

Tool 31-1. Advantages and Disadvantages of Data Collection Methods

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages
Written Questionnaires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Somewhat fast and easy to administer and calculate results • Can be anonymous. If anonymous, individuals feel free to express their true individual feelings; increases honesty • Low cost • Variety of formats • Easily quantified 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bad reputation as sole tool for measuring reactions • May lack accuracy as individuals hurry to complete it • Questionable rate of return • Requires specific directions • Must be jargon free • Responders determine actual return time
Phone Surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saves the travel expense associated with interviews • Enables the ability to ask probing questions • Once contacted, provides immediate response • Makes a personal contact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals are difficult to reach by phone • Must develop protocol • Interviewer must be trained • Respondent bias, saying what he or she thinks the interviewer wants to hear • Body language not seen • Respondent can become impatient
Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permits individualized give and take • Flexible • Interviewers can follow up with questions and thereby probe for information • Trained interviewers improve quality of information • Protocol ensures consistency in format 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Costs, travel expense for field interviews • Can be time consuming • Must have trained interviewers • Labor intensive • Face-to-face format may create fear and result in biased information
Focus Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enables face-to-face discussion and interaction of all trainees • Fast • Low cost • Permits group members to obtain ideas from each other • Protocol ensures consistency in format • Good qualitative responses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face-to-face discussions allow individuals to dominate the discussion, creating false conclusions that are not representative of a group • Limited in the quantity of information that can be obtained • May be hard to arrange • Hard to summarize and interpret information • Labor intensive • Must have trained leader
Tests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be written or oral • Provide written documentation • Reinforces content • Easy to score <ul style="list-style-type: none"> —Multiple formats —True or false —Multiple choice —Matching —Completion —Listing —Essay 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to write • People fear tests • Must be part of the course design • People fear test results will become known to others and used inappropriately
Observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be nonthreatening • Checklist provides consistency • Good measure of change in behavior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must develop a checklist • Can be obtrusive • May get biased results • Observer must be trained • Can be threatening

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages
Performance Test	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reliable • Job related • Objective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes time • Costly • Simulations or instruments are difficult to construct
Extant Data or Client/Company Performance Records	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accepted by client • Objective • Measurable • Can determine dollar value • Organization is tracking the data • Reliable • Job related 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not be in a usable form • Internal political issues • Access to data • May need to interpret the data • May not be tracked according to your timeline for evaluation