St. Michael's
Inspired Care.
Inspiring Science.

Survey Administration Options

Thanks to advancements in technology over the past two decades, today there are a significant number of survey administration options to choose from. The varieties of ways one can categorize these options make the researcher's task of selecting a survey administration option seem complicated. However, all the main options available can be broken down into three main choices:
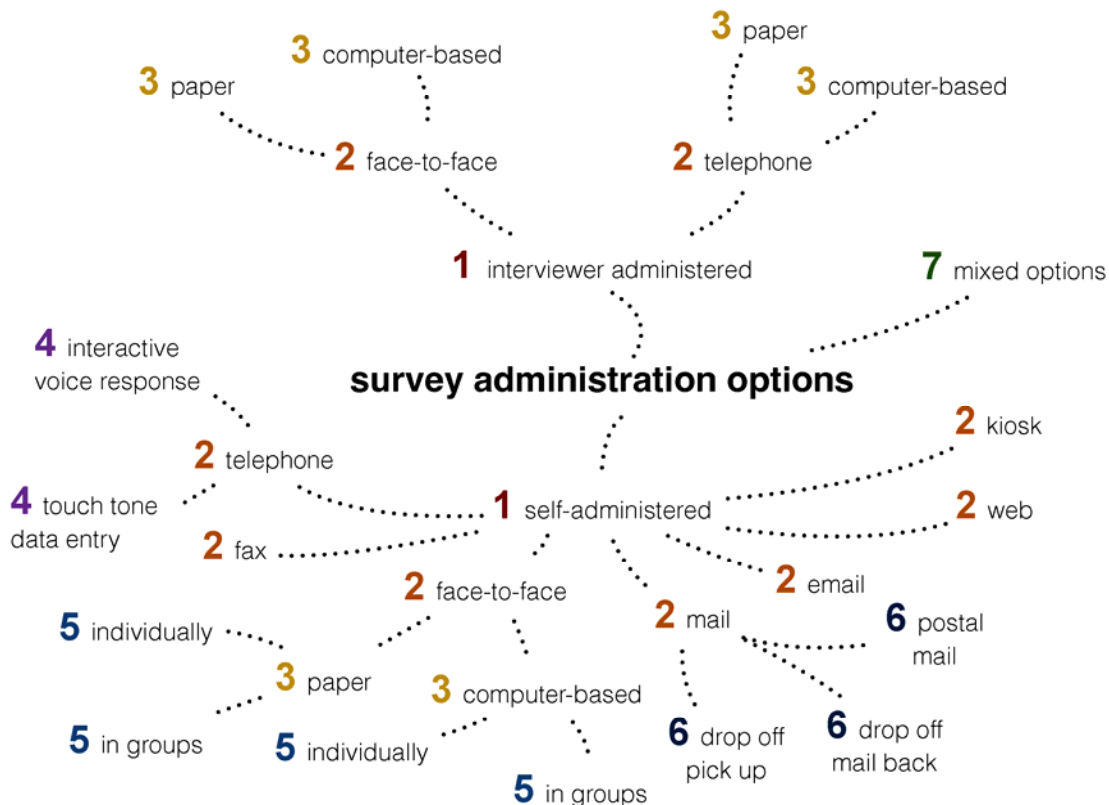
1. Interviewer administered versus self-administered surveys
2. Face-to-face, telephone, mail, fax, kiosk, email or web surveys
3. Computer-based or paper surveys

In addition to these choices, there are a few other survey administration options for particular scenarios:

4. Individual versus group surveys
5. Interactive voice response or touch tone data entry surveys
6. Postal mail, drop off mail back, or drop off pick up surveys

Finally, it is possible to combine administration options in order to optimize effort and resources:

7. Mixed options surveys

HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT SURVEY ADMINISTRATION OPTION FOR YOUR RESEARCH PROJECT?

1. Interviewer administered versus self-administered surveys

Advantages of interviewer administered surveys:

- Tends to increase overall data quality
- More suitable when administering complicated questions
- Allows for probing and clarification
- Allows for verification of identity
- Allows rapport building (tends to increase willingness to participate and follow-up)
- More accessible to low literacy and low cognitive skills populations

Advantages of self-administered surveys:

- More affordable (doesn't require interviewers and research facilities)
- Doesn't require interviewer training
- Allows for multiple respondents to answer the survey at the same time
- Suitable for the administration of sensitive questions
- Allows the incorporation of visual clues
- Allows participants to retrieve and check information

2. Computer-based versus paper surveys

Advantages of computer-based surveys:

- Tends to increase overall data quality
- Allows automatic skip patterns
- Allows automatic validity checks
- Allows automatic answer codes
- Allows interactive visual aids
- Allows real time analysis feedback
- Avoids data entry errors and costs
- Allows multi-location studies to centralize data management

Advantages of paper surveys:

- Doesn't require programming, software testing or computer skills (saves time and funds during start-up)
- It is not dependent on internet connection nor equipment availability
- Can be utilized as a back-up option to computer-based surveys

3. Face-to-face, telephone, mail, fax, kiosk, email, or web surveys

Advantages of face-to-face surveys:

- More suitable when administering complicated questions

- Facilitates rapport building (tends to increase willingness to participate and follow-up)
- Allows venue sampling
- Doesn't require web applications, telephone stations or fax machines.

Advantages of telephone surveys:

- More affordable than face-to-face
- Allows random digit dialing (RDD)
- Allows automated recording
- Allows multi-location studies to centralize the coordination of the interview process
- Accessible to visual and mobility impaired respondents

Advantages of mail surveys

- More affordable than face-to-face
- Allows for recruitment based on postal code and location

Advantages of fax surveys:

- More affordable than face-to-face
- Faster than regular mail

Advantages of kiosk surveys:

- In some cases, more affordable than face-to-face, telephone, fax and regular mail (kiosk cost and sample size should be considered)
- Allows venue sampling

Advantages of email and web surveys:

- More affordable than face-to-face, telephone, fax and regular mail
- Faster than regular mail

CRICH Survey Research Unit – Providing high quality and efficient research services to the health and social sciences research community

We can help you determine the types of services that are right for your project. Contact us for data collection options, rates and availability.

Contact information:
http://sru.crich.ca
SRU@smh.ca

CRICH
Centre for Research on Inner City Health
Survey Research Unit