

Random Digit Dialing

- Phone numbers are **randomly** generated – many of these numbers result in non-working, disconnected, or fax numbers.
- Phone numbers are dialed randomly and then respondents are randomly selected from the household members.
- Different methods are used for randomly selecting the respondent.
 - **most recent birthday method**
 - **computer selection method**
 - **ESSENTIAL - Once a respondent is selected – he/she is the ONLY person in the household that we can interview.**

Listed Sample

- Like random digit dialing because we don't have a specific respondent's name before we call.
- These samples are purchased from an outside company. They are customized for studies that require respondents from a certain segment of the population:
 - **Pennsylvanians over 75 years old**
 - **Parents with children ages 10-14**
- Essentially, the numbers are picked randomly from the white pages, then run through a predictive module that tries to associate secondary data with the number (driver's license records, marketing reply cards, etc)
- These samples can save a great deal of time when specific demographics are needed.

List Studies

- We start out with a list of respondents, so we know who we want to interview before we even call.
- These respondents have often been screened or contacted prior to the interview.

To obtain accurate information, all interviewers must collect data in the same uniform manner from all respondents. Each interviewer should conduct the interview in the same fashion as all other interviewers – as the survey was designed! Follow these guidelines throughout the interviewing process:

- **Stay neutral.** Responding in any way to answers given by respondents has the potential to affect their answers to future questions. Respondents generally want you to like them – if they see you approve or disapprove of an answer, they may answer differently to future questions.
 - **Never disagree or argue with the respondent**
 - **Avoid “fine” or “good” after a response**
 - **Always keep personal opinions to yourself**
 - **Never release personal information**
- **Be courteous and professional at all times.** Make the interview a pleasant experience for the respondent. The purpose of the interview is to obtain accurate information from the respondent. In order to obtain this information, you should avoid creating the impression that the interview is a test or cross-examination.
 - **There are no wrong answers.**
 - **You have the right to ask the respondent for information, just as the respondent has the right to refuse to answer.**
 - **Do not hang-up on anybody! If a conversation is going nowhere and you feel like hanging-up, simply end the conversation politely.**
 - **Politely deal with difficult respondents.**
- **Know the study thoroughly.** Familiarity with both the study and questionnaire will facilitate a smoother flow and allow the interviewer to focus his/her attention on the respondent to an informal atmosphere that is conducive to obtaining information.
 - **Become familiar with the exact wording of the questions, their order, and the response categories.**
 - **Know the details of the study guide – the who, who, what, when, where, why, and how behind the survey.**

GOOD FEEDBACK

- ◆ *I see ...*
- ◆ *That's important to know*
- ◆ *OK ... now the next question reads*
- ◆ *It's important to find out what people think about this*
- ◆ *That is useful/helpful information*
- ◆ *Thanks, it's important to get your opinion on that*

BAD FEEDBACK

- ◆ *Yes, a lot of people say that*
- ◆ *Oh, really?*
- ◆ *Gee, that's the first time I've heard that*
- ◆ *I don't know anything about that*

The Ohio State University
Polimetrics Laboratory for Political and Social
Research

Basics / Convincing the Respondent

One of the most difficult, but also the most rewarding) aspects of telephone interviewing is convincing the respondent to be interviewed. Your introduction and the first few minutes with the respondent are crucial.

This is your chance to persuade the respondent to agree to participate in the study. If you find an introduction that “works” for you, then you’re going to be a successful interviewer!

- **Speak slowly and clearly.** Your voice and your words convey your credibility. Being well-prepared will help you avoid the nervous habit of talking fast.

- *Respondents who can’t understand what you’re saying will not want to participate.*

- **Be self-confident.** Self-confidence is vital and comes from being well prepared. You should be serious, pleasant, and self-confident. Remember that you are a professional interviewer - respondents will only take you seriously if you convey a credible image.

Try to avoid pauses at all costs – pauses give the respondent a chance to refuse. If you know the study details, you’ll be able to avoid awkward pauses, which will portray a confident image.

- **Know the study details.** Many refusals occur because the respondent did not have enough information to understand the importance of their participation in the study. Use the frequently asked questions on the next page as a guide to answer questions the respondent might have.

- **Make an appointment.** If the respondent is unable to do the survey at the time you call them, try to set up a more convenient time to complete the survey. Offer them suggestions, such as “*How about Thursday around this time?*”

- **Use active listening.** Listen closely to determine what is keeping the respondent from participating. If they say something to make you think their concern is confidentiality, then offer information about out confidentiality policies, etc.

