difficult one as a good sample is probably better than a census (everyone surveyed). However, to many, this becomes an end in itself. Where you have the expertise within the group or accessible to you, you probably should sample. However, if this is not feasible, don't panic as all is not lost. Your only safe recourse is to study those you think are representative and then base your future action with this in mind. In some cases, you will find the results are sufficiently clear that you can tell the significant findings without employing statistics exhaustively. This is not to negate the use of sampling but to encourage you to move ahead.<sup>1</sup>

Most communities do have individuals who, with a little encouragement, can help you with your statistics, i.e. the math teacher or the extension agent or other professionals. Remember your objectives and that you must handle your sample and analysis so that you can project it to the target population you desire to deal with.

Above all, be certain you know who you have contacted and that you can report this. We do not mean by name but by area, type or however you make the study, (i.e., all boxholders on Route 3, Essex Hole, Virginia, or all listed voters in X County.)

#### METHOD OF INTERVIEWING

Interviewing can be (1) personal, (2) by telephone, (3) by mail or a combination of the above. All three have their advantages but the particular method has a lasting effect on the results.

Personal interviewing has the advantages of (a) allowing you to obtain more information and utilize non-verbal clues, (b) to be flexible and versatile as you restate and probe, (c) to be certain of who responded to the questionnaire and (d) to halt at any time if you desire to alter the survey. It has the

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<sup>1</sup>Some reviewers have justifiably not agreed to this paragraph. Again, we suggest you look within your community for aid.

disadvantages of (a) being probably the most expensive, (b) being difficult to find respondent at home and available and (c) interviewers may deviate from the prescribed interview format. Generally, it is felt interviews can be longer and also have a higher rate of acceptance in person than with other methods.

Mail interviewing has the following advantages: least expensive, absolute knowledge of what was asked and generally reaches the respondent. On the other hand, it has the following disadvantages: inflexible, easier to put aside, cannot restate or probe, difficult to take advantage of non-verbal clues such as intensity or type of house, race, etc. Often, complex rating scales are not well received by respondents. Later questions may be changed as it is difficult to use sequential approaches effectively. Some feel people are not so tended to reply with socially accepted answers as with phone or in-person interviewing.

As we will see later, all three methods have their advocates with methods of overcoming their seeming disadvantages. Dillman, with his approach to mail interviewing, makes a particularly strong case for the format, including art work to increase returns via mail.

Telephone interviewing has the advantages of calling many people from a central location, thus negating the cost of physically going back and forth and allows the supervisor to keep control over his interviewers, to pick replacements readily, to utilize bilingual individuals, and to allow for immediate questionnaire processing. In Appendix B, we have set down some of our beliefs regarding the telephone interview.

Mail questionnaires must be attractive and readable while in-person or via phone the questionnaire need not be so attractive to the respondent.

Interviewing may be done also by a combination of the above, giving the respondent his own option if he does not like one method. Others utilize mail to alert the individual to an approaching phone or personal interview. Others allow the person to self-administer the questionnaire but are available either by phone or when they pick up the questionnaire to answer questions. Another option is to have the questionnaire administered in a group such as the Farm Bureau meeting or in a classroom. Another experience indicates that all methods work but have the above limitations. The method may be chosen by your own resource base--how much money, time and volunteers you have available to yourself.

#### QUESTIONNAIRE

Most questionnaires and most interviews tend to use the soft to the hard approach. At the beginning, the questionnaires are easier and require less thought and do not provoke controversy. A questionnaire might start with the household composition or ask if you bought any milk products within the last month. Generally, we find that the most difficult problems are: (1) insuring acceptance and continuity, (2) making certain that questions are understood, and (3) framing questions so that they can be answered without involving the individual's ego, i.e., he will not feel that his social status or his intelligence is being evaluated.

Questions should be arranged so that you move from the easiest to the hardest at the near end and with some anticlimatic activity at the end to defuse any consumer dissonance. Questions at the first should "qualify" the respondent. Is she or he the one you desire to talk to, (i.e., the one buying the food, the owner of a trailer, etc. or whoever you wish in the study.)

You should be prepared either immediately or shortly thereafter to identify who you are, who you are with and why you are dealing with this individual. In personal and phone interviews, it may be necessary to repeat this two to three times. Part of the reason for this is that some of us do not listen well and we try to get you to say this in a different way. If you are from VPI & SU or from a local civic group, the respondent may be trying to ascertain why you are in the inner city or a locality where you seldom would be.

Appendix B indicates more completely our thoughts on interviewing. It should be remembered that the questionnaire must balance (1) getting the information necessary to prove or disprove your objectives and (2) maintaining rapport between the respondent and the interviewer so the rate of acceptance and veracity is high.

The length of questionnaire has been highly debated with the results that few persons agree on this subject. Part of this debate is due to the variety of surveys done. Interviews with someone interested in the area can easily go for two hours or more. Even busy mothers with infants under twelve months or medical doctors can be interviewed if they are convinced of the study's importance and their role. Many interviews are more in the 10-30 minute range with the interviewee being allowed to set the starting time.

Finite answers (yes, no or scaled on a 5-7 point) are more easy to tabulate and relate. Other types of answers which are open-ended require more probing and more interpretation before being analyzed. Many persons employ a variety of all type of answers.

An ex-Atlantic Monthly magazine editor had as his law that nothing is as simple as it first seems. The same thing could be said for question construction. It may appear clear to you but what does it mean to the reader? Regardless of how experienced you are, always and I repeat, always pretest a questionnaire. Test on your peers but also on your target audiences. Don't fall in love with your own style; in other words, be quick to change.

The minor classic on this subject is Payne's The Art of Asking Questions where he exemplifies the easy reading and clear communication that he and Whitehead postulate. He makes a strong case for knowing what you want, keeping it simple, avoiding double meanings and checking yourself.

Warwick and Lininger also have a good checklist which includes:

1. Are the words direct, simple and familiar to all respondents?
2. Is the question specific and clear as possible?
3. Are any items double barreled (leading and ambiguous or loaded) (Have you stopped beating your heterosexual husband?)
4. Are the questions loaded or leading?
5. Are the questions applicable to all the respondents?
6. Will the answers be influenced by response styles?



Our experience has been to limit anything which people can't answer effectively and/or may reflect unkindly on their self-esteem. Warwick and Lininger, The Sample Survey: Theory and Practice.<sup>1</sup> McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York: page 140-150.

When interviewing is done well, it is like a good tennis match with questions going over the net and answers coming back over the net and both parties enjoying the interchange. Usually, we start with easier shots (questions) but the idea is not to demolish the other person but to allow her to fully communicate. Normally, we have found that you can build to such a complex or intimate degree of questioning when more than you desire to know is forthcoming. We do find it is desirable to have anticlimatic questions after getting to the tough questions. Otherwise when you reinterview, you may find the other person dissatisfied (somewhat like consumer dissonance) as they were left on too high a note.

