



checklist

- The internet can help you collect data through surveys, interviews and/or ethnographic approaches. However, first and foremost, be sure that participants in your study are happy with sharing their views via an online medium.
- You will need to pay particular attention to the development of trust between yourself and participants, with transparency, feedback and encouragement key to putting participants at ease.
- Remember that your sample will most likely be biased given that lower income earners are less likely to be online. Be wary of this fact when making inferences from your data.
- Be sure to consider existing ethical guidelines for social research and how they relate to informed consent when collecting data online.



project

Imagine that you have been commissioned to carry out an online study exploring attitudes to alternative medicine amongst university students. You can decide whether the study will be a qualitative piece of research using interviews or a quantitative survey using a questionnaire. Develop a detailed design for the research project, addressing the following issues:

- How will you identify a suitable sample of students?
- What kinds of bias might this sample involve and how might this affect the generalisability of results?
- How will you identify students and recruit them for interviews or questionnaires? Is there anyone whose permission you should seek? (Note: it may be important to clear use of institutional mailing lists with someone in authority first.)
- Would you use email interviews or would you conduct interviews in real time using instant messaging or video call? Would you send surveys in the body of an email or as an attachment, or would you place the survey on a website? Would you advertise the study on a social networking site?
- How will you frame your initial contact with potential research subjects? What would your approach be to informed consent? How, practically speaking, would you expect people to signal their consent?
- What response rates might you expect? What means could you use to encourage response?