



Qualitative E-Interview Tips

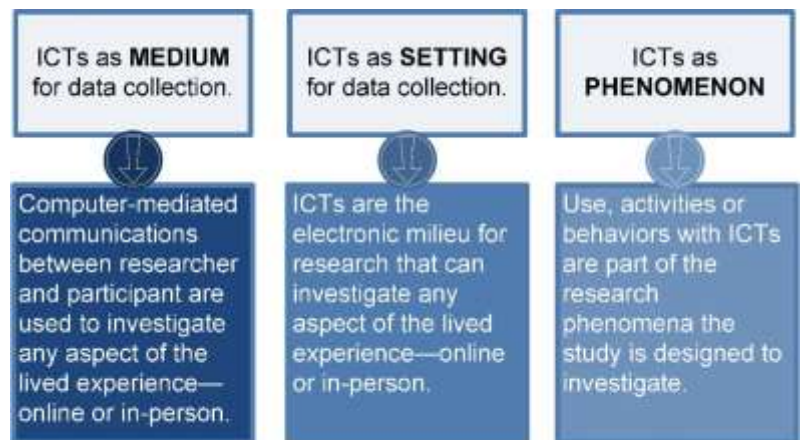
Sampling Strategies for Online Qualitative Studies

The first steps of any sampling plan is a clear and cohesive research design. The researcher should have a clear set of intentions for the research problem and purpose. When the study is to be conducted online, it is important to drill down into the ways technology relates to the research purpose in order to determine the appropriate ways to sample and recruit participants.

As discussed in Chapter 3 of [Qualitative Online Interviews](#), researchers who conduct online interviews to collect data fall into two broad categories:

- Those who choose to collect qualitative data online to study phenomena that occur in the face-to-face world, or
- Those who choose to collect qualitative data online to study ways people use the Internet or technology-mediated behaviors, culture, practices, attitudes, or experiences.

The first type of researcher may choose to conduct interviews online because the participants are in different geographic locations, or because it is a convenient to interact online with busy participants. For this researcher, the technology is simply a medium of communication, and is not important to building an understanding of the phenomenon. This researcher needs to consider what information and communications technologies (ICTs) participants can access, and have comfort and skills to use in an interview.



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The second type of researcher may choose to conduct interviews or observations using the same kinds of ICTs the participants use, indeed, the technology may be intrinsic to the research phenomenon. For example, the researcher who is interested in ways instructors offer webinars may choose to conduct interviews on a web conferencing platform commonly used for webinars. For this researcher the ICT is both setting and phenomenon.

Consider a hypothetical study designed to understand new parents gain help and support when they transition back into the workplace.

- *Researcher A* is interested in any support systems new parents use, including local friends, family members or even services that provide house cleaning or deliver meals. Before deciding to conduct interviews online with this sample, Researcher A would determine the extent to which new parents who meet the study criteria have access to online communications through computers or mobile devices outside of work. Researcher A might use as a sampling frame a child care center's list of new parents, and after getting permission, visit a new parent orientation or post notices to the center's physical or online bulletin board to recruit participants.
- *Researcher B* is interested in the ways new parents use the Internet to find support as they make the transition back into full-time employment. Researcher B may first initiate a preliminary stage of research to identify social networking sites, blogs, email lists or other online settings used by new working parents. After locating one or more sites with robust exchange, the researcher contacts the moderator, owner or host to gain permission to use the group as a sample frame. With permission, the researcher cooperates with norms of the site to develop and implement a suitable recruitment strategy.

The empirical purpose of these studies is similar, yet the sampling strategies they use and the ways to describe those strategies in the sampling plan may vary greatly. All sampling plans will need to address any issues related to the methodology and research paradigm.



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In addition, online researchers should address the following questions in order to determine what sampling approach is appropriate:

- To what extent does one or more ICT serve as the medium, setting or phenomenon (Salmons, 2015)? How do choices about the ICTs used for medium, setting and/or phenomenon relate to the choices for sampling criteria?
- Will the sampling plan lean more towards homogenous or heterogeneous sampling criteria? How important is it to the study that *all* participants have access to the same ICTs? For example, do all participants need webcams or mobile devices? Or is it possible that some interviews could be conducted face-to-face and some online?
- How will the researcher assess whether the target population has access to the ICTs the researchers intends to use, and the capability and willingness to use it as a research participant?
- If the target population does not commonly have access to online communications (outside of work), might a community center or senior center, library or school be willing to partner with the researcher? If so, the school or center could also serve as a sample frame and their clientele could be recruited to participate in interviews that take place using the center's computers.

For more on research design, sampling and recruiting see Chapters 3 and 7 in [Qualitative Online Interviews!](#)

Salmons, J. (2015). *Qualitative online interviews*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.



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