We would also caution not to ask questions' unless you really need this information. Don't ask too close or detailed questions unless you need the information. (If you don't plan to use income, don't get into this quagmire. If you do plan to sue income but only by \$5,000 increment, ask by the \$5,000 increment--not by the exact amount.)

#### Field Operations-Interviewers and the Questionnaire

We have already mentioned that the questionnaire needs to have been pretested and a preliminary run through should be made to see that the questionnaire's answers can be both coded and analyzed to answer the objectives you have decided upon.

Interviewers are often volunteers or partime workers. Interviewers can be of either sex or any age but the rule of reasonableness should be used regarding how the respondents will view the individual. Extreme care should be taken in orienting the interviewers as to why you are doing the study and what type of answers you are looking for. (We remember one milk consumption study in the midwest where the milk consumption was 50% above what was sold in this area; the problem was that the interviewers were and identified themselves as dairymen's wives.) There is a certain tyranny in our language; it can mean various things depending on the circumstance. For instance, a horse is called fast when it is speedy; a window is fast when it cannot be moved. Or introduce the words "grass" or "gay" and see how persons can interpret meanings.)

Ideally, interviewers are socially acceptable individuals with pleasant voices and a fairly quick mind. (see Appendix B) However, we have seen individuals do an excellent job who varied extremely in characteristics.

As a project leader, it is your job to inform, to motivate and to review. Most people want to do a good job and it is your role to make this possible. Workers should know in general why you are doing the study. They should be made aware of their role and their limitations including:

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<sup>1</sup>Please note the questionnaire in Appendix "C" for examples.

(a) confidentiality and (b) that you want the public's response, not their response.

We generally go through the questionnaire piece by piece indicating what responses you might expect. Then, we go conduct an interview with one of the trainees; then with a person from outside if possible. Then, we let them (the interviewers) interview one another. After two or three interviews, we ask them to attempt to code the questionnaire which should indicate to them their thoroughness and their detailedness. We find that it takes time to get the questionnaire down to the point where they can ask the questions as naturally as in their own conversations. Don't be surprised to have to re-explain questions. Be prepared to be asked if they can change the questions.

The first few days are critical with new interviewers. Generally, they lack confidence in themselves in this role and also they may have doubts on the questionnaire. Many persons are quite taken back by non-cooperators. They will reflect seriously on these turndowns. (Yet we have found at almost any instant that you will have a certain amount of turndowns. This holds true even if the individuals had previously cooperated.)

With people telephoning from a central location, it is relatively easy to deal with problems about the questionnaire and about non-cooperators. The transformation of an amateur into an experienced and skilled interviewer is a slow process and initial hesitancies should be dealt with in an encouraging manner.

Interviewers generally have ascending patterns of success with a new questionnaire and then may descend. It is desirable to watch for this descendency in completions and in thoroughness.

As in many small groups situations, many interviewers will view the leader as a model. His work habits and attitudes will be mirrored. It is important that you set the example that you want the interviewers to follow. Be certain to be available and be certain to follow up so that they know that you do take an interest in what they are doing. Emphasize the positive, but insist on completeness.

### Tabulation and Analysis

Just as questionnaires should be pretested, so must the means of tabulation. In most cases, the preferred method would be to convert the questionnaire into a machine-readable form so that a computer can be employed. This again will be dictated by local conditions, i.e., whether you have computers and/or electronic data equipment available.

Regardless of the method used to reduce the data, it is necessary that methods be established so you can comprehend, analyze and present your arduous endeavors. Although not as interesting as interviewing, this segment

is equally important.

Care must be taken that data can be tabulated and, secondly, that you do double check (verify) to ascertain that the data tabulated is clean (accurate).

Material should be presented to reflect not only what you find (such as 38 percent of new car buyers had problems with their new auto) but also what relationships, if any, were there (New car buyers with problems tended to be persons of less than 40 years of age, bought on credit and had self-described low knowledge of auto repair.).

You have already set up your objectives; then you set up the questionnaire to meet the objectives; also you contrive the code to help answer your objectives and hypothesis, and here you may make dummy tables to insert the data which will qualify your objectives and the population tested. With the help of your statistician, you may want to run tests of significance, and then using an elaboration model, you may wish to manipulate the variables to find out which are independent and dependent.

### Dissemination

Having thought of this for some time, you will be surprised at how much material you have accumulated on this subject. Some persons keep track of all their pursuits and all their thoughts on 3 by 5 file cards so they can recall the pertinent material easier. Your job is to distill this knowledge and make it relevant to the various public involved.

All surveys are different and this in turn makes their communication different. Both for yourself and the clients (paid or unpaid) you should write a rather complete report. In many cases, you may find that it is well to put some of the material in the appendices.

- In written reports, we favor
- (1) a one page summary at the front
  - (2) background
  - (3) purpose, including objectives
  - (4) methodology employed
  - (5) findings and analysis
  - (6) summary, conclusions and recommendations
  - (7) appendix
    - (a) copies of forms used
    - (b) details of sample with validation
    - (c) tables and analysis not included in findings
    - (d) bibliography including pertinent studies

In many cases, the technical parts are given in the part. Be cautious of too much verbiage. There is much virtue in (1) having short, to the point sentences; (2) using precise words which are familiar to the reader; (3) avoiding incorrect grammar and (4) not being afraid to rewrite. Have a friend (preferably an English major) read it over. Remember, most good articles are not written but re-written.

Calling together the advisory group and discussing it with them is a good strategy before a final printing. Later, you may care to distribute copies to the client group. In case the budget doesn't allow, you might distribute the one page summary at the front. Then place the entire copy in strategic places such as the library, community centers, government officials' office and other pertinent offices.

Another strategy is to appear on talk shows which have call-ins and allow people to react. Don't forget the print media which may not be as quick but they do allow reflection.

Although we have talked as though these are separate strategies, you would probably care to reach as many of the audiences as possible with a variety of communication mediums. Repetition, although not universally admired, is a worthy educational tool; hence people receiving similar information from different sources only reinforces the message.

Some noted commercial researchers insist on a post six months meeting with the client to see what use is made of their research. Many of us do not have this luxury but it is desirable to followup later on what was done and what questions arose, if any.

In conclusion:

Methods of obtaining input from citizens are a necessary part of a democratic, capitalistic system. Anyone can conduct surveys but to conduct one which is meaningful one must work on all parts--the situation analysis, problem definitions, research design, the survey itself and the solution. Utilizing resources within your own community, you can do an excellent survey but much research and diligence will be required.

## NOTES ON THE INFORMATION INTERVIEW

The interview may be defined as a two person conversation which is conducted in accordance with a definite program by one of the participants. Because the situation resembles many other spontaneous acts which are not committed to a methodology or technique, the interview is often considered more simple and natural than perhaps it is.<sup>1</sup> This paper purports that interviewing can follow (and does) certain principles which are independent of the material discussed or personnel involved.

There are two types of interviews--therapeutic and information. Both types involve an interviewer with a plan for obtaining information and a respondent whose responses are the objectives of this interaction.

