

# Developing Your Skills

## FORMING A HYPOTHESIS

A hypothesis is a possible answer or assumption that guides your search for an answer to a problem. Below you will find the criteria for a good hypothesis, plus some examples of both good and poor ones. After you have read these, test your understanding by completing the questions.

### Examples of Good Hypotheses on the Topic *The Impact of TV on Children*

- ◆ Unsupervised television-watching has a harmful effect on children's attitudes toward violence and sex.
- ◆ Television has a positive educational impact on young children.

### Examples of Poor Hypotheses on the Topic *The Impact of TV on Children*

- ◆ Children watch hours of violence on TV.
- ◆ Is television making children into consumers for big business?
- ◆ TV has an interesting impact on young children everywhere.

### Criteria of a Good Hypothesis

- ◆ It must be a clear answer to the problem, not a statement of the topic or evidence.
- ◆ It must be an answer that summarizes a definite view and that is supported by arguments and evidence.

### Why These Hypotheses Are Poor

- ◆ This is evidence, not an answer.
- ◆ This is a problem or question, not an answer or hypothesis for the topic.
- ◆ This is an unclear answer and cannot be proven.

1. Examine the following statements and, using the criteria above, decide whether they are good or poor hypotheses on the topic *Does religion as a socializing agent have a significant impact on society today?*
  - a) In Canada today there are many different religions, such as Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Judaism, that influence us.
  - b) Religion must have some impact; otherwise, where would teens get their morals?
2. Create good hypotheses for each of the following social science questions:
  - a) Which agent of socialization influences teens the most today?
  - b) What is the impact of the mass media on our attitudes toward minority groups?
  - c) Do TV advertisements give children a false sense of reality?
  - d) In our school, is the clash between teen and traditional family cultures an important cause of teen identity crisis?
3. In small groups, evaluate your hypotheses using the criteria for good hypotheses.

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## DESIGNING A SURVEY OR QUESTIONNAIRE

Social scientists use surveys or questionnaires to get information about what people feel, know, or think about current issues or topics. Surveys and questionnaires are particularly useful for getting information from a large number of people, since they are easier to do than long, detailed interviews. This exercise will help you design, conduct, analyze, and summarize a survey or questionnaire.

### Steps in Designing a Survey or Questionnaire

1. Be clear about the reasons for your survey. Is the purpose to test a hypothesis, such as: *Do teens feel pressured by schools to adopt certain roles, norms, and values?* Or do you just want people's views on a topic, such as: *Canadian attitudes toward marriage.*
2. Use your purpose to develop relevant questions. Most questions in a survey are closed questions with limited, often multiple-choice or range-of-opinion (from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*) answers. This makes it easier both for the people responding to the survey and for you when analyzing the answers. You may need to include factual questions about the respondents' age, sex, or cultural background if you want to see if different types of respondents have different views on a topic.
3. Test your survey out on a friend to ensure that the questions are clear, inoffensive, and unbiased, and that the survey is not too long or complicated.
4. Decide who you will give the survey or questionnaire to. How large a sample will you need? Do you need a random sample (chosen by chance) to ensure the sample is not too narrow, or do you need people from specific groups to answer your purpose?

### Steps in Conducting a Survey or Questionnaire

1. Explain the purpose of the survey or have it written at the top of the questionnaire.
2. Do not comment on respondents' answers, to avoid influencing them.
3. Keep a separate record of the results of the survey/questionnaire for each respondent.
4. Always thank the people surveyed for their time and effort.

### Analyzing and Summarizing a Survey or Questionnaire

Use a