

CONTENT OVERVIEW

This unit describes methods related to conducting surveys. Particularly when populations are large, geographically-dispersed human populations, it would be nearly impossible to include everyone in a survey. So, one aspect of conducting a good survey is the **sampling design** – the method used to choose a **sample** that is representative of the **population**. Equally important are the design of the questions and interviewer training.

Convenience sampling and **voluntary sampling** are two methods for choosing a sample that may not produce a **representative sample**. In convenience sampling, a sample is chosen in a way that makes it easy to obtain. For example, the pollster could stand outside a grocery store on some weekday morning and interview people as they enter the store. That would be an easy way to get a sample, but the sample probably won't be representative of the opinions of the population – for one thing, most likely there will be more women in the sample than men, and the sample won't contain people who work weekdays 9 to 5. So the sample will be **biased** toward the views of women who are not working weekday mornings. Voluntary sampling is equally hazardous. A television show might ask people to call or text in their responses. Generally people who feel strongly about a topic are more likely to volunteer.

Using random sampling techniques as part of the sampling plan produces samples that are more likely to be representative of the population. In a **simple random sample**, every person in the population has an equal chance of being chosen for the sample. However, for large populations, a simple random sample can be difficult to conduct. Here are two new concepts of sample design: **multistage samples** and **stratified samples**. For a two-stage sampling process, a sample of clusters is first selected and then random samples within each cluster are chosen. For a stratified sampling process, two or more strata are defined and then random samples are taken from each stratum.

Questionnaire design concerns the wording of questions and the overall order and length of the questionnaire. In terms of wording, consider the following:

- Don't use long words when a shorter word would mean the same thing.
- Stay clear of words that might be unfamiliar to respondents.
- Be sure that questions are neutral and do not lead the respondent in a particular direction.
- Keep sentences relatively short and simple.

- Avoid asking two questions in one – for example, the question “Have you argued with your friends or parents this month?” is really two questions in one.
- Be specific and avoid terms that are vague. For example, words such as “often” or “sometimes” should be replaced by specific terminology such as “every day” or “once a week.”
- Finally, interviewers need to be trained not to show their own opinions and not to suggest answers, but to encourage people to respond. In addition, the gender or race of an interviewer needs to be taken into account. For example, people may give different answers about racial issues depending on the race of the interviewer.