Assessment in Focus: Conducting Effective Interviews & Focus Groups

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Learning outcomes

By the end of this program, participants will...

- be familiar with the differences between qualitative and quantitative research methods and results
- be familiar with the benefits and challenges of interviews and focus groups in order to determine their potential usefulness for library assessment
- be familiar with the range of textual, audio, and visual data that can be collected via interviews and focus groups
- have gained experience collecting data by conducting a sample interview or focus group

Today's plan

- Introduction to qualitative research
  - Quick brainstorming exercise
- Preview of practicalities + logistics
- Interviews
  - Practice interview exercise
- Focus groups
  - Practice focus group exercise
- Wrap up + questions

Quantitative & qualitative data

CUNY Students' Commute Time
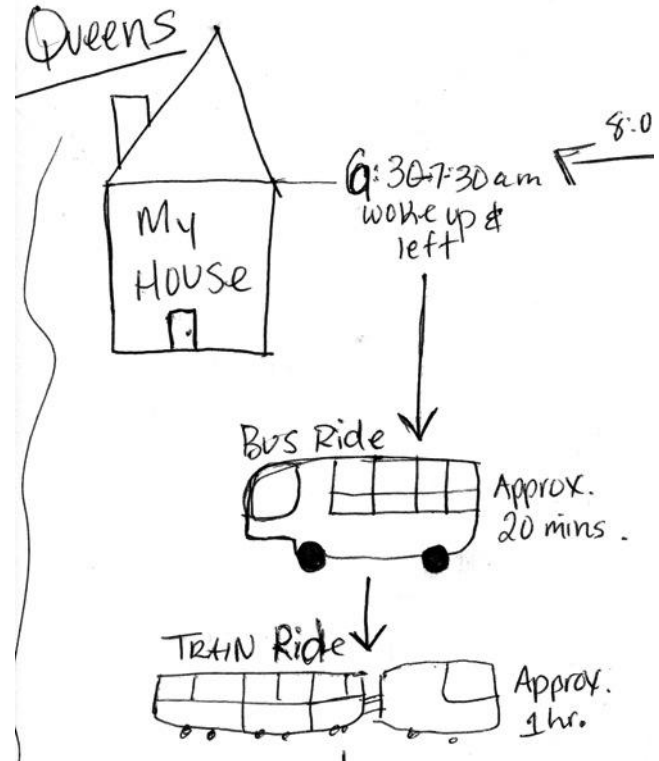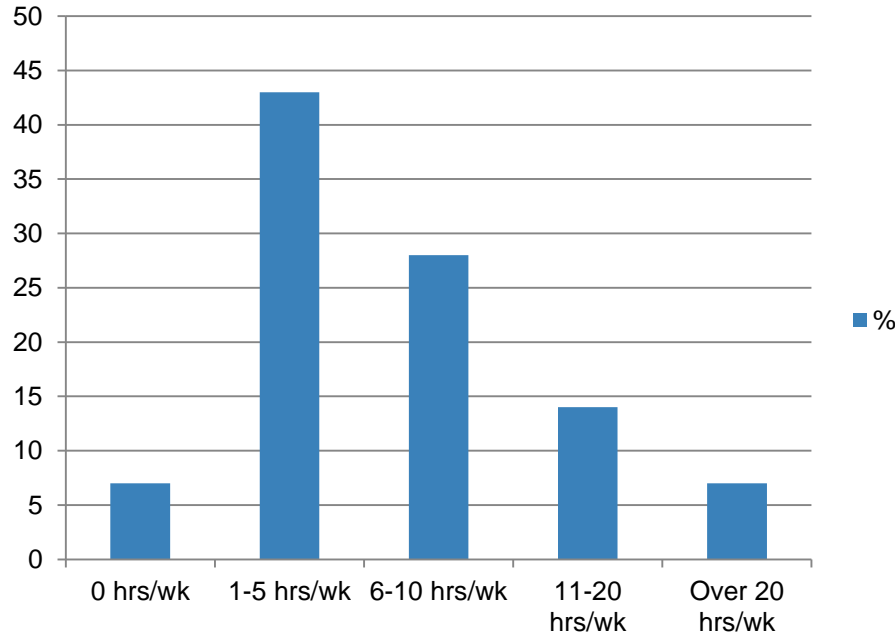
Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose. It is a seeking that [s]he who wishes may know the cosmic secrets of the world and that they dwell therein.