A therapeutic interview could be designed as a conversation instituted to modify the behavior of the respondent. The information interview's purpose is to establish a conversation to improve the interrogator's knowledge of particular matters.<sup>2</sup>

In the post World War II period, there has been much activity and research on the information interview both by academicians and by marketing research and advertising agencies. Among the dominant accounts were those of Herbert Hyman (1954), the Maccobys (1954), Merton (1956), Kahn & Cannell (1957) and Payne (1951).

Although some details differ, there is much agreement among the experts in interviewing and surveying about many fundamental principles of interviewing for informational purposes.

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<sup>1</sup>Walters, B., How To Talk With Practically Anybody About Practically Anything, Dell Publishing Company, New York, 1970.

<sup>2</sup>Ralph Perdie proposed a similar division into situation and egocentric interviews in 1943. See Berdie, R.F., "Psychology Process in the Interview, The Journal of Social Psychology, Vol. 18, August, 1943, page 13-31.

The interviewing involved five stages which include:

1. Preparation of a questionnaire or schedule which the interview will follow and be recorded.
2. Development of an approach or introduction which will initiate the interview with a minimum of refusals.
3. A dialogue in which both participate and which includes both speaking and listening, with one person consciously guiding the event.
4. The information garnered being recorded.
5. A method of closure so that the interviewer can gracefully terminate and so that the interviewer will not have dissonance.

The principles of information interviewing which appear to be common are:

1. The interviewer should not interject his own attitudes or experiences into the schedule and should abstain from value judgements of any types. When it is necessary to express experiences or attitudes as a means of preserving the conversational illusion, they should be neutral. The skilled interviewer makes an extra-ordinary effort to refrain from any judgement evaluation that might result in changing the person's self image.
2. The interview should start with the easier and more factual material to the more difficult, with the tougher and climactic questions and so close to the end, but not the absolute end. The dialogue should follow much like a ping-pong game with question and answer followed by question and answer, etc. with both parties feeling free to express themselves.
3. Although questions are based perhaps unreasonably on a stimulus-response hypothesis, the responses logically anticipated (and tested for) in an answer may be different from the reply to interrogation in the actual survey. Instead of getting quantitative numbers, you may get dates. You may find new interpretations to words, i.e., profits may turn into prophets.
4. Much communication that takes place between individuals is non-verbal. Hence, appearance and reactions can be a deterrent.
5. For accuracy and since most respondents are not paid, there is a general consensus that the interview should be as pleasant as

possible for the interviewee.<sup>3</sup> Questioning should be done so that the individual can quickly respond without feelings of self-abasement. Questions should be worded so that the individual can readily answer. (If it is absolutely necessary to know how much sugar was used in the past year, you would have to ask whether you use it or not, how often do you buy, how much, whether seasonally affected . . . and build up so that a total answer could be obtained.

6. The attitude of the interviewer toward the interviewee should always be extremely attentive and focused. There should be no doubt that the interviewer is part of the interview and is not a passive voice recording device. Also, the interviewee should be made to feel that he is not a laboratory experiment to be manipulated but that he is an expert witness who is most helpful.

There are numerous ways of training interviewers but most of them embody an explanation of the study and its parts plus role playing.<sup>4</sup> Most of these methods emphasize: (1) increasing the knowledge and confidence of the interviewer, (2) conserving the interviewer's neutrality, (3) increasing the self-expression of the respondent and (4) aiding the interviewer to faithfully and accurately record.

Most beginning interviewers are apprehensive about their intrusion on another persons' life, lack confidence in themselves and the survey, and overreact to refusals. Preliminary role playing is highly desirable.

Most researchers feel refusal rates can be reduced<sup>5</sup> but some are avoidable. One study done by the author showed that when we re-interviewed the group previously interviewed about how they felt about the interview, we had roughly the same refusal rate as with the original study.

Interviews once begun generally are carried through by their own momentum. Dillman reports interviews of up to seven hours.

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<sup>3</sup>For a fuller discussion of the ethics involved in interviewing, look at Gordon, R.E., Interviewing, Dorsey Press, Homewood, Illinois, 1975, pages 138-177.

<sup>4</sup>Heneman and Patterson reported once dropping their initial 18 percent refusal rate in a labor study to 1 percent.

<sup>5</sup>For example see, Weinbug, Eve, Community Surveys With Local Talent, National Opinion Research Center, Chicago, Illinois, 1971, pages 49-53.

Interviewing is an inherently satisfying experience, and ordinarily constitutes its own goal. The respondent does not need a special motive for his participation. In human interaction, we are accustomed to conversations which may at times be unfulfilling or boring but we generally continue them if they are not acutely threatening or frustrating. The interview should not be threatening or confusing or frustrating and as such the satisfaction which the respondent may derive approaches a strategic maximum as the respondent is the expert about himself, his experiences, etc.

The gratifying character of the formal interview is based on several factors: (1) Both participants enter the conversation with explicit biases, the one to talk and the other to listen. The interviewing procedure facilitates these complementary goals to an extent which is unusual in ordinary life; (2) the expression of opinion, the narration of fact, and the playing of roles by the respondent are systematically encouraged. The ordinary resistences which would be encountered in spontaneous conversation are suppressed in the formal interview. For example, it rarely occurs to anyone to have the opportunity of expressing political opinions at length and in detail without encountering some disagreement or other resistance from those who listen. The interview method, however, is designed to minimize the interviewer's resistance to any expression of the respondent. Because the interview has a schedule, the conversation appears from the respondent's point of view to be self-sustaining. The problem of organization is minimized for the respondent. It is understood to be a responsibility of the interviewer. The respondent is assured the immediate satisfactions of conversation without the necessity of making adjustments in his own behavior. This circumstance is often sufficient to create an illusion of



facility in communication which may go to the point of modifying the respondent's perception of time intervals

On the other hand, there are certain elements in the interview situation which limit the yield of information under even the most favorable conditions. The role of the interviewer involves more listening than speaking, and more reception than expression. In general, the more effective the interview the less will be said or done by the interviewer. This precept is almost caricatured in non-directive interviewing. (Note writings of Carl Rogers and others.) It follows that as the yield of information approaches a maximum, the role of the interviewer as perceived by the respondent becomes attenuated to such a degree that he has scarcely any characteristics left for ordinary identification. The interviewer seems to function as a kind of verbal mirror reflecting the subject's expression back to his own view.

Persons who have been skillfully interviewed not infrequently report their inability to remember or describe the interviewer. The noncommittal role of the interviewer allows the respondent to ascribe his own connotations to the questions, and to endow the interviewer with various attitudes, on the basis of which his own responses are adjusted.

To function as a highly facilitated conversation, the interview must be perceived as a conversation, without much awareness of the structure of the interrogatory, the order of questions, or the objectives of the interviewer. This does not imply that the interviewer may not take notes, use recording devices, or in other ways signal the situation as an interview. What needs to be preserved is the illusion of spontaneity and of free response on either side. The attempt to make respondents aware of the

significance of questions or to employ them in the judgement and analysis of their own responses usually leads to the frustration of the inquiry.

