

POLI 344

Methods of Political Research

SESSION 5: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION AND LIBRARY METHOD

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FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

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A focus group discussion (FGD) is a good way to gather together people from similar backgrounds or experiences to discuss a specific topic of interest. The group of participants is guided by a moderator (or group facilitator) who introduces topics for discussion and helps the group to participate in a lively and natural discussion amongst themselves.

The strength of FGD relies on allowing the participants to agree or disagree with each other so that it provides an insight into how a group thinks

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

about an issue, about the range of opinion and ideas, and the inconsistencies and variation that exists in a particular community in terms of beliefs and their experiences and practices.

FGDs can be used to explore the meanings of survey findings that cannot be explained statistically, the range of opinions/views on a topic of interest and to collect a wide variety of local terms. In bridging research and policy, FGD can be useful in providing an insight into different opinions among different parties involved



FGDs

in the change process, thus enabling the process to be managed more smoothly. It is also a good method to employ prior to designing questionnaires.

Outline of the Process

FGD sessions need to be prepared carefully through identifying the main objective(s) of the meeting, developing key questions, developing an agenda, and planning how to record the session. The next step is to identify and invite suitable discussion participants; the ideal number is between six and eight.

FGDs

The crucial element of FGD is the facilitation. Some important points to bear in mind in facilitating FGDs are to ensure even participation, careful wording of the key questions, maintaining a neutral attitude and appearance, and summarizing the session to reflect the opinions evenly and fairly. A detailed report should be prepared after the session is finished. Any observations during the session should be noted and included in the report.



FGDs

FGDs can also be done online. This is particularly useful for overcoming the barrier of distance. While discussion is constrained, the written format can help with reporting on the discussion.



Library Research Method

The Library Research Method

One of the major methods that researchers use to collect data is the library method. Researchers find it indispensable as the need to know what data already exist for the use of researchers. This section looks at the library sources available to the researcher.

The following steps outline a simple and effective strategy for finding information for a research paper and documenting the sources you find. Depending on

Library Research Method

your topic and your familiarity with the library, you may need to rearrange or recycle these steps.

Stage 1: [Identify and Develop Your Topic](#)

State your topic as a question. For example, if you are interested in finding out about use of alcoholic beverages by college students, you might pose the question, "What effect does use of alcoholic beverages have on the health of college students?" Identify the main concepts or keywords in your question.



Library Research Method

Stage 2: [Find Background Information](#)

Look up your keywords in the indexes to subject encyclopedias. Read articles in these encyclopedias to set the context for your research. Note any relevant items in the bibliographies at the end of the encyclopedia articles. Additional background information may be found in your lecture notes, textbooks, and reserve readings.



Library Research Method

Stage 3: [Use Catalogs to find books and Media](#)

Use guided keyword searching to find materials by topic or subject. Print or write down the citation (author, title, etc.) and the location information (call number and library). Note the circulation status. When you pull the book from the shelf, scan the bibliography for additional sources. Watch for book-length bibliographies and annual reviews on your subject;

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they list citations to hundreds of books and articles in one subject area. Check the standard subject subheading "Bibliographies," or titles beginning with Annual Review of topics in Political Science.

Stage 4: [Use Indexes to find periodical Articles](#)

Use periodical indexes and abstracts to find citations to articles. The indexes and abstracts may be in print or computer-based formats or both. Choose the indexes and format best suited to your particular topic; ask at the reference desk if you need help figuring out which

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index and format will be best. You can find periodical articles by the article author, title, or keyword by using the periodical indexes in the University of Ghana [Library home page](#). If the full text is not linked in the index you are using, write down the citation from the index and search for the title of the periodical in the University of Ghana Library catalog.

Stage 5: [Find Internet resources](#)

Use [search engines](#). Firefox, Gmail, Yahoo, Hotmail, etc. can all be used to check the [bibliography or research guide](#) usually created by librarians.

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Stage 6: [Evaluate what you find](#)

See [how to critically analyze information sources](#) and [distinguishing scholarly from non-scholarly periodicals: A checklist of criteria](#) for suggestions on evaluating the authority and quality of the books and articles you located. If you have found too many or too few sources, you may need to narrow or broaden your topic. Check with a reference librarian or your tutor.

