

Lab Mission and Overview

Welcome to the Social and Behavioral Science Research Lab (SBRL). This lab is designed to introduce you, the student, to the professional research environment. To this end, work in the lab will introduce students to the Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) system. This lab does a mixture of paid and unpaid work for various governmental and non-governmental organizations. Thus, while this lab is intended for instructional purposes, it is vital that a professional environment is maintained.

Caller's Ethical Responsibility

Because work in this lab involves the study of human participants, it is vital that callers strictly adhere to the ethical standards laid out by the American Association for Public Opinion Research as well as those spelled out by Winthrop University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) which approves the work done by this lab. Your chief responsibilities are:

- 1.) To never mislead or lie to a respondent prior to or during the survey research process
- 2.) You must gain informed consent from the respondent before proceeding to the survey
- 3.) You must never falsify information when conducting the survey (see the calling lab honor code for further information)

These three responsibilities are taken very seriously as the credibility of the lab within the community depends upon our adherence to these ethical standards. Any violation could result in serious consequences.

Informed Consent

On the most basic level, informed consent requires that you, the interviewer, give the respondent all the necessary information that he/she requires in order to make an educated decision about participating in the survey.

This information is provided in your introduction to the respondent in the interview process. This also helps in establishing a rapport with the respondent which is valuable to ensure an effective interview. This information includes:

- 1.) Your name
- 2.) The location from where you are calling, i.e. Winthrop University
- 3.) The purpose of the survey
- 4.) The time it will take to complete the survey
- 5.) A statement that informs the respondent that all their information will be confidential.

All this information will be provided to you prior to the start of the survey process, as well as being available at each calling station in the form of a written introduction. It is important that you review this information prior to your first time in the lab so that you are familiar with the requirements for informed consent.

The Winthrop University CATI system

In order to ensure accurate recording of data, the lab managers will handle setting up the caller stations prior to your shift. However there are still a few important procedures that are performed once the lab manager has set up your station.

- 1.) You will need to enter your interviewer code. This allows the CATI system to track the number of completions you have made in your time at the lab.
- 2.) Put on the headset.
- 3.) Click the **ON/OFF** button on the headset.
- 4.) Click the **Autodial** option in the final disposition page.
- 5.) Click **Talk** on the **dialog box** on the screen.
- 6.) If someone answers your call and agrees to take the interview, click on the **Interview** button. This will take you to the survey tool and you will simply click on the answer the caller gives and click on the **next** button to go on to the next question.
- 7.) **Hanging up:** Press the **ON/OFF button** on the phone then click **Disconnect** on the computer screen.
- 8.) **Enter Final Disposition** according to the response from the respondent (Completion, Call Back, Busy, etc.).

First Time Caller Guide

During your first day in the lab, it is important that you familiarize yourself with the actual use of the CATI system. You will be responsible for knowing the lab procedures prior to your first day. To ensure this, you will be given some training in a classroom setting and a brief tour of the lab and the CATI system. The lab supervisors will also assist you if you have any problems.

On your first day you will need to:

- 1.) Familiarize yourself with the computer and the phone head set
- 2.) Read any notes and announcements posted at your calling station
- 3.) Review the calling instructions posted on the monitor of the calling station
- 4.) Familiarize yourself with the sample introduction so that you know the nature of the survey in order to answer any questions the respondent may have prior to administering the survey
- 5.) Familiarize yourself with the actual survey tool so that you will have an idea of how it flows and the approximate pacing of the survey

- Mistakes do unfortunately occur but most will not lead to any serious problem as long as they are quickly corrected. If you think you have made a mistake or notice a mistake in the survey itself, simply inform the lab manager and they will be able to help you fix the situation. Do **not** hesitate to ask them for help as it is their job to assist with any problems.
- If there is a problem with the CATI system, leave it on the screen and ask the supervisor for help. **Let them take care of all technical problems.**
- If at any time you feel confused during the interview process do not be afraid to tell the respondent that “this is my first day, so if you could be patient, let me check with my supervisor.” Most people understand that problems do occur and more likely than not they will be patient with you and let you resolve the problem without hanging up.
- Confidence is the key for obtaining completions. In order to be confident you need to be informed about the details of the survey, because the respondent will most likely be able to tell if you know what you are talking about and be far more comfortable taking the survey with you. Be able to clearly explain to them why they should take the survey.
- Be sure to enter in the survey data correctly; take your time if you need to in order to minimize entry errors.
- For some helpful tips on effective calling read the sections on making introductions, overcoming hesitation, and effective caller tips. These should give you some excellent tools to make your time in the lab much easier for you.
- Within the survey you will need to have excellent listening skills and the ability to probe effectively. These skills will develop as you gain more experience within the lab environment so do not be discouraged if you have troubles on your first day.

