

## Data Collection Basics - Interviews and Surveys

This document focuses on what you need to think about and do while administering surveys and conducting interviews. Some of it is common sense you may naturally follow when talking to a stranger and trying to make them feel comfortable. All of it is critical in helping us ensure that any evaluation is carried out in a reliable manner.

### Random Sampling

You cannot interview or survey every visitor who is a part of the target audience. The goal is to sample visitors randomly. This eventually ensures a pool of interviews or surveys that reflect the full range of target visitors **and** that someone else trying to repeat the study would be able to get a similar range of visitors in the target audience that does not differ significantly from the result found.

A critical reason to use random sampling is that it is human nature to want to approach a visitor who looks friendly, or to avoid a visitor who looks harried. Don't worry if you feel this way, but you need to use random sampling to keep away from that temptation! If you only chose the visitors who didn't look harried, it would not represent the true visitor population.

One way is to ensure you only interview or survey the eligible person who crossed your imaginary line (e.g. third person to cross the line). How do you do this? Typically at this moment you will see an individual or group using the exhibit. As they leave the exhibit and cross your imaginary line, count the first eligible individual as number one.

You want to approach the third eligible individual that crosses your imaginary line. You should recruit that person whether s/he is alone or part of a group. If you find that you have multiple people walking over your imaginary line at the same time, select the person closest to you as s/he crosses the line.

### Seeking Permission

To initiate the actual interview or survey, approach your target.

*"I am working with the museum to get people's feedback about this part of the exhibit so that we can improve it. Would you mind spending some time with me looking at it? It should take about [X] minutes."*

If you are approaching a child under the age of 16 you must get verbal permission from their parent or guardian.

*"I am working with the museum to get people's feedback about this part of the exhibit so that we can improve it. Would you mind spending some time with me looking at it? It should take about [X] minutes. Are you at the museum with an adult today? We need to get permission from them for you to participate."*

Walk with the child to the adult and explain.

*"I am working with the museum to get people's feedback about one part of the exhibit s/he has just visited. I am talking to people aged eight and over. If s/he is eligible, would you mind if I interviewed him/her about the exhibit? It should take about [X] minutes."*

Once you have secured permission verbally, you can begin the interview. If the child is not old enough or the parent or guardian does not want the child to participate, thank them for their time.

### Refusals

At some point, a visitor may decline to participate in the interview or survey. You never want to push someone to participate, but you should clarify why they are declining. Be sure to write the details on the refusal log: date, time, your initials, approximate age of respondent, sex, ethnicity (sight-based), and brief reason for refusal.

### Beginning the Interview or Survey

In the first moments of the interview or survey you need to do two things: 1) let the visitor know what you want to do: interview or survey them to help us improve the museum; and 2) Move to a comfortable place to conduct the interview. This is the time to physically position the visitor in a good spot. Make sure you are not blocking an exhibit or walk-through space because this poor positioning may make you and your respondent uncomfortable later. Feel free to say,

“Let’s walk over here to be sure we’re out of the way.” Remember that some visitors will want to be in a certain location so that they can see the rest of their group.

### **Working with Groups of Visitors**

Your goal for this study is to gather information from one person who may or may not be part of a group (most people do come to science museums in family groups). It is important that you approach one person.

Some groups may wander on ahead and ask the person to catch up, or they may circle back to collect them. Be conscientious of the group dynamics. Some visitors may want to walk along with their group. Frequently other members of the group will want to listen in on the interview or participate. Be as inclusive as possible while still recording responses from just one person. Focus on the answers from the respondent.

If the respondent is filling out a survey, make sure that other members of the group are not recording their answers. If necessary ask the person you are interviewing how they would answer the question if other people in the group have responded but they haven’t. If they say something like “what she said” (referring to a group member’s response) that is fine, write down the answer they are referring to.