Interviewing can be used to obtain more individual input into consumer economics and other areas. Interviewing can be an inherently satisfying experience plus helping in the democratic participation system.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>One type of example is in Webb, K. and Hatry, H.P., Obtaining Citizen Feedback, The Urban Institute, Washington, D.C. 1973.

## TELEPHONE INTERVIEWING

This appendix is primarily for the use of individuals in research, either formally or informally, who are **desirous** of obtaining certain knowledge in a relatively short period of time.

Telephone interviewing can be used by extension workers, home economics teachers, volunteer group leaders, and others for the gathering of information.

Economic Justification

Adam Smith had said that "Consumption is the sole end and purpose of all production; and the interest of the producer ought to be attended to, only as far as it may be necessary for promoting that of the consumer."<sup>1</sup> As our economy moves further away from a subsistence economy into a differentiated or marketing economy, techniques to better ascertain methods and means of fulfilling human desires should be developed and employed in order that groups can properly make decisions and allocate resources. This paper deals with a tool--telephone interviewing--that can be economically and safely employed to aid in getting consumer feedback. Not only industry but public and voluntary groups are striving for more interaction with individual consumers.

Commercial and academic research constantly demand accurate and relatively easily obtained answers. As the economy becomes more dynamic,

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<sup>1</sup>Smith, Adam, The Wealth of Nations, The Modern Library, Inc., New York 22, New York, 1937, page 625.

these demands become greater. Telephone interviewing is one tool available to home economists and others that may be employed to obtain these answers.

#### Some Advantages of the Telephone Interview

The advantages of the telephone interview can be characterized by:

1. Economy
2. Large area coverage
3. Relatively high, if not the highest, rate of response
4. Interviewers are easily observed and checked, both for standardized methodology and bias
5. Supervisor is readily accessible for guidance and consultation
6. Bilingualists can be more efficiently employed
7. Schedules can be edited and, if necessary, corrected while the interview is fresh in the interviewer's mind
8. Sequential sampling is easily accomplished
9. Entry both into and away from the individual household is probably more easily accomplished than by any other method
10. Call backs are easily accomplished
11. Amenable to the focused interview and limits the personal identification bias of the interviewer

Payne states that "when cost is calculated on the basis of the number of completed interviews, the telephone survey is markedly less expensive than the mail questionnaire and very much less than the personal interview survey."<sup>2</sup> Cravens and Baeza of Michigan State University, in a consumer preference study, showed that the telephone interview (44¢ an interview) was less expensive than either the mail questionnaire (54¢ an interview)

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<sup>2</sup>Payne, Stanley L., "Some Advantages of Telephone Surveys" Journal of Marketing, Volume XX, No. 3, January, 1956, page 279.

or the personal interview (\$2.72).<sup>3</sup> Groves in a later national study alludes to the lesser-cost of phone interviews as vis a vis personal (54.82) but cautions that certain assumptions are questionably necessary which may invalidate this.<sup>4</sup>

In an Ohio dairy consumption study, the author found the interviewers required an average of twelve minutes per phone interview and an average of 32 minutes for each in-person interview. The interviewer at a centralized location, utilizing both local and long distance telephone calls, has a large time savings over one who has to travel to homes or businesses. Recalls are much less time consuming and less painful to the interviewers. Redraws may be utilized with little time lost. Many problems that arise among interviewers are caused by these two factors.

Today's population is a slave to the telephone; they have to answer it. Telephone conversation, as a means of doing business, is typical of this decade. People are accustomed to doing business over the phone.

Interviewers don't have to cope with interviewees' reluctance in opening their doors to a stranger. Interviewees aren't biased by wondering how the interviewer regards their answers and their homes. In nine Ohio cities, the response rate of those answering the phone averaged from 93 to 99.6%.Parten reports refusal rates in telephone interviewing to be two to three percent.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Derived from unpublished Ph.D. dissertation of M.A. Baeza, Sampling and Response Difference for Three Methods of Enumeration Obtained in a Study of Consumer Preference, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, 1950, page 23.

<sup>4</sup>Groves, Robert M., An Experimental Comparison of National and Personal Interview Surveys, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1977, page 21-23.

<sup>5</sup>Parten, Mildred, Surveys, Polls, and Samples, Harper & Brothers, New York, New York, 1950, page 87.

However, other researchers have found higher non-response ratio to as much as 40 percent.<sup>6</sup> Mail questionnaires, along with follow-ups, may draw less than fifty percent response. Personal interviews are reported with response rates of 80 to 95 percent. The writer's experience with personal interviews, using hired interviewers, has averaged between 9 and 16 percent noncompletion, even with three call backs.

In a regional forestry marketing project, states using the telephone interview method had a five percent higher acceptance rate than states using the personal interview method. Questionnaires in both groups of states were identical.

Correct interviewing requires skill on the part of the interviewer. It is arduous, and usually not particularly rewarding financially. Interviewing often is relegated to part-time employees or under-employed graduate students whose main concerns are not always in this area. Dr. George Fish, a marketing scholar, has said that dishonesty of interviewers remains the greatest challenge to successful field work. The writer would prefer to say that, outside of poor project design, the interviewing phase is probably one of the most neglected fields in research today and is a source of many of the resulting differences found among researchers.

However, interviewing error can be reduced through competent questionnaire design, instruction and remuneration (financially and otherwise) of interviewers, proper pretesting, guidance and editing. In one study, refusal rates dropped from 17 percent to 1 percent after the interviewers were reorganized and retrained.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Bock, K.E., "Non-response Patterns in Consumer Telephone Survey," Market Science Institute Research Briefs, Market Research Institute, Cambridge, Massachusetts, July 1979, page 1.

<sup>7</sup>Heneman, Herbert G., Jr., and Paterson, Donald G., "Refusal Rates and Interviewer Quality," International Journal of Opinion and Attitude Research, Volume III, Fall, 1949, page 394.

Telephone interviewing, when conducted in a group with a supervisor present, is not as demanding on the interviewer as if he were on his own. Proximity will aid rapport so that interviewers can be easily guided and corrected, when necessary. Interviewers will do a better "qualitative" job in this atmosphere, if encouraged to do so.

Many interviewers, knowingly or not, will deviate from a set questionnaire after a certain length of time. They will influence the respondent's answer or sometimes fail to ask questions as they feel they "know" what the respondent would say. Oftentimes, this is not a conscious deviation. As interviews are being conducted, many interviewers find problems or misunderstandings that were not caught in the pretest or clarified properly in the training period. The supervisor is on hand to answer these. And, of course, overt cheating is more easily apprehended.

A supervisor can readily amend any of these errors. Schedules can be edited quickly, checked with the interviewer and, if necessary, the interviewee can be reinterviewed.