Making Your Introduction

Overcoming Respondent Hesitation

Many times the respondent you call will not be immediately interested in taking this survey. This is your opportunity for you to convince them to take the survey. Remember, the longer they spend on the phone with you, the more likely they are to take the survey. Also, if the respondent is asking you questions about the survey, it is a good sign that they are interested and just need to be reassured so answer their questions with confidence. Confidence is the key to overcoming hesitation. What follows are a few common objections to not taking the survey and some suggestions on how to overcome these problems.

1. ***The respondent tells you that they do not have enough time.*** If this is the case, the best thing to do is to try to schedule a call back time. To do this, do not just ask if you can call them back. Instead tell them that you would be happy to call them back at a convenient time.
2. ***Sometimes the respondent will ask you what the point of the survey is.*** This question comes up if the respondent thinks that the survey is a waste of time or serves no purpose. Your response to this question largely depends upon the purpose of the survey. In many cases the survey helps the City of Rock Hill determine how to appropriate resources, improve city services, or offer feedback on quality of life issues in the city. This should give the respondent the sense that these surveys matter. This also shows why it is important for you to be familiar with the purpose of the survey prior to administering it.
3. ***Respondents may also ask about what kinds of question you will ask them.*** This requires you to be familiar with the survey so you can come up with some sample questions. For instance, if the survey is concerned with future road construction in Rock Hill, a good sample question would be, “How do you travel to work?” This question is a good one to ask because it is not intrusive like questions on income and race, but gives the respondent a good idea as to what to expect.
4. ***On occasion the respondent may tell you that they do not know enough to take the survey.*** In these cases tell them that it is ok because all we are looking for is their opinions and the questions we ask do not have a right or wrong response.
5. ***They may also show hesitation about giving out personal information.*** In these cases you can reassure them about the confidentiality of the survey and also tell them that they do not have to answer any question they do not feel comfortable answering.
6. ***Many respondents will ask you how you have gotten their number.*** They may also add that they are on the national do-not-call list. In this case, it is important that you tell them that their number was randomly generated by the computer. On questions concerning the do-not-call list, all surveys run by academic institutions such as Winthrop University are exempt by law. If you explain this to the caller it should help alleviate their concerns.
7. ***A respondent may also ask you why you couldn't call someone else.*** To answer this, simply tell the respondent that their number was randomly generated and that for the survey to be scientific you need their opinion.
8. ***Other ways to overcome respondent hesitation would be to emphasize the importance of the survey.*** You can tell them that they are one of only a few

members of the community participating in this survey and as a result the information they provide is particularly valuable. This sort of information given to the respondent may help them overcome their hesitation.

Dealing with Refusals and Call Coding

Refusals

We understand that refusals are a normal part of the calling process. They will happen so do not be discouraged. Your rate of refusals will go down as you gain experience and confidence, so do not be terribly concerned with refusals. If you do get a refusal or a hang up, simply code the response as a refusal so that the number is not called back again.

If you get an opportunity to make a response to the respondent's refusal, the best thing to do is reassure them about the confidentiality of the survey, the importance of the survey, and the importance of their opinion. Sometimes this may not work because of the reluctance of the respondent; however, it is worth a try as most interviewees, even those who give refusals, can be persuaded to participate.

Call Coding

As you make calls in the lab, one of the main menus you will see is the call coding menu. What follows is a list of codes that you will mark once you have completed a call during your shift:

- **1 Complete:** If you complete an interview with a respondent, you would mark that number as complete, this is the only time that you would use this code
- **2 Schedule Callback:** If a respondent cannot take the survey when you call but they would like to take it at a later time, click on this code to schedule a time when the respondent is able to take the survey
- **3 Refused:** If the respondent refuses to take the survey or hangs up on you before you finish your introduction, mark the call as refused
- **4 Terminated Early:** If the respondent suddenly hangs up with you in the middle of the survey or for any reason decides to stop midway through, that call must be marked as terminated early
- **5 government/business:** If you call and a business or government office, simply apologize for the inconvenience and hang up, then record it as government/business
- **6 Answering Machine:** If you call and hear an answering machine, do not leave a message, simply hang up and record it as an answering machine
- **7 Screened Out:** do not worry about this code, you will never use it
- **8 Over Quota:** do not worry about this code, you will never use it
- **9 Language/Deaf:** If you have a respondent that you are not able to understand because of a heavy accent or because they are deaf, try to find

another person in the household to interview or apologize for the inconvenience and hang up, code the call as language/deaf

- **10 nonworking number:** If you call a number that is not working or a number that is not assigned to any person, simply code the number as nonworking
- **11 Busy:** if you get a busy signal when you call, simply mark the call as busy. Also, if you mess up with call coding for some reason simply mark that call as busy so that the system cycles to that number as soon as possible
- **12 No Answer:** if you call but the phone continues to ring with no person or machine picking up, usually after 8 or so rings, code the call as no answer

Survey Procedures

Once the respondent has agreed to the survey there are some important procedures that you need to be aware of and follow in order to maintain the scientific integrity of this study.

