

# STAGE 6 FIELDWORK ESSENTIALS

## Conducting surveys and interviews

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Surveys and interviews provide valuable information and data for geographical inquiries. It is very expensive, time consuming and impractical to survey very large sections of a population. Surveys just collect the opinions of a section of the population. This part of the population is called a sample.



Source: Wikimedia Commons

To conduct an effective survey or interview students need to undertake preparation to design structured, but straight-forward questions that address their research topic. It is also important to consider the type of data that is needed to ensure that the question provides what is needed.

### INTERVIEWS

Interviews are important because they can provide a lot of general information about the topic, and can also provide direction for future research. Ensure that you know about the interest or expertise of the person you are interviewing. This should help to make your questions relevant and ensure that you get information useful to your research.

Try to ask a few general, open-ended questions that enable the interviewee to talk openly. If the person doesn't respond, a few probing or specific questions might be required. If you miss something the interviewee says or if you want to clarify something, you can always ask something more specific.

Try to complete a few interviews before you design your survey.

### Who might you interview?

- Local councillor
- Council employee
- Local business owner
- Community group

### Before the interview

Research the person you are interviewing – What are their interests/areas of expertise?

Ask a few questions by email beforehand to give you an idea of the types of questions you might ask in person.

Pre-arrange a meeting time. Don't just expect someone to be able to meet when it suits you.

Have a draft set of questions ready to ask the interviewee (but be flexible if the interview leads you in a slightly different direction).

### After the interview

- Send a thank you in a follow up email.
- Transcribe your notes while they are still fresh in your mind.

### Ethical research practices

If you are going to use audio or video to record your interview, be sure to ask permission first. The interviewee may not want to be recorded in which case you will just have to write notes.

The views of those being questioned should not be influenced or confused by confusing questions or the views of the interviewer. Ensure that your questions are open ended and avoid leading questions.

### SURVEYS

Surveys are a useful tool to canvas the opinions and feelings of a group of people. They can be used to determine levels of community involvement in relation to an issue, and to see how much they like or dislike or

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are affected by something. Surveys are usually made up of a range of different question types. Examples of question types include multiple choice questions, ranking questions, dichotomous questions (e.g. yes or no), rating scales (e.g. 1 to 5 stars), likert scales (e.g. strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree), or open-ended questions. Most of these question types make data analysis quite easy because they can be numerically presented and represented in graphs and tables. Open-ended questions tend to require more time and attention to analyse.

## Before the survey

Design your survey in a way to simplify data collection and data entry. If you are going to do the survey manually on paper, then you will also need to manually enter it into a database later. It is much easier to set up a Survey Monkey or Google Form to collect your data.

Include a paragraph describing what it is you are investigating.

Test your questionnaire on a small group of people before conducting your survey. Change any questions that the test group found confusing.

## After the survey

After the survey period ends, close the survey and remove any links to it that you may have posted online. This will help to ensure that the results are not affected by anything that happens outside of the survey period.

## Who might you survey?

- Local residents
- Neighbours
- Business people

## Ethical research practices

If you choose to use a Google form or Survey Monkey to record your survey results, be mindful of the type of data you are collecting. People may not feel comfortable attaching their name to the survey results, or providing personal information such as income, date of birth, etc. Consider whether you really need the information that you are asking about. It may also be helpful if you assure participants that the data will be de-personalised, and that you will be deleting the data after it has been analysed. Confidentiality is the key, don't ask for names on the survey.

## GeoCareers

### Meet a Geographer – Working indoors



**Adam Terrill**  
**Associate Town Planner**  
**Tract Consultants**

#### Work description

Adam undertakes strategic planning studies looking at the best locations and implications of new houses, shops, roads, train stations and parks. This involves site inspections, regular meetings, working with allied professions such as architects and engineers, preparing plans and reports and advocating proposals at VCAT or Planning Panels.

#### Future career options

The issues town planners deal with everyday are becoming more important and topical in everyone's lives. Increasingly, town planners are well placed to manage the big issues of the 21st century, such as climate change and housing affordability.



Find out about other GeoCareers –  
[geocareers.net.au](http://geocareers.net.au)

The GeoCareers website is an initiative of the Australian Geography Teachers' Association (AGTA).