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2. Survey Methods

Research Designs & Methods

➤ **Research design:** the strategy and overall framework of the research.

Example: A survey design.

➤ **Research method:** how the data is collected.

Example: A questionnaire.

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A **survey** involves collecting a large amount of data from a wide variety of people.

Design involves:

Defining concepts (tools sociologists use to describe the social world) – e.g. social class.

Operationalising concepts (finding ways of measuring key concepts): eg. classifying occupations as indicators of class.

Collecting data using most suitable research method.

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Questionnaire Methods

Questionnaire: A set of pre-planned standardised questions that can be distributed by hand or post.

General design principles:

- Keep questions clear and simple.
- Keep questions as short as possible.
- Avoid questions that are open to different interpretations.

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Correlations

Survey research enables us to document correlations in a precise and measurable way.

Correlation: a measure of the degree to which two variables are related. For example:

- **Variables** = socio-economic background and educational success.
- **Possible correlation:** Students from poorer socio-economic backgrounds tend to have lower educational motivation.

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Types of Question

Closed: Respondent picks answer from list of possibilities. For example:

“Do you like coffee?”: Yes No Don't Know

“Getting good grades at A-Level is important to me”:

Agree very strongly	Agree strongly	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree strongly	Disagree very strongly
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Or is asked to provide short piece of information:
E.g. “What is your father’s occupation?”

Open: Respondent answers in their own words:
e.g. What do you like about your school / college?

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Advantages

- **Coding and Quantification:** The use of pre-coded questions makes it easier to quantify data.
- **Ease of Completion:** A closed questionnaire is relatively quick and easy to complete.
- **Anonymity:** may improve validity of collected data (can avoid interview / interviewer effects).
- **Sampling:** Contact and question large numbers of people quickly, easily and efficiently.
- **Reliability:** Easy to standardise - everyone answers the same questions.

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Limitations

- **Validity:** Difficult to examine complex issues and opinions in depth and detail.
- **Lacks flexibility:** cannot ask follow-up questions or ask for clarification.
- **The Meaning problem:** the same word can mean different things to different respondents.
- **Response Rate** for postal questionnaires may be very low.

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