First and foremost, **do not deviate from the script** while administering the survey. Every survey has to be given to every respondent in the same way, this means that you cannot add or subtract words, alter sentences or do anything else to the question as it is stated on your screen. If there are deviations from the script, it could destroy the scientific accuracy of the survey.

Question Clarification

Another essential procedure is that of clarification. Sometimes respondents will be confused by a question that is asked in the survey and will ask you to rephrase it or offer them some sort of clarification so that they can answer the question. It is important that their concern be addressed so that you can obtain an answer for the survey question.

- 1) Often the easiest means of clarifying the respondent's concern is to repeat the question, slowing down your delivery.
- 2) Another solution to this problem is to repeat the question emphasizing key words within the question that cue the respondent towards an answer.
- 3) A third method is to add the words "in general" or something along these lines to the front of the question to help them center their opinion.

If these three methods fail simply ask the respondent to try to make sense of the question to the best of their ability. If they still fail to understand the question and cannot answer it, then mark "I don't know/no response" on the survey and move onto the next question. It is important that you do not say anything more than this because to do so would change

the question which distorts the scientific nature of the question. To recap the process of clarification:

- 1.) Repeat the question at a slower pace.
- 2.) Repeat the question emphasizing the key words of the question.
- 3.) Use terms like “In general. . .” when offering help to the respondent.
- 4.) If the respondent is still unclear and cannot give a response, click “I don’t know/no response.”

Probing Procedures

Probing in the lab is an essential skill for the caller because it allows the respondent to find the answer that is closest to their true opinion. Probing for answers will be necessary in a variety of situations: in a series of questions that have the same response set (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree); when the respondent does not give an answer that matches the response set; or when the respondent answers a set of contradictory answers that you catch.

In the first case, probing answers during a series of questions with the same response set, often what happens is that the respondent begins giving the same answer to each of the questions in the series. This can happen for a variety of reasons though often it happens because the line of questioning can be tedious for the respondent and they want to finish up the survey quickly. For example if a respondent answers “agree” for three questions in a row,” it would be time to begin probing this respondent. Perhaps the best way is to do this is by breaking the pattern of question and answer by asking “are you sure?” or some similar probing question after the respondent gives their answer. This will make them reconsider their response. It is not a bad idea to introduce this question every once in a while to make sure the respondent is giving his true opinion rather than simply giving a meaningless response.

Sometimes, during the survey, respondents will give responses that do not match any of the available responses on your survey. For instance, say the following question is asked: “Affirmative action denies equal opportunity for whites” with the following responses: “strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree.” Questions like these can result in the respondent giving a response that does not correspond to one of these answers such as “yes.”. Because you cannot assume to know what the respondent’s answer to this, you will have to probe. In this case the simplest solution would be to politely repeat the list of available answers to the respondent and have them choose. This will, more than likely, result in the question being answered in the form suitable for the survey. If they continue, or cannot give you a suitable response, it would be best to mark their opinion on the question as “I don’t know/no response” and move on.

The third situation, that of inconsistent answers, is perhaps the least likely to occur within a survey. This is a particularly tricky situation to deal with because at times, it is part of the experiment to test the consistency of respondents. Thus the only time this is likely to be a problem is when assessing the physical state or demographic situation of the

respondent. For instance, if you ask a respondent how he gets to work, and they respond with public transportation in Rock Hill, one may want to probe their response.

The Effective Caller

Effective Calling Tips

Encouragement and Neutral Responses

The key for sustaining the interview is to offer your respondent continual support and encouragement. However, it is important to remember to use only **neutral** language that is still positive and upbeat.

In order to maintain this upbeat tone throughout the survey it is important to continually thank the respondent. This builds a rapport with the respondent and also lets them know how important they are to the overall survey. The result of this encouragement is that the respondent is less likely to become impatient and end the survey or rush through it giving answers that do not truly reflect their own opinions.