Many persons work better in a group. They become more interested in their work when they realize the purpose and other attributes of this group. (This is not unlike the experiment on group behavior at Western Electric's Hawthorne plant.)

In major cities and other areas, it often becomes necessary to use bilinguists to interview certain nationality groups. The mere knowledge of a person's name does not indicate whether or not he can speak English. A bilinguist can be used easily when persons not speaking English are encountered. In Cleveland, Ohio, the writer employed a group of interviewers who could speak a total of seven different languages with little, if any,

loss of efficiency. Substantial time would have been lost matching interviewers with interviewees if the interviewers had been in the field. Speaking a foreign language often is a mechanism used by the interviewee to discourage unknown persons and later they may revert to English.

Many times, a study requires only a certain number in a cell or a certain stabilization in sequential analysis. In telephone interviewing, changes regarding who is to be interviewed and how they are to be interviewed are easily made. Furthermore, changes in the questionnaire are easily made.

Interviewing has been chastised and its validity a matter of speculation partially because of the non-respondent problem and because of the effect of interviewers on answers. With the telephone interview method, the problem is minimized since call backs are practically unlimited.

Using a maximum of seven calls (not including busy signals) with at least two calls in each of the calling periods--morning, afternoon and evening--the author had to drop less than 1.6% of his sample in over ten thousand interviews supervised. In order to achieve this high percentage of calls, evening and repeat calls are essential.

This percentage is important. Any substitution in a sample is subject to question and even criticism if the number of substitutions becomes significant.<sup>8</sup> The very fact that some are not interviewable leaves room for wondering if these are typical of the interviewed group.

Interviewees are more likely to allow the interviewer to come into their home via telephone than in person. Extraneous factors arise to

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<sup>8</sup>Deming, W. Edwards, "On a Probability Mechanism to Attain an Economic Balance Between the Resultant Error of Response and the Bias of Non-response," Journal of the American Statistical Association, December, 1953, pages 743-772.



complicate the situation with personal interviews. Some of these are: the type of role the interviewee should play, business or friendly; should the interviewer be left outside or should he be invited to enter the home; if inside, should the interviewer be offered a chair? Telephone interviews eliminate any interviewee concentration on questions such as these; the interviewee is free to concentrate on the interview.

Usually, the experience of participating as a subject in an interview is a satisfying one. In a forestry consumer survey 85 percent of the housewives interviewed by phone stated they liked being interviewed. Seventy-eight percent felt scientific research organizations should collect information by telephone interviews. Twenty percent preferred the interviewer to come to the house. Two percent were undecided.

For good interviewing, the interviewer should strive to:

1. Enable the interviewee to express himself fully on the subject in question.
2. Maintain a neutrality that in no way inhibits, biases or expresses a feeling either for or against the respondent's expression.

In limited cases, the interview may have a therapeutic value but our usual concern is for information. Our goal is to elicit information. In as much as possible, the interview structure should require the interviewer to be only a neutral questioner whose purpose is to facilitate the free flow of information along certain lines. Many persons who have experienced a skillfully handled interview grossly misjudged the length of time consumed and the nature of the interviewer. The telephone interview aids skillful interviewing by removing many of the biases present in the personal interview. Such things as dress, size, facial expressions and mannerism, other than vocal, do not become distractors.

Some limitations of the telephone interview should be noted:

1. Not all families have listed phones.
2. There is a limit to the length of time persons will talk on the phone.
3. Some characteristics (such as race, type of home, etc.) and reactions (such as facial characteristics or body language) are not observable.
4. Motivation research is not easily accomplished.
5. Use of auxiliary materials such as budgets, maps, books, projective technique materials, etc., are impossible to employ without prior contact.
6. Some households now have more than one phone; thus complicating using the phone book as the universe to draw a sample.

It is not known how well telephone subscribers typify the general population. Since the Literary Digest Pool disaster in the 1936 election, telephone directories have been frowned upon by many concerned with the actual population. However, the use of telephones has expanded greatly since 1936. The ratio of households with listed phone numbers in larger Virginia cities approximates 81 to 92 percent.

Although telephone companies conduct attitude studies, the writer has been unable to find any evidence of research on why persons do or do not have phones. The phone companies, since World War II, often have had trouble expanding rapidly enough to take care of demand. In 1976 forty of the fifty states had 90 percent of the households having telephones.

In certain cities, where supply has met up with demand, there are high saturation points such as 96 percent in Minneapolis-St. Paul. Reportedly there are 40 states that have phones in 90 percent of the households.

The percent of farms in the United States having phones is generally lower and vary widely by different states. There has been a constant increase in the number of phones in rural residences in the last decade.

However, many studies pertain to so-called classes or selected groups. Many of these people or firms would be listed in the telephone directory. There is also the possibility that a supplemental personal interview may be made of the sample lacking listed phones. Most large metropolitan areas have street directories which list all households including those who do not have phones.

In the greater Akron and Dayton markets, over two thousand households were interviewed. A control subsample of over two hundred households not having telephones were contacted in person. The phone families were compared to non-phone families, both within the census tract and within the metropolitan area. The families having phones were not significantly different from those families not having phones. Factors compared included per capita consumption of milk, percent of milk home delivered, percent of milk purchased in paper, family size, and given family income. The census income was lower for non-phone families than families having phones. They did not differ in given family income. Significance was determined by a "T" test, at the 5 percent level.

Cravens and Baeza<sup>9</sup>, using analysis of variance on combinations of the following, failed to reveal any significant differences where different data collection methods (mail, telephone and personal) were utilized. Factors included in the study were: (a) type of potatoes purchased; (b) type of container; (c) cost per pound; (d) number in family; (e) consumption;

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<sup>9</sup>Baeza, op. cit., page 72.

(f) type of shopping area in which store located; (g) number of blocks traveled from home to store; (h) rental areas; and (i) income levels.

Despite much opinion to the contrary, the determinants of a person's action (motivation factors) may be obtained by definite structured questions. Extensive probing of each individual by a psychologist is not essential.

It should be noted that:

1. Telephone directories or criss-cross directories made ideal lists for sample drawing;
2. Roughly 20 percent of the U.S. population change residences during a year, complicating the sampling;
3. Unscrupulous sales organizations have used so-called research surveys as entry to the consumer.

#### Acquisition of Telephone Interviewers and Conducting Telephone Interviews

The literature on interviewing in research abounds with different methods which seemingly have brought good results in the individual cases concerned. Hence, this should not be considered as the only way of doing interviewing but as a way that has yielded good results.

Telephone interviewers generally need have no technical knowledge but rather should be individuals who have agile minds, who like people, like to talk to persons, desire to work, and are flexible. Our best results have been with individuals who want to work and have an I.Q. of 90 to 120. Although perhaps by happenstance, women who have worked previously and are between the ages of 20 to 40 have been our best interviewers and are often easily obtained for interviewing. This is not to say other age groups or males do not make good interviewers. Persons who are interested or well versed in the area that you are interviewing in (for example, a dairy farmer's

wife on consumer attitudes toward milk prices) often have too many "set" ideas on the subject and are prone to advance their own ideas and experiences upon their interviewees rather than being a neutral recipient of information.