—Zora Neale Hurston (1942) *Dust Tracks on the Road,* p.142

Research methods in social sciences

- Research methods and research design
- Quantitative and **qualitative** (focus group and interview data generate qualitative data)
- Research question and research goal
- Mixed methods

Comparing research approaches
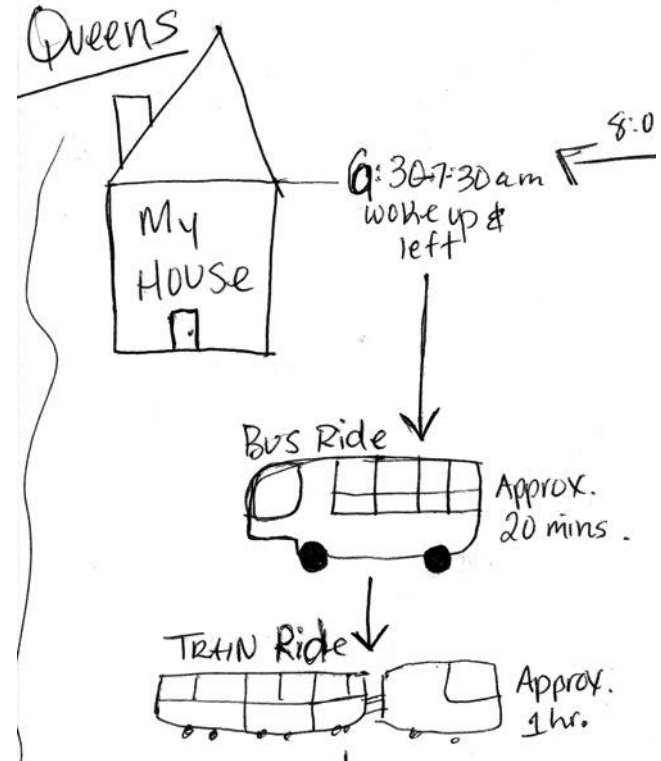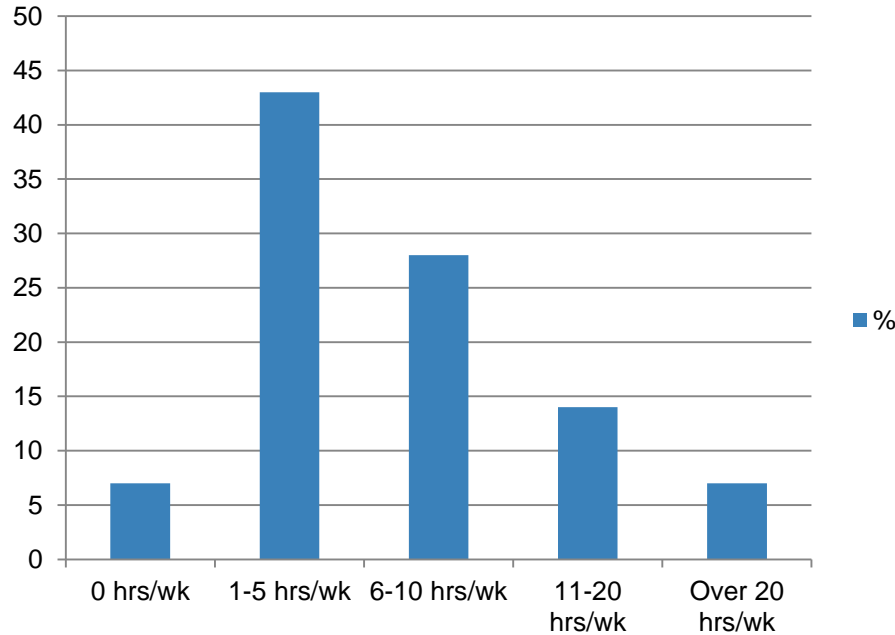
Quantitative

numerical data
validity internal/external
replicability
inductive and deductive
effects, correlations, and causation
surveys, experimental methods,
control
iterative
...and more!

Qualitative

non-numerical data
face validity (researcher judgement)
replicability not a goal
saturation
inductive and deductive
capture the most variation
researcher is the tool
iterative
...and more!