It is appropriate to also thank or encourage the respondent after they respond to a question. In this situation it is important to keep your words neutral. For instance, after a response it would be appropriate to say “thanks” or “O.K.” It is not appropriate to say “excellent” or “very good.” This can lead the respondent into thinking there is a right answer to these questions and therefore trying to please you, the caller, with the answers which means that their statistically viable opinion is not actually being recorded.

A common situation that can arise under these circumstances is that as the survey reaches its middle and end the respondent becomes impatient with the survey because it seems to be taking longer than it should. In this case it is best to tell them, if it is true, that they are “doing very good and the survey is almost done.” Another option would be to say, “We appreciate your patience, and it will be only a few more minutes.”

In most cases it will not be necessary to continually encourage the respondent which allows for the script to be read straight through. This would be the ideal situation because the survey script is being followed in the purest sense.

Caller Trouble-Shooting Guide

This section is an overview of problems one may come across while making calls. These problems may never come up, but in order to be an effective caller it is important to know what to do if one of these situations occur.

Hearing Problems

There are two common scenarios when it comes to listening problems. The first is the respondent's inability to hear you read questions, and the second is that you, the caller, cannot hear the respondent's answer.

The first problem is a bit tricky to solve. The immediate solution to the problem is to make sure the volume adjustment on the phone is all the way up. The next thing one can do is try to speak louder. Now it is important to note that while there are sound absorbing partitions, you shouldn't speak so loudly so that other callers are not disrupted. If this does not work, one can try to have the respondent move to a quiet room in the house. If all else fails, one can just try to be patient and try your best to communicate.

The second hearing problem, when you the caller cannot hear the respondent, is normally solved easily. The first thing that can be done is to ensure the volume is turned up all the way on the phone. The second solution to the problem is to ensure the dialogue box on the computer monitor is up and click "call" which automatically turns the volume up on the phone. If these two solutions do not work, you can politely ask the respondent to speak up when answering the questions. Again, if these three solutions fail, the last thing left to do is be patient and try to finish the survey as best you can.

Accent and Language Problems

In some very rare occasions you may encounter a respondent who has a heavy accent or does not speak English at a sufficient level. If you cannot understand the heavy accent of the respondent, you may want to have the respondent speak slowly in order to catch his words. Fortunately most of the responses are simple responses and this alone should overcome this language barrier. Another solution that may address this problem is to have another caller or the lab manager administer the survey if they are better able to understand the respondent.

If the respondent has problems understanding or speaking English and there is no one else to take the survey, the only thing that can be done is to thank the respondent for his/her time and code the appropriate response on the caller screen.

Computer Problems and Power Failure

Computer problems and power failures are rare occurrences in the lab. The most typical problem that does occur is that the CATI software drops the completed survey. If you think this has occurred, speak to the lab supervisor and explain to them the situation.

If the computer has an unexpected malfunction or the power goes out and you are still on the phone with the respondent, politely explain the situation to the respondent. The next thing to do is to tell the respondent that you will try to call back as soon as the problem is fixed.

Respondent Drifts Away from the Survey

From time to time you may encounter respondents who want to chat about the question and/or engage you in conversation. This is problematic because the respondent will be more likely to give responses that you want to hear rather than responses that reflect their own opinion. It is important that you bring the respondent back to the survey so that you can complete it with the minimal amount of script deviance. There is a subtlety that is required here too because you, as the caller, cannot sound bored with the digressions. If you do, you could lose the rapport with the caller causing a possible hang-up from the respondent. What follows are a few suggested lines to get the caller to focus on the survey:

- 1.) “How interesting! But now I want to ask you. . .”
- 2.) “I don’t want to keep you detained for too long, so here is the next question. . .”
- 3.) “There are some questions about that topic later on, so if you could just hold your thoughts we will be there soon.”

The key is to be respectful and polite and the respondent will more than likely finish the survey with few problems.

Respondent Asks for Additional Information

Sometimes a respondent can become interested in a topic that a question addresses and then ask for more information on that subject. Often we will not provide you with any additional information on the subjects in the survey, so the best thing to do is to try to direct them back to the survey. Some questions will also ask respondents to answer an empirical question with a correct answer. It is important for you to avoid being an expert or specialist on the subject and just get back to the survey. It is often best to play dumb and not tell them the right answer because the survey is about what they think and what they know, and not an educational process. Here are some example phrases to get the respondent back on track:

- 1.) “To be honest, I am not really sure.”
- 2.) “They do not give us the answers to these surveys.”
- 3.) “I don’t know.”
- 4.) “These questions don’t have a right or wrong answer; we just want your opinions on these questions.”

Reporting Problem Situations

In very rare circumstances you may encounter a request for information that needs to be followed up. Examples of these sorts of questions include:

- 1.) “Where should I go to find out if I have. . .?”
- 2.) “What can I do about. . .?”
- 3.) “How can I find out about receiving Medicare/Medicaid/Food stamps?”