Paid interviewers can often be obtained from universities, business colleges, or the state employment offices. The best results have been obtained from ads in local papers. Many individuals desire a short-time job while they are not in the market for a regular position.

Our method has entailed (1) explaining the job and its responsibilities to the job seekers as a group, (2) interviewing individuals separately and (3) having them call us individually on the phone. Although involving some time, this gives a chance for both you and the prospect to see each other under varying circumstances and to ascertain their qualifications for the job, including their reliability.

Later, interviewers are trained together. Interviewers will tend to follow characteristics of the supervisor. The supervisor must set a good example (i.e. punctual, working, congenial, serious and confident) and maintain a rapport with his interviewers so they will be free to ask questions.

Interviewers need to be convinced that their work is important both as to the overall purpose and their own role. Interviewers often need to be reassured of this and their ability.

The overall purpose should be reviewed with the interviewers. Next, the questionnaire should be minutely gone over so that no doubt remains about what you are trying to do. The supervisor should call several persons first to show how it is done. Then, allow the interviewer to ask questions. Next, the interviewers should call each other. Encourage role playing.

Discussion should then be allowed for possible problems and general clarification. Next, the trainees should call some persons or farms which are not in the regular sample. After another round of discussion, you are ready to begin on your regular interviewing. The interviewers should get in the habit of reviewing their own work and constantly trying for self-improvement. Check not only what is written and said but what is recorded. The supervisor also has this same responsibility.

A few general remarks may be helpful.

1. Develop a positive, confident attitude in the interviewers. Response rates go up generally as interviewers are more sure of themselves.
2. Persons generally like to be interviewed. Don't hesitate to re-explain why you are doing the study or to call back at a different time if they are busy.
3. Try to maintain a direct line of questioning. Don't agree or disagree on a controversial matter. If the interviewee rambles, ask them if you can talk about this at the end of the interview or, "That's very interesting; now I'd like to get your answer to this question."
4. Interviewers often get discouraged when refused. Although you should go over whether or not they are doing something which encourages refusals, they should be reminded that few persons get 100% acceptance.
5. The interviewee should always be given the impression that you are grateful for their aid and that they are quite helpful.
6. Only about 50 to 67% of each call attempted will be completed. Reasons for non-completion are no answers, busy, woman not at home, sickness, call back later, and refusals. (Refusals should not run over 7%.<sup>9</sup>) Interviewers should be encouraged to go ahead calling regardless of non-completion. Good interviewers will average practically the same amount of completed calls regardless of the number of calls attempted.
7. Calls should be attempted in the evening as well as in the morning and afternoon. With housewives, the hours of 8:45 to 11:15, 1:15 to 4:15 and 6:15 to 9:15 have been quite satisfactory.

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<sup>9</sup>Some knowledgeable experts would say interviewing completions has become more difficult in the last decade and this refusal rate is low.

8. At least seven calls (not counting busy) with at least two in each time period should be made before redrawing a new sample member.

### Conclusion

The telephone interview does have some limitations, particularly in lengthy or in-depth interviews. However, the author's experience with telephone interviewing indicates that this tool is relatively accurate, quick, and inexpensive. Industrial and academic research are constantly demanding accurate and relatively easily obtained answers. As the economy becomes more dynamic, these demands become greater. Telephone Interviewing is one tool available to family economists and others that may be employed to obtain these answers.

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## VARIOUS CONSUMER QUESTIONNAIRES

Taken from: Penney's Forum, Fall/Winter 1972.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USING THE QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is designed to provide you with a better insight as to how people feel about some of the major issues concerning Consumerism. The survey will be done in several stages:

1. First, read over the interview instructions, plus a copy of the questionnaire. Be sure that you completely understand the questionnaire.
2. Fill out one questionnaire yourself.
3. Personally conduct your interview(s)--by asking questions and recording their answers yourself.
4. The people you interview should be 18 years old or more, who maintain a household, who are not students and who are not members of your family.
5. Summarize the results of your interview(s). What generalizations can you make? Then compare the results of the interview(s) with your own opinions on the questionnaire you filled out for yourself. The results should be interesting.

CONSUMER ISSUES SURVEY

Hello! I'm \_\_\_\_\_, from (MENTION NAME OF YOUR GROUP), and I'm working on a project to find out what people like yourself think about some consumer issues.

1. For example, here are a number of subjects that many people feel are important consumer issues of the day. Would you please read through them and then tell me the three that you personally feel are the most important? (ALLOW RESPONDENT TO READ LIST AND PUT AN "X" INSIDE THE BOX NEXT TO YOUR ANSWERS.)

- Flammability of children's sleepwear
- Product safety (such as cars, appliances)
- Safe foods and pharmaceuticals
- Charge account service charges
- Truth in advertising
- Washing and dry cleaning instructions permanently sewn into garments
- More informative packaging and labeling
- Effective warranties and guarantees

(SEE NEXT PAGE)

- Durable products
- Availability of consumer credit
- Control of price inflation
- Reliable product repair services

(TAKE BACK QUESTIONNAIRE.)

2. Now I'm going to read you a number of different points of view about consumer issues. I would like you to give me your own feelings about each statement I read, with the use of this sheet. (HAND SHEET LISTING FOUR POSSIBLE ANSWERS TO RESPONDENTS.)

As I read each statement to you, please indicate whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or completely disagree. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. All I would like is your opinion. Are there any questions before I begin?

Now, how do you feel about this statement? (READ EACH STATEMENT AND CHECK THE NUMBER TO WHICH THE ANSWER APPLIES.)

	Agree		Disagree	
	Strongly	Somewhat	Somewhat	Strongly
The American business system has more good features than bad.	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
Car manufacturers should be required to spend more on auto safety devices.	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
Advertising usually tries to persuade consumers to buy products they don't really need.	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
Most companies do their best to correct customer complaints.	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
Most people go over their heads in debt to get the things they have.	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
Most business profits are too low.	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
I prefer to buy things having well-known brand names.	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
The cost of additional auto safety devices should be passed on to consumers.	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
Monthly service charges on store revolving charge accounts are reasonable.	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
It has been said that 15% of what you spend for some products goes for advertising. This is far too much.	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>

	<u>Agree</u>		<u>Disagree</u>	
	<u>Strongly</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Strongly</u>
Food middlemen should be more closely regulated because they are most responsible for increasing the cost of food.	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
The list of ingredients on packaged foods give me all the information I need.	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
Businessmen are just as honest as doctors or lawyers.	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
The Federal Government is doing a good job enforcing pure food and drug laws.	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
Most advertisements make exaggerated claims.	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
When I buy things, I usually get my money's worth.	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
Credit bureaus are always careful to keep up-to-date credit ratings.	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
Consumers could probably stop price inflation by refusing to buy things at higher prices.	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
A lot of things I buy don't last as long as I would like them to.	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
More state and federal laws are needed for better consumer protection.	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
Credit is too easily available.	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>
There is little that people, like myself, can do to influence corporate decisions concerning product quality.	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>

3. Now, I have some different kinds of questions that I'd like to ask. As you probably know, several consumer advocates have made reputations for themselves during the past few years on consumer issues. Some people agree with what they have done, and some people disagree. How do you feel--do you agree or disagree with their consumer activities?