Quantitative & qualitative data

Resources & Research Goal & Audience

Challenges of qualitative research

- Time-consuming to collect data
- Time-consuming to analyze data
- Yields TONS of messy data
- Validation can be difficulty
- Results not generalizable

Strengths of a qualitative approach

- Complex reasoning (bottom-up approach)
- Researcher is the key instrument and situated in the study
- Categories are constructed from data
- Holistic account (not constrained by cause effect relationships)
- Identify variables that cannot be easily measured

From *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, Creswell p. 47-49

Qualitative studies in libraries

Large scale

Medium scale

Small scale

Put on your thinking caps...

Practicalities & logistics for interviews & focus groups

Interviews . . .

- Are more than just Q & A
- Are more than "just the facts"
- Have a structure
- Are often open ended
- Get at the "why" or "what was it like"
- Are both challenging and rewarding!

Focus groups . . .

- Are a type of interview
- Typically include 5-10 participants
- Are guided discussion
- Elicit or assess attitudes or beliefs
- Are about expressing and understanding varieties of opinion, not necessarily about consensus

Develop your research project

- Develop clear goal(s)
- Determine interview type
- Develop questions
- Draft your plan

Plan the research process

- Assess resources
- Identify participant population
- Secure approvals

Prepare to collect data

- Equipment
- Incentives
- Recruitment
- Reminders
- Problematic participants
- Unforeseen circumstances
- Keeping track of data

Interviews

Lots of different kinds

- Typically one-on-one with semi-structured questions
- Can be wide variation in that general frame
  - Some interviews use a list of questions, interviewer and participant meet once
  - Others use probes or prompts/stimuli, ask participant to do something during/before the interview

Sample interview types

- In-depth interview
- Process interview
- Mapping/time log
- Photo survey
- Space design/space use
- Other image-based stimuli
- And there are more!

Conducting the interview

- How long should the interview be?
  - It depends!

- Where will the interview be held?
  - It depends, strive for privacy if possible

Interview challenges

- Leading questions

- Space for answers

- Problematic participants

- (Possibly: technical issues)

What does an interview look like?

INTERVIEWER:
Okay, the night before a big assignment is due. Tell me what you see in this picture.

STUDENT:
Okay, well, this is a picture of me getting my editing done on the assignment. I try to read over and read over as much as possible because professors tend to take off marks for not proofreading. They say, "Oh, you didn't take your time and do this assignment, so I'm just gonna take off five points." So what I do is I try to read over several times and what I also do is I have someone else read over for me 'cause my professor says that sometimes you won't recognize a mistake but somebody else will.

INTERVIEWER:
That's true even with very, very experienced writers. And where are you in that picture?

STUDENT:
I am in the bedroom that I stay with my cousins. That's the computer; I'm sitting by the computer. So, we have a desktop in our bedroom so I was just editing that night.

INTERVIEWER:
And so do you use the computers here at the college as well?

STUDENT:
Yes I do use the computers at the college as well. Sometimes they're occupied so what I do is that I just sit in the back and there's a lounge area when enter. You can chill out until a computer is free.

INTERVIEWER:
Did your professor give you any recommendations or restrictions for outside sources? So, not including the textbook and the notes, but any outside sources. Did she say you had [[emphasis]] to use these [[emphasis]] kinds of sources or you couldn't use those [[emphasis]] kinds of sources?

STUDENT:
No.

INTERVIEWER:
Did she require you to use any library resources or any books? Or she said you didn't have to?

STUDENT:
Yeah.... She said we can use the library sources.

INTERVIEWER:
But was it required?

STUDENT:
Mm… Nah, I don't think so.

INTERVIEWER:
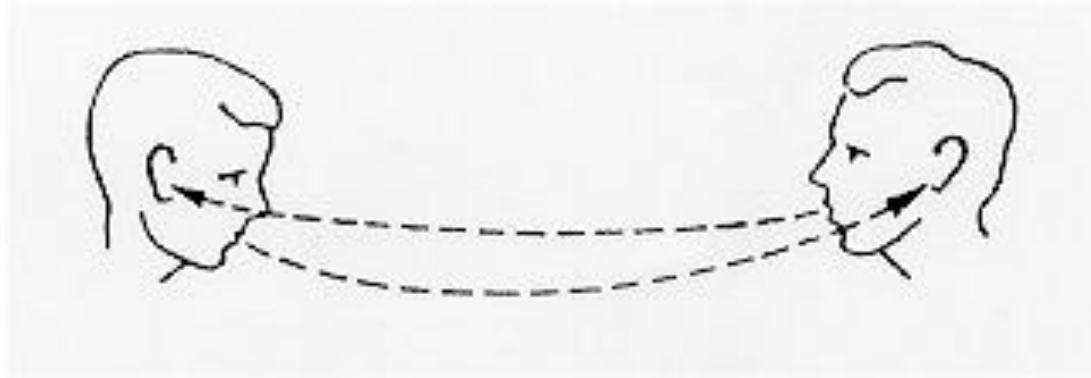Did you use any library resources for the paper?

