



Qualitative E-Interview Tips

Recruiting Participants for Online Interviews

Locating the right people and recruiting them to participate in a study is a challenge for any researcher. If the researcher posts a recruitment message or advertisement on a public website, networking community, or e-mail list, a deluge of unwanted responses may result. On the other hand, if the researcher sends unsolicited e-mail requests to potential participants, the message may be perceived as spam.



Online researchers are often concerned about the identities of participants recruited online. At the same time, participants may be similarly concerned about the credibility of the researcher. The first set of questions the researcher needs to answer begin with: how can I communicate to potential participants that I am a legitimate, ethical researcher? Why should someone trust me to protect their identities and the information they might share? If potential participants search for me online, will they find a digital identity that confirms that I am a respectable and trustworthy researcher?

The second set of questions the researcher needs to answer center on: why should someone take time from a busy life to participate in my study? What about my goals will draw in potential participants and motivate them to contribute? Is the participant committed to finding solutions to the problems the study will address? Would the participants welcome an opportunity to tell their stories? Did I make it easy to participate? Did I offer an appealing incentive?

Once you have answered those questions, you can create a recruitment statement. The language of a recruitment message to post online is necessarily different from the formal statements you may be accustomed to writing for your committee, institutional review or grant



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application. Keep in mind that a recruitment message to post online will need to be short, and attract the reader's attention in the first few words.

It is important to have a recruitment statement so all posts or requests use consistent language to describe the study and convey the same message to potential participants. Because online posts will reach a very general audience, a very specific recruitment message should be used to better reach the target population. The researcher can direct the call to potential participants or ask for nominations of research participants. The statement can be summarized when a briefer post is needed, or in the case of a heterogeneous or extreme case sample, the researcher may highlight some elements of the statement to appeal to diverse audiences.

Researchers can create an online space where a longer recruitment message can be posted, such as a website, blog, or virtual space in immersive environments. Links to the message can then be posted in briefer announcements in relevant online spaces or communications with colleagues.

In addition to text descriptions of the call for participation, the researcher can create a video clip or audio excerpt of the recruitment message to increase interest and make more personal contact with site visitors. Links to the researcher's academic institution or other publications can impart a sense of integrity and authenticity of the study. In the site, provide means for contact, such as a link to an e-mail or messaging address. (Avoid using the researcher's primary or personal e-mail address to avoid excessive spam or privacy violations for the researcher. Free e-mail services are ideal for this purpose.)

The researcher can share a recruitment statement or link to recruitment site through e-mail discussion lists. The best practice is to approach the moderator of the list or discussion group directly to get permission for the recruitment posting and respect any norms or guidelines. If relevant to the topics of the list or community, the researcher can initiate a discussion about the nature and importance of the study and include a link to the recruitment site.

Another way to get the word out is by using the networking possibilities of the digital milieu: the researcher can offer a webinar or host an online event or discussion on issues



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related to the study. The researcher creates an opportunity to interact with individuals who are interested in the subject of inquiry. Those who attend may be potential participants or people who can nominate participants. A recruitment notice can be posted and/or discussed as part of the event.

A recruitment statement explains the researcher's approaches and expectations on the matters discussed in Chapter 7 of [Qualitative Online Interviews](#). A succinct but comprehensive recruitment statement should include these elements:

- **Purpose of the study:** Research questions, reasons for conducting the study, and the researcher's goals for the results should be outlined. Is the researcher conducting dissertation or thesis research? If so, note institution as well as the name of the dissertation supervisor. Such academic purposes assure potential participants of some level of faculty oversight of the study. Alternatively, is the researcher developing new theories or models that may address a pressing social problem? Assessing needs for programs or services? Creating the basis for a larger survey research project? What about the purpose might appeal to participants?
- **Expectations:** What time commitment is needed? What technical skills are needed? Will the participant be expected to share personal or sensitive information, pictures or images of self or others? Also, discuss how you will use the results. How will you disseminate the findings?
- **Ethics and privacy:** Offer assurances about ethical conduct of the study, confidentiality, protection of privacy, and private data storage. Indicate appropriate ethics, institutional, or other review board approvals granted for the study. If the study anticipates an international sample, indicate how you will address multiple sets of requirements.



All research needs to demonstrate the trustworthiness of the researcher.

(Bulpitt & Martin, 2010)



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Bulpitt, H., & Martin, P. J. (2010). Who am I and what am I doing? Becoming a qualitative research interviewer. *Nurse Researcher*, 17(3).



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