### **Ending the Interview or Survey**

When you finish the interview or survey, thank the person for their time. People often ask what you plan to do with the information you are collecting. Feel free to tell them that their feedback helps the museum measure the success of what they have created and make future exhibits even better!

### **Recording Data from the Interview or Survey**

Do not be shy about telling visitors that you want to get down every word they say. It often helps to repeat what the visitor has said back to him or her to provide time for you to write and to be sure you have heard everything correctly. You may want to tell people at the outset that you need to write down what they are saying, and so it may take a second before you can respond to them – people are usually quite understanding and accommodating when you tell them this.

You may also want to develop a good short-hand system that works for you. Then, once you are done with the interview you can review your notes, turning your short hand into complete sentences that someone else can read.

It is important that you are as detailed as possible! It is critical to record people’s responses in their own words, not in your paraphrased words.

If the respondent is filling out a survey, ensure that all questions are understood by the respondent and all the questions have also been answered.

**CRITICAL:** The person entering and analyzing this data will need to be able to read what you write, and to understand what you write in relation to the original question. Please take the necessary time at the end to go over what has been written, make sure it reflects the visitor’s own words, and confirm the writing is legible.

### **Consistency**

Throughout the document, the theme of consistency has been repeated over and over again. Overall, you must strive to collect the data the same way each time. Following these guidelines helps to make the information we collect reliable. Below are some tips to avoid common data collection issues.

- Do not change survey/interview instruments midway through the data collection process. When questions are worded differently, the responses generated may also differ wildly. Language matters!
- Do not use a single instrument to interview multiple visitors when the instrument is intended to record **one** visitor’s response. Use a separate instrument for each visitor.

- Remember to always select only one response for every question, unless it is an open-ended question where you would probe.
- If you begin to administer an instrument as a survey, administer it as a survey throughout the data collection process.
- If you begin to administer an instrument as an interview, administer it as an interview throughout the data collection process.
- Ensure that the visitor you are interviewing/surveying responds to the questions independently. Do not record other visitors' responses.
- Ensure that the demographics recorded reflect the visitor that responded to the questions and not the others in the group, unless the instrument asks for group demographics.

### **Addressing Other Common Data Collection Issues**

- Take as much time as you need to look over your data collection sheet when you finish with one visitor. Make sure everything is filled in correctly and legibly. Spending a little time double-checking your sheet will save time later during data entry and analysis.
- If there is ever confusion about a data collection method, please do not hesitate to ask. We want to make sure the methods and data collection instruments are clear. If they aren't, other people may have similar questions and we want to make sure we address them as soon as possible.
- Listening is probably one of the most important skills for an interviewer. Concentrate on what the person is saying, not what you will say next. Memorize the questions so you do not have to spend much time thinking about them or reading them.
- Ask probing questions to get detailed information from your respondent. You can do this by simply making reassuring sounds (e.g., uh huh, I see, yes, etc.) or by saying things like, "Tell me more about that" or "What do you mean by that?" or "Can you give me an example of that?"
- Be careful not to talk too much or try to "teach." As an interviewer, your job is not to correct the person if they give inaccurate information – your job is to understand how this person is thinking about a concept or an experience. Sometimes if you just pause and give the person time to gather his/her thoughts you will learn a lot.
- You may want to repeat the person's response, or summarize their response, to prompt them to carry on. For example, "So, let me just make sure I understand what you are saying...." This also slows things down, giving you more time to write.
- Do not feel that you are imposing on the visitors' time. They will sense that and feel that you are an imposition!
- Do follow the wording and order of the interview questions. This is the only way to gather reliable data.
- Do not feel that you need to be an expert. You will be asked a lot of questions while you are in the exhibit. Feel free to say "I do not know," ... but you should be an expert on the locations of the bathrooms and the movie theaters.
- If a visitor ever makes you feel uncomfortable, you should politely end the interview and leave the exhibit area. You are more important than any interview!

Please see <http://cns.iu.edu/2015-VisLit.html> for study materials and results.