STUDENT:
Nah. Just the textbook.

INTERVIEWER:
Just the textbook and the outside web sources?

STUDENT:
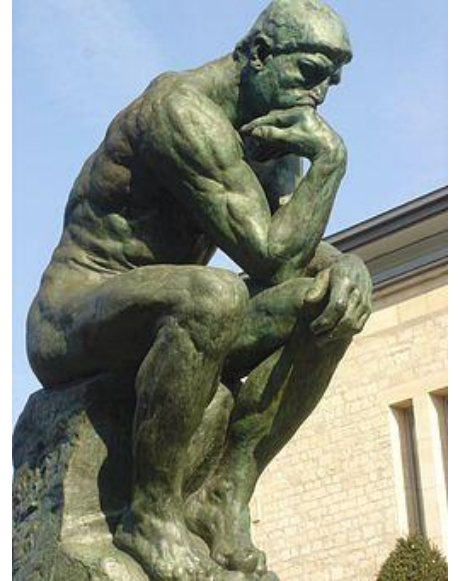Mm-hmm.

Let's practice!

Focus Groups

Focus groups are good for:

- Product or service assessment
- Tap into the power of "group interactions"
- People know what it is
- Flexible locations, online/telephone

Considerations

- Recruitment (more time-consuming)
- Budget
- Facilitating a group
- 2 people on the focus group team

Plan a focus group

- Checklist
- Recruitment (time, money, and resources)
- Screening criteria
- Group size smaller (less variation) <====> larger (more variation) in the data
- Audio and video
- Write questions (see checklist)
- Pilot your questions (sequence -- difficult in the middle)

Planning: focus group guide

- Many different kinds (a tool that helps the facilitator guide the session)
- Research team
- Don't read from your guide
- Areas or themes of interest (domains)

Conducting a focus group

- Prepare checklist #7, 8, 10
- PowerPoint images and documents (day of folder)
- Notetaker role (third eye)
- Opening a group => easy / hard questions / sequence / unexpected

Conducting a focus group continued

- Probing definition
- Silence
- Problematic
  people or situations

Closing a focus group

- End with: does anyone have anything else to say?
- Stop recording: thank yous / incentives / signatures
- Debrief team

What does a focus group look like?

Excerpted from: Where do you get books for your research or homework back in your home country?

Grenada - Even in high school right now, they have to have an Atlas as a textbook. So we have to purchase our own textbooks for our kids. They are equipped with all these things, but the schools have their own libraries. And right now, three years ago the public library closed. So there's a lot of people back home they order the books on Amazon.

Moderator - Is that true for all of you?

Bangladesh - No, we never use Amazon.

Colombia - No, not in Colombia. People never buy online. It's very unsafe. It never makes it home.

Bangladesh - Yes. You cannot buy from Amazon back home.

Moderator - Let's go back a little bit to China, there you would just go on the Internet and look for Ebooks?

China - Yes.

Moderator - Do you do that in the library, or do you do that at home?

China - At home. Anywhere.

Vietnamese - China has a very big e-book collection

China - They have almost all the books in the world.

Moderator - Free ebooks, like pirated e-books?

China – Yes.

Difficult to understand

China – In my, in my city, we have library, but just I don't go there.

Moderator - Do you know who goes there?

China – Don't need to go there, because in high school, in China high school they don't require research. Baisicially my city, they don't require research.All you need is just textbook, and then to practice practice, practice. It's really different, really different, education

Moderator - Okay so it's just doing exercises from workbooks?

China – Yeah, or textbook and if you want to read something, they encougrage you to read something-they don't want. No want. They don't let you, how do you say, is it like: they don't ask you must to do research, just require you maybe you want then you go read some book, go to buy in the book store. No library.