Agree

Disagree

Don't know

With whom, in particular, do you agree or disagree? Could you tell me why?

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4a. Have you complained to any company about some unsatisfactory product or service you may have bought in the last 12 months? (IF MORE THAN ONE, ASK RESPONDENT TO PICK THE MOST RECENT CASE.)

Yes                       No

4b. (IF "YES" IN Q. 4a ASK:) Was your complaint handled to your complete satisfaction?

Yes                       No

4c. (IF "NO" IN Q. 4b ASK:) Could you briefly tell me in what way it wasn't handled to your satisfaction?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. And now for a different question. If you were able to change the way products are advertised, what would you suggest?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Could you give me your best guess as to what proportion of families you think make use of credit, including banks, mortgages, retail charge accounts and credit cards? Is it . . . . . (READ LIST AND CHECK ANSWER BELOW.)

Nearly everyone                       About 3 out of 4                       Less than a fourth

About half                                       About a fourth

7. When you buy an item from a store, what proportion of the price you pay do you think becomes the store's profit after all expenses? Is it . . . (READ LIST AND CHECK ANSWER BELOW.)

5% or less                                       From 6% to 10%                       Over 30%

From 11% to 20%                                       From 21% to 30%

8. In order to make this survey as meaningful as possible, we would appreciate it if you would also answer a few questions about yourself.

A. What is your occupation? (WRITE IN) \_\_\_\_\_

B. What is the last year of school which you completed?

Less than high school

(NEXT PAGE)

- Some high school
- High school graduate
- Some college
- College graduate
- Post graduate

C. What is your marital status?

- Single                       Married                       Widowed/Divorced/  
Separated

D. Do you have any children under 21 years of age?

- Yes                       No

E. Do you have any retail or bank credit cards?

- Yes                       No

Sex:                       Male                       Female

Approximate Age:

- 18 to 24                       35 to 55  
 25 to 34                       55 and over

Town or City and State Where Respondent Lives:

Town or City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Group \_\_\_\_\_

Date Completed \_\_\_\_\_

SAMPLE SURVEY OF CONSUMER OPINIONS  
VPI & SU Consumer-Business Communications Program

Information

Easily accessible information at the point of sale (labels and hand tags), that is meaningful information, is needed to enable consumers to evaluate products and services and make comparisons.

1. At point of sale, about which products or services do you feel there is sufficient meaningful information available? About which do you feel is sufficient information available?

Information available is	<u>sufficient</u>	<u>NOT sufficient</u>
foods	_____	_____
clothing	_____	_____
furniture	_____	_____
cars	_____	_____
credit	_____	_____
insurance: Health	_____	_____
Life	_____	_____
Car	_____	_____
repairs for: TV	_____	_____
appliances	_____	_____
other _____	_____	_____

Be specific within above, if you wish.

2. Other than point of sale information or labels and hang tags:

(a) where do you find information about products and services?

(b) how helpful are they?

I use ads:

They are: Good Fair Poor

___ radio	_____	_____	_____
___ TV	_____	_____	_____
___ newspaper	_____	_____	_____
___ mailed flyers	_____	_____	_____
___ clerks	_____	_____	_____
___ <u>Consumer Reports</u> and <u>Consumer Research</u>	_____	_____	_____
___ VPI & SU Extension	_____	_____	_____
___ friends	_____	_____	_____
___ other _____	_____	_____	_____

3. What kinds of information would you like to have available at point of sale?

- unit pricing
- dating of perishables
- nutritive content of foods
- cosmetic ingredients
- detergent ingredients
- true annual interest rate on savings accounts
- average expected life of appliances
- date of inspection and rating received by restaurants
- date of inspection and rating received by supermarkets
- meaningful descriptions of types of tires
- explanation of materials and construction of home furnishings
- safety precautions
- other \_\_\_\_\_

4. Yes or No

Should advertising be informative?

5. How do you rate advertising in general?

- honest
- exaggerated, but not dishonest
- deceptive
- informative
- puffery, not meaningful

6. Which ads do you find informative?

7. Which ads do you find are not informative?

8. Are there ads that bug you? If so, which ones?

#### Credit

Truth in Lending requires that you be given the cost of using credit when you borrow money or use credit. The law requires that you be given the total dollar cost of credit and the annual interest rate.



Yes or No

- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ 9. Have you found this information readily available?  
 \_\_\_ \_\_\_ 10. Do sales clerks and loan officers readily give you  
 this information?  
 \_\_\_ \_\_\_ 11. Is it prominently placed on credit contracts?  
 \_\_\_ \_\_\_ 12. Have you had difficulty getting this information about  
 the cost of credit?  
 Where? \_\_\_\_\_

13. Are there other problems consumers have when using credit? If  
 so, what?

14. Have you used credit in the last 6 months?  
 If so, please answer the following by filling in the table.  
 What did you use it for?  
 What was the annual interest rate?  
 Where did you get credit? (Store, bank, credit union, finance  
 company, etc.)

<u>Credit for</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Where</u>
purchase of clothing	_____	_____
appliance	_____	_____
car	_____	_____
car repairs	_____	_____
car gas	_____	_____
cash loan	_____	_____
other _____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Guarantees

Yes or No

\_\_\_ \_\_\_ 15. Have you been satisfied with service or repairs provided  
 by a warranty or guarantee?

16. If you have not been satisfied, please explain.

Product:

Problem:

Consumer Preferences

17. Do you shop locally or in another town for:

	<u>locally</u>	<u>out of town</u>	<u>why</u>
food	_____	_____	_____
clothing	_____	_____	_____
cars	_____	_____	_____
home furnishings	_____	_____	_____
meals out	_____	_____	_____

18. How do you rate local stores and sales clerks?

store: \_\_\_ reasonably priced  
 \_\_\_ honest and fair policies  
 \_\_\_ clean

personnel:

\_\_\_ informed  
 \_\_\_ uninformed  
 \_\_\_ courteous  
 \_\_\_ pushy

Be specific if you have comments.

19. In addition to the preceding answers, have you had any unsatisfactory experiences in dealing with businesses? Please explain.