As part of your ethical obligations and the confidentiality agreement you entered into with your respondent, you cannot handle this problem yourself. What you must do is record the Date of the request, the Telephone number that appears on the CATI screen, and the information that has been requested by the respondent. With this information recorded, give it to your lab supervisor who will take care of this situation.

If you have a case of child abuse reported to you, follow the same procedure as above, only this time record more information about the conversation with as many details as possible so that this situation can be taken care of. Remember, this is a rare occurrence that will likely never happen but this information is here to make you aware of the procedures if such a case ever does happen.

Problematic Respondents

On occasion you may encounter an abusive caller. If you do encounter this situation it is important to know that you do not have to tolerate this type of behavior. All you have to do is hang up the phone. The respondent will not be able to contact you back.

Also, if the respondent insists on talking to a supervisor, please give them Dr. Scott Huffmon's office number (323-4669). This will rarely come up, but if it does it is important for you to have this number available to you so you can respond promptly.

SBRL Rules and Procedures

Calling Room Rules

- 1.) No food or drinks are allowed in the calling room under any circumstances.
- 2.) Interviewers should not do any work not connected directly to the lab during their shifts.
- 3.) Personal conversations in the lab should be kept to a minimum. If conversation does occur, it should be kept as low as possible so as to not disturb callers. If conversation does occur, it should be kept outside the lab to maintain a quiet work space.
- 4.) At the end of the shift, you need to straighten up your work station but leave the caller screen up and let the lab supervisor shut down the CATI program to ensure no information is lost.
- 5.) Do not make non-survey calls of any kind on the caller station phones.
- 6.) NO CELL PHONES. If you do have them in the room, keep them silent and do not make or receive any calls in the lab; if you have to, take it outside.
- 7.) Do not use the internet in the lab at your work stations.
- 8.) Those working at nights and on the weekends are not to leave the doors of Bancroft open as this is a security risk. If you need to get into the building and the doors are locked, call the lab and the lab supervisor will let you in.
- 9.) Do not open the doors to Bancroft to anyone you do not know.
- 10.) If you have any problems with your fellow callers bring this to the attention of the lab supervisor so this problem can be resolved in a timely fashion. If you have a

problem with your immediate lab supervisor try to resolve the problem with him/her and if this does not work, talk to the lab faculty or your faculty supervisor.

Caller Shifts

Much of this information is dependent upon instructions from your supervisor or instructor. Listed here are some general guidelines about shift procedures in order to keep the lab running smoothly.

- Caller shifts will be made available to you on a weekly basis through the lab supervisor. You want to sign up for as many shifts as possible at the beginning of the survey cycle so that you can ensure yourself a fresh sample and enough time to finish your completions.
- It is important to understand that when you sign up for a shift, it is your obligation to be there. If for any reason you cannot show up, you need to inform the lab supervisor as soon as possible. You also need to try to reschedule your shift so that you can make your required calls.
- If you are sick, it is recommended that you do not come into the lab because it is a small and poorly ventilated space. This means that it is very likely other people may become sick.
- Try not to be late; this is problematic because late entrance into the lab can be a distraction to other callers. The best solution to this problem is to just be on time, though if you know you will be running late, it would be best to call in so that the lab manager can be aware of the situation.
- If for any reason we have to shut down the lab in the middle of a survey cycle you will be informed as soon as possible so as to minimize the level of inconvenience.
- Communication is vital for the running of this lab, so if you have any problems, please call the lab supervisor so we can be informed of situations and adjust accordingly.

Important Contact Numbers

What follows are some spaces to write down vital contact numbers and e-mail addresses so that communication can be maintained between you and the supervisors.

Social and Behavioral Science Lab Honor Code

Because this is a school run lab, you are expected to adhere to the Winthrop University Honor Code. We take infractions of this code seriously. We absolutely will not tolerate cheating, especially the falsification of data.

The lab has many security measures in place to prevent and detect falsified data entry. All calls placed in the lab can be monitored by the lab manager; moreover, the computer maintains a complete calling log so that your actions can be reviewed. The bottom line is that any sort of data misrepresentation will be caught.

If anyone is caught falsifying data or cheating in any other way during their time in the lab, you will be prosecuted to the fullest extent allowed by Winthrop University.

Final Comments

We thank you in advance for your hard work during the calling cycle and the preparatory work prior to the survey. Without your work and dedication these surveys would not be possible. Because you represent Winthrop University and the department under which this survey is conducted, we demand and expect the best from you. Again, thank you for your time.