Library Research Method

Stage 7: Cite what you find using a standard reference format

Give credit where credit is due; cite your sources. Citing or documenting the sources used in your research serves two purposes, it gives proper credit to the authors of the materials used, and it allows those who are reading your work to duplicate your research and locate the sources that you have listed as references.

Knowingly representing the work of others as your own is plagiarism.



Library Research Method

Use one of the styles listed below or another style approved by your tutor. Handouts summarizing the APA and MLA styles are available.

Available online:

[RefWorks](#) is a web-based program that allows you to easily collect, manage, and organize bibliographic references by interfacing with databases. RefWorks also interfaces directly with Word, making it easy to import references and incorporate them into your writing, properly formatted according to the style of your choice.



Activity

Go on the internet (Google Scholar) to search for one article on writing Political Science papers.



Library Research Method

Other Uses of Available Data

There are two types of available data sources that are used by researchers. These involve the use of statistical records

mass communication media

Use of Statistical Records

These records refer to socio economic characteristics or attributes of individuals or groups. These include

Library Research Method

Census reports e.g. the Ghana national population census of 1970, 1984, 1994 and 2010. The census report will have information on sex/gender balance, age, family size, occupation/ unemployment etc.

District, Municipal and Metropolitan assemblies may provide data on wages, productivity etc

Health statistics: this will provide information on the birth and birth rates, common diseases etc.

Library Research Method

Voluntary organizations also provide information on membership, the type of people in the organization and their activities.

Various institutions like schools, hospitals service agencies human resource departments in Ministries, corporations etc are sources of data.

Statistical records have the following advantages:

Such information (data) is collected periodically and this makes it possible to establish trends over time.

Library Research Method

Information gathering does not require the cooperation of the individuals about whom the information is being sought.

The data is usually collected in the ordinary course of events and therefore the measurement procedure is likely to reveal the investigator's purpose. Furthermore it is less expensive.

Uses of Statistical Records

They may be used at other points in the research process i.e. to supplement the main method of data collection.

Library Research Method

They are helpful in selecting cases with specified characteristics for intensive study

It may be used to cross check information specifically for the purposes of a given investigation or research

It may be used as an indicator of more generally accepted concepts.

Disadvantages

There is the problem of definition of terms: Usually the definitions of categories used in available statistical records frequently do not coincide with those used in social science research.

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It poses a problem for the social scientist on how appropriate those categories are for his purpose.

The methods used in collecting the data in the statistical records may be inadequate because methodological errors may lead to serious inaccuracies in the researcher's data.

Using data that have been collected over many years may be inadequate for present conditions



Mass Communication

Mass Communication

Every literate society produces a variety of materials intended to inform, entertain and persuade the people of that society. Mass communication materials are usually in the form of literary productions, newspapers, magazines, journals, motion pictures, radio TV etc.

Uses

They allow the researcher to deal with historical events as well as current events in society.

Mass Communication

- They reflect broad aspects of the social climate in which the materials were produced and through that the researcher can find general attitudes, folkways and the mores of that society by reading the materials.
- They are also used to throw light on some aspects of the culture of a given group in the society.
- They can be used to identify the propaganda techniques or to describe the appeals of political leaders to their followers.



Mass Communication

- The technique for the analysis of materials from mass communication is called content analysis. It is a research technique for the objective, systematic and qualitative description of the manifest contents of mass communication.



TELEPHONE SURVEY

The telephone survey involves the use of the telephone directory as the sampling frame for the data collection. People on the directory are randomly interviewed on the issue for which data is needed. It is not recommended for countries whose telephone directory is poorly developed. Personal documents like autobiographies, letters, diaries, certain types of school lessons and prize essays are sources of useful data.



Summary

Similarly mass communication media are useful sources of data for the researcher. We have also learned about library research methods. We have learned how to use the library catalogs [to find books and other media](#), use indexes to find scholarly articles and use the internet to search for research material.



THANK YOU