20. What remedies do you think are needed to solve consumer problems?

Problem:

Remedy:

21. What changes do you suggest to local businesses so that shopping locally would be more satisfactory for consumers?

Please describe yourself:

female:

male:

occupation \_\_\_\_\_

age:    \_\_\_ 20-30  
           \_\_\_ 31-40  
           \_\_\_ 41-55  
           \_\_\_ 56-65  
           \_\_\_ over 65

lived in this town for \_\_\_\_\_ years

annual family income

   \_\_\_ under \$5,000  
    \_\_\_ \$5,000 to \$9,999  
    \_\_\_ \$10,000 to \$15,999  
    \_\_\_ \$16,000 to \$19,999  
    \_\_\_ \$20,000 or more

VPI & SU CONSUMER EDUCATION AWARENESS SURVEY

Date \_\_\_\_\_

County or Government Unit  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Please circle your answer.

1. Your Sex: 1. Male 2. Female

2. Your Age:

- |                       |            |
|-----------------------|------------|
| 1. 16-30 years of age | 4. 61-75   |
| 2. 31-45              | 5. Over 76 |
| 3. 46-60              |            |

3. The next questions deal with consumer concerns and their ranking. They are a bit tedious but they are very important. Of the following issues that face this nation, would you rate these issues as to what you personally are concerned about in the categories of:

- |                 |                  |
|-----------------|------------------|
| 1. A great deal | 3. A little bit. |
| 2. Somewhat     | 4. Not at all.   |

Please check one of the four categories (✓):

	A Great Deal	Some- What	A Little Bit	Not At All
A. Keeping inflation under control.	_____	_____	_____	_____
B. Finding a job for the unemployed.	_____	_____	_____	_____
C. Establishing a specific national energy policy.	_____	_____	_____	_____
D. Keeping spending by the federal government under control.	_____	_____	_____	_____
E. Controlling air and water pollution.	_____	_____	_____	_____
F. Lowering medical costs.	_____	_____	_____	_____
G. Providing adequate housing for the nation.	_____	_____	_____	_____
H. Reducing taxes.	_____	_____	_____	_____
I. Increasing productivity.	_____	_____	_____	_____
J. Helping consumers to get a fair deal when shopping.	_____	_____	_____	_____
K. Others - list:				
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

4a. Below are some concerns that some consumers have expressed. How would you rate these as to your personal concern:

1. A great deal.
2. Somewhat.
3. A little bit.
4. Not at all.

Please check one of the four categories (✓):

	A Great Deal	Some- What	A Little Bit	Not At All
A. The high prices of many products.	_____	_____	_____	_____
B. The high cost of medical and hospital care.	_____	_____	_____	_____
C. The poor quality of many products.	_____	_____	_____	_____
D. The failure of many companies to live up to claims made in their advertising.	_____	_____	_____	_____

	A Great Deal	Some- What	A Little Bit	Not At All
E. The poor quality of after-sales service and repairs.	_____	_____	_____	_____
F. Too many products breaking or going wrong soon after you bring them home.	_____	_____	_____	_____
G. Misleading packaging and labeling.	_____	_____	_____	_____
H. Not being able to afford adequate health insurance.	_____	_____	_____	_____
I. The feeling that it is a waste of time to complain about consumer problems because nothing substantial will be achieved.	_____	_____	_____	_____
J. Not being able to get adequate insurance coverage against an accident or loss.	_____	_____	_____	_____
K. Funeral expenses.	_____	_____	_____	_____
L. Energy costs.	_____	_____	_____	_____
M. Car repairs.	_____	_____	_____	_____
N. High cost of food.	_____	_____	_____	_____
O. Inadequate guarantees or warranties.	_____	_____	_____	_____
P. Failure of companies to handle complaints properly.	_____	_____	_____	_____
Q. The absence of reliable information about different products and services.	_____	_____	_____	_____
R. Not knowing what to do if something is wrong with a product you have	_____	_____	_____	_____
S. How to communicate with government officials.	_____	_____	_____	_____

4b. Which of the above are your three biggest concerns?  
List by alphabetical references, i.e., S, R, and O: \_\_\_\_\_

5. In the last twelve months, have you or your family been dissatisfied enough with a consumer problem to act in any of the following ways?  
Rate them as:

1. Yes                      2. No                      3. Don't know

Please check one of the three categories.                      Yes    No    Don't Know

A. Changed the principal place that you buy groceries.	_____	_____	_____
B. Stopped buying a particular brand of product.	_____	_____	_____

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
C. Stopped buying at a particular store.	___	___	_____
D. Written to or contacted manufacturers of some product or service.	___	___	_____
E. Talked to a store manager or employee about some product or service.	___	___	_____
F. Refused to pay for goods.	___	___	_____
G. Contacted the Better Business Bureau or the Chamber of Commerce.	___	___	_____
H. Joined a consumer group.	___	___	_____
I. Sought out legal aid concerning a consumer complaint.	___	___	_____
J. Contacted your local extension office for more information.	___	___	_____
K. Contacted any state, county, or city agency concerning an unsatisfactory service or product.	___	___	_____

In order to make this survey as meaningful as possible, we would appreciate it if you would answer a few questions about yourself.

6. What is your marital status? Circle.

- |                    |              |
|--------------------|--------------|
| 1. Single          | 4. Separated |
| 2. Married         | 5. Divorced  |
| 3. Living together | 6. Widowed   |

7. How many are in the household? Circle.

- |          |                       |
|----------|-----------------------|
| 1. One   | 6. Six                |
| 2. Two   | 7. Seven              |
| 3. Three | 8. Eight              |
| 4. Four  | 9. Nine to twelve     |
| 5. Five  | 10. Thirteen and over |

8. How many children are in the household under 19 years of age? Circle.

- |          |                   |
|----------|-------------------|
| 1. One   | 6. Six            |
| 2. Two   | 7. Seven          |
| 3. Three | 8. Eight          |
| 4. Four  | 9. Nine to twelve |
| 5. Five  | 10. None          |

9. How many in the household were born before 1914? Circle.
- |         |                 |
|---------|-----------------|
| 1. Zero | 4. Three        |
| 2. One  | 5. Four         |
| 3. Two  | 6. Five or more |
10. This next question is optional. What is the household annual income before taxes? (Include interest, dividends and all government payments whether taxable or not.) Circle.
1. \$5,200 or less (\$100 a week)
  2. \$5,201 - \$10,400 (\$101 - \$200 a week)
  3. \$10,401 - \$15,600 (\$201 - \$300 a week)
  4. \$15,601 - \$20,800 (\$301 - \$400 a week)
  5. \$20,801 - \$31,201 (\$401 - \$600 a week)
  6. Over \$31,201 a year.
  7. Do not care to answer.
11. Are You? Circle.
- |             |                      |
|-------------|----------------------|
| 1. Black    | 4. Spanish surname   |
| 2. White    | 5. American Indian   |
| 3. Oriental | 6. None of the above |
12. What level of education have you completed? Circle.
1. Grade school or less.
  2. Some high school.
  3. High school diploma or high school equivalency diploma.
  4. Some college.
  5. Four year college degree.
  6. Some graduate or professional school.
  7. Graduate or professional degree.

We thank you for your time and your answers. Please check to make sure you have answered all parts of the survey. If you have any additions or questions, please communicate these also.

Thank you!