

## Guidelines for a Successful Survey

Critical thinking skills can help you write effective survey questions and put together effective questionnaires. For example:

- *Clear* and *precise* thinking helps you write questions that are easy to understand.
- *Reflective* thinking helps you write questions that provide *accurate* data directly *relevant* to your problem.
- *Objective* and *consistent* thinking helps you treat different points of view with fairness.
- *Logical* thinking helps you put together a questionnaire that does not confuse respondents.
- Being *persistent* helps ensure that you collect enough data to solve your problem.
- Being *reflective* helps you keep an open mind and revise questions when needed.

Administering a survey effectively requires some special knowledge and skills. Here are some guidelines that can help you collect valuable data:

- **Identify a population.** A *population* is all members of the group of people from whom you want to collect facts and opinions. For example, all seventh grade students in your school make up a population. Any group of people can make up a population. How you identify the population for your survey depends on your purpose. You need to determine the group of people who would be affected by the problem you have defined. In most cases, that group would be the population you would want to survey.
- **Select a representative sample.** A *sample* is the members of your population that you will ask to complete your questionnaire. If your population is small and accessible, you can sample the whole group. For example, you could ask all seventh-grade students in your school to complete your questionnaire. However, you could not realistically ask all seventh-grade students in the world to take your survey. Furthermore, surveying all the seventh-graders in the whole world would be unnecessary, provided that your sample is sufficiently representative of the population. The most representative samples are chosen randomly from a population. If you do not have access to all members of a population, you can use a sample that is as representative as possible.
- **Prepare questionnaires.** Determine the best method for delivering your questionnaire to respondents and collecting the completed surveys. If you are handing out or mailing a printed questionnaire, make sure you have enough copies for your sample. If you are e-mailing your questionnaire, make sure you have the capability to send and receive responses. If you are putting the questionnaire online, make sure you can inform your sample of the Web address and collect and access the data they provide.
- **Pilot test.** You should always pilot test your questionnaire if possible. Give your questionnaire to one or two respondents. In this test run, you can instruct respondents to tell you if any of the questions are confusing. A pilot test gives you a chance to make sure you get the data you want before you survey your sample.

- ***Deliver the survey.*** Provide your sample with enough information to complete and return your questionnaire as conveniently as possible. Make sure respondents know the purpose of your research. How well respondents answer your questions depends in part on how well you inform them about your purpose. Make sure respondents are comfortable enough to give accurate answers.
- ***Collect the data.*** Make sure you collect as many completed questionnaires from your sample as possible. When printed questionnaires are collected, keep them together in a safe place. When you conduct an e-mail or online survey, be sure to make a backup copy of the data.