Regardless of all the information you provide, it is inevitable that you will receive refusals. If someone refuses to do the survey, please accept it as a refusal! Refusals are classified as any situation where you were not able to persuade a reluctant respondent into either completing the interview or finding a time to call back. If someone hangs up on you during any point of the phone call, it is always considered a refusal.

If you are unable to complete the interview because the respondent can't communicate (hearing difficulties, language problems, physical or mental problems, etc.), this is NOT a refusal. This would be coded as "Other" with an appropriate description.

We eventually call back all of our refusals and often convert a good proportion of them. Therefore, it is very important to provide information about the refusal that would be helpful when we call back and try to convert the refusal. You'll want to include any information that you think would be helpful for the call back, such as respondent's gender, age range, why they refused, etc. For example, "*young male hung-up after intro. I can hear Monday night football in background, avoid callbacks on Monday.*"

This information will be entered into the computer at the end of the call ... the procedures for leaving such messages will be covered in section 4.

******It is very important that you record "DO NOT CALL BACK" if the respondent said "do not call back" because we are required by law not to call them back if they say this.***

Avoid a "refusal by other." Try to get the refusal directly from the designated respondent. If someone else in the household tells you that the respondent wouldn't be interested, tell them pleasantly but firmly that you really must speak with the respondent directly to explain the study to him/her and if necessary accept his/her refusal. If they absolutely will not allow you to talk to the respondent, then you must accept it as a refusal.

Q: “I’ve never heard of your organization”

A: “The Survey Research Center is a non-profit organization located at Pennsylvania State University. The center conducts studies that are important to society and that will contribute to basic knowledge. We do NOT conduct market research.”

Q: “Who will see this information?”

A: “All identifying information, such as your phone number or name, is kept separate from the information you provide in special confidential files, so there is no possible way you can be identified. The information you provide will be included in a large data set with information from several other respondents. Scholars will use the data to produce findings from this study, which will then be published in scientific journals, books, magazines, and newspapers.”

Q: “How long will this take?”

A: We are legally obligated to inform the respondent of the length of the survey, so tell them the estimated length. Then follow that with, “But we don’t have to do all of the survey right now. We can break the survey into 5 or 10 minute segments if you like. We can do as much as you want right now, and then finish the rest at a more convenient time.”

Q: “What is the survey about?” or “Where did you get my number?”

A: Each study is different – offer the relevant information from the study guide.

Q: “How do I know your organization is legitimate and reputable?”

A: “You can visit our website at www.ssri.psu.edu/survey to learn more about our center, or you can call our center toll-free at 1-800-648-3617.”

Q: “The study doesn’t apply to me”

A: “We need information from every respondent randomly selected in order to have accurate scientific findings. Your participation is vital to the success of the research. You are representing people who are similar to you, and we need information from all types of people to gain a truly accurate report of people living in _____.” (Pennsylvania, United States, or whatever population we’re sampling – see the study guide to determine who is included in the sample)

Q: “I’m really busy right now” or “I don’t have enough time”

A: “I understand that you have a busy schedule, but it’s very important we speak with busy people like yourself in order to get an accurate cross-section of opinion. We know your time is valuable, that’s why we are concerned about doing this at a time convenient for you. Even a few minutes at a time would be a big help. We’re open throughout the day and on weekends; I am sure we can find a time that would fit your schedule. Is there a specific day or time that works better for you?” If they don’t offer a better time, offer them a day and time “Would Thursday evening work for you?” If they offer no help at all with setting up a call back, tell them that we’ll just try to call them back randomly.

Q: “I’m really not interested”

A: Use information from the study guide to try to find some aspect of the study that peaks their interest. You can use anything here – just pick an issue and start discussing it, such as study topic, importance of study, confidentiality, time, etc.

Q: “I don’t give any information over the phone”

A: “I can understand your reluctance to give information over the phone. Why don’t you take down our number and website, and then you can contact our office and talk with one of the directors to reassure yourself.”

- **Ask every question in the order presented.** Some respondents will offer you information that answers future questions; it is still necessary to ask all the questions.
 - *The interviewing software may change the order of the questions to eliminate the possible bias associated with question order.*
 - *Sometimes many questions in a series will be very similar, and the respondent may want to just answer “no” or “yes” to all of them. You cannot enter a response until you have read the question. You can tell respondents “We’re asking everyone about each one of these questions and we want to make sure we’re getting an accurate response as to how you feel about each one separately.”*
- **Read each question verbatim.** Each question is worded exactly the way the principal investigator and other researchers want it to be asked. For all respondents to be interviewed in a uniform manner, the EXACT wording must be used.
- **Record all responses accurately.** For the results a study to be meaningful, accuracy and quality of data must be assured.
 - *Always check to make sure you entered the correct response. Beware of different response categories for different sections of questions.*
 - *In the case of open-ended questions, you must use the respondent’s exact words. Repeating the respondent’s answer while typing it in will help you remember the response and keep the respondent interested.*
- **Deal with inconsistencies politely.** While apparent inconsistencies must be addressed, always approach the situation as a misunderstanding on your part.
 - *If you feel it would be inappropriate to address the inconsistency, make a note of it at the question or at the end of the interview*
- **Thank the respondent periodically.** Some surveys may be relatively long and respondent may get fatigued. State your appreciation for their cooperation every so often – it helps to use their name once in awhile.
 - *The interviewing software has a progress meter on the screen throughout the interview. You can use to gauge how much time is left if they ask.*