Staccato Q/A quiet voice with thick accents

China – The Chinese high school science has different parts, something like the physics, chemistry. Is two different subjects. It's not a science.

Moderator - I'm interested in the high school experience, for example, how many subjects did you have?
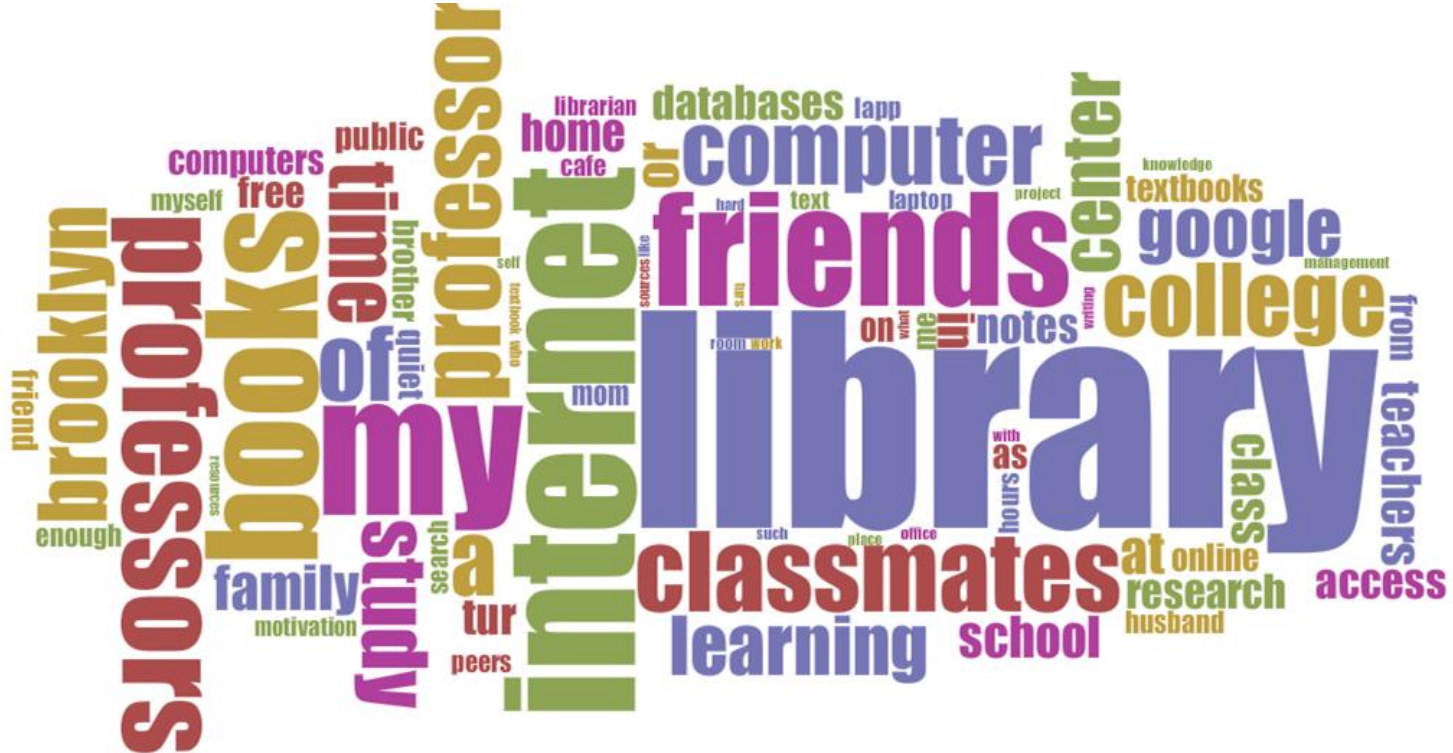
China – 9

Moderator - 9? Ok, what are they?

China – Chinese, Math, English, History, Physics, Chemistry, Economy, and then that's it.

Moderator - Ok. And So when you go into English class, or Economy class, do you have culture class?

China – The culture class is involved in history class.

Succeed in Research

Difficulties with research

Let's practice!

Chevalier D—E—n returnd or the Stock-Brokers outwitted:

Wrapping up

- You can do it!
- It's a good idea to start small
- Unexpected outcomes
- Synthesizing/analyzing data: 4/23 @ 1-4pm

Questions?

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