The schedule works to:

Fulfill the study’s research objectives

Each question is carefully designed and pretested to fulfill its exact purpose—to obtain specific information and to be understood by the maximum number of respondents.

Standardize the Interview

Research has shown that people’s answers are strongly influenced by the wording of a question and its location among other questions. The use of a fixed schedule helps to standardize the many hundreds of interviews taken on a survey.

Build respondent interest

The wording and order of the questions has been designed to avoid respondent irritation and maximize respondent interest and interviewer-respondent rapport.

University of Wisconsin
Survey Research Laboratory

There will be situations where the respondent is confused and does not understand the question. In these cases, the first thing to do is to repeat the question slowly and deliberately. This also gives the respondent more time to think about the question. If you think the respondent just needs to be reassured, you may offer a neutral remark such as, “There are no wrong answers, we’re just trying to get people’s ideas on this.”

If the respondent is genuinely confused and asks for explanation, you need to give the responsibility for the definition to the respondent. You can do this by saying, “Just whatever it means to you” or “However you would define it is what we’re looking for.” Whatever you do, **DO NOT TRY TO DEFINE OR EXPLAIN IT!** The **ONLY** exception to this rule is if there is a definition offered in the study guide. Some study guides have pre-determined definitions that are listed for each survey item that may need clarification. But, if there is no additional definition in the study guide, you cannot offer your own. You may, however, read the response categories to the respondent, which may help clarify the question. If the respondent remains uncertain, enter “don’t know” for the response and move on to the next question.

Probe for answers. Try to avoid using “don’t know” and “refused” as responses to questions. Some respondents have difficulty making up their minds, but if we allow them the time and flexibility to do so, they may provide a valid response.

How to probe:

- Pause and allow them time to think about the question. Some respondents may think aloud and automatically say “don’t know” as part of their thinking process. If we allow them time to think, they may provide a valid response. Be certain the respondent truly does not know before accepting it as a response.
- You may also want to try repeating the response categories.
- Ask them which response category is closest to their feeling.
- If asking scaled items, such as strongly agree to strongly disagree items, and respondents answer with “agree” – probe further by asking, “Would you say that you strongly agree or just agree?”
- Repeat what the respondent has said. Hearing the idea repeated often stimulates the respondent to additional thought or clarification.
- Ask questions for clarification, such as “What do you mean by that?”
- Remind the respondent that there are no wrong answers.

*** *If they still say don’t know after probing, accept DK as a response and move on to the next question.*

Basics / Anatomy of an Interview

Youth Sports Sample

<p>Good morning/afternoon/evening. My name is _____ and I'm calling from Penn State University regarding an important research project studying youth and sports.</p>	<p>>hello< This screen introduces the interviewer to the person who answers the phone – identifies the purpose of the call.</p>	FRONT END
<p>This telephone survey is designed to gather information that will help us understand the effects organized sports have on children ages 10-14. It is important that we speak with parents of children who do play sports and parents of children who do not play sports.</p> <p>If you have a minute, I'll tell you a little bit about the survey.</p> <p>Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to answer questions that you don't want to answer and you can stop at any time. Your participation is also confidential - your name and telephone number will not be associated with your answers.</p> <p>If you would like more information about the study, I can provide you with contact information for the principal investigator, Doug Coatsworth. There are no known risks participating. If you want to know more about your rights as a research participant, I can give you a telephone number to contact our Office of Research Protections.</p> <p>The survey will only take 20-25 minutes.</p>	<p>>irb< This screen is the IRB mandated disclaimer that establishes <i>informed consent</i>.</p>	
<p>How many children between 10-14 years of age live at this residence?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) One 2) Two 3) Three 4) Four 5) Five 9) None <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p>SKIP LOGIC – If 9) None is selected, interviewer will be routed to a screen saying “Thank you for your time, but we are currently only interested in interviewing households with children between the ages of 10-14.”</p> </div>	<p>>intro< This question screens the household to see if it is qualified to participate in the study.</p>	
<p>Are you the parent of a child between 10-14 years that lives at this residence?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Yes 2) No <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p>SKIP LOGIC – If “no”, routed to screen: IF NO, ASK TO SPEAK WITH PARENT. WHEN PARENT IS ON PHONE, REPEAT INTRO.</p> </div>	<p>>parent< This question screens the person on the phone to see if they are qualified to participate in the study.</p>	
<p>What is your first name? _____</p>	<p>>parentnm< Enters name of parent</p>	

FRONT END

<p>Can you please tell me the first name of the child between the ages of 10-14? _____</p>	<p>>name< Enters name of child</p>	<p>FRONT END</p>
<p>Does <INSERT NAME> currently participate in any organized sports?</p> <p>NOTE: "BY ORGANIZED SPORTS WE MEAN THE TEAM AND LEAGUE IS ORGANIZED BY ADULTS THROUGH A SCHOOL, CHURCH, OR OTHER COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION AND HAS A COORDINATED SCHEDULE OF GAMES AGAINST OTHER TEAMS. IT IS NOT JUST KIDS GETTING TOGETHER TO PLAY SPORTS."</p> <p>1)Yes 2)No</p>	<p>>orgsprt< Determines whether respondent is qualified to participate based on a quota system requiring 150 respondents with children in organized sports and 150 respondents with children not in sports.</p>	
<p>What is your relationship with _____ ?</p> <p>1) Mother/Stepmother 2) Father/Stepfather</p> <p>8) DON'T KNOW 9) REFUSED</p>	<p>Q: q1</p>	<p>QUESTIONNAIRE STARTS</p>
<p>I would like to know who lives in the home with you and their relationship with</p> <p>Are there any women living in the home, such as a Mother, Step-Mother, Father's Girlfriend or other Female relative?</p> <p>1) Yes 2) No</p>	<p>Q: q2b</p>	

Bellefonte School Sample

<p>Hello, this is _____ from the Penn State Survey Research Center, calling on behalf of the Bellefonte Area School District.</p>	<p>>hello< Introduces the caller to the person answering the phone</p>	<p>FRONT END</p>
<p>In what school district do you currently reside?</p> <p><1> Bellefonte Area School District <2> State College Area School District <3> Bald Eagle Area School District <4> Penns Valley Area School District <5> Other</p> <p><8> DON'T KNOW <9> REFUSED</p>	<p>>qual< This question establishes whether the call has reached some qualified to participate in the study.</p>	

<p>We are calling on behalf of the Bellefonte Area School District to gather your opinion on plans to improve the school facilities. Your telephone number was picked at random for a short 10 minute survey we are conducting of residents within the Bellefonte Area School District to gather their views about this issue</p> <p>All of your answers will be confidential and your participation is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any individual questions. There will be no way that the information collected can be linked to your identity.</p> <p>PRESS 1 TO CONTINUE</p>	<p>>intro<</p> <p>Introduces the purpose of the call – also provides the informed consent disclaimer. Because this study was for a client outside PSU (and will not be used for PSU research), the study did not need IRB approval.</p>	<p>FRONT END</p>
<p>What is the first name of the person 18 years of age or older living in your household who last celebrated their birthday?</p> <p>IF THEY REFUSE TO GIVE A NAME, TRY TO GET INITIALS</p> <p>IF THEY REFUSE TO GIVE INITIALS, TRY TO GET SOME IDENTIFIER, SUCH AS MALE HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD, ETC.</p>	<p>>getname<</p> <p>This question determines a random respondent. It is very important to only interview the selected respondent.</p>	
<p>May I speak to _____</p> <p>1. YES, RESPONDENT IS ALEADY ON THE PHONE 2. YES, THEY WILL GO GET THE RESPONDENT 3. NO, THEY ARE NOT AVAILABLE - ASK FOR TIME TO CALLBACK</p>	<p>>getresp<</p> <p>If the selected respondent is not available, setup a time to callback. Don't interview the person on the phone.</p>	
<p>First, I'm going to ask you a few questions about the local schools and this issue.</p> <p>How do you feel about the overall quality of the public schools that the children from your community attend?</p> <p><1> Very good <2> Fairly good <3> Neither good nor bad <4> Not very good <5> Not good at all</p> <p><8> DON'T KNOW <9> REFUSED</p>	<p>>q1<</p>	<p>QUESTIONNAIRE STARTS</p>
<p>Have you visited a school facility in the past year?</p> <p><1> Yes <2> No</p> <p><8> DON'T KNOW <9> REFUSED</p>	<p>>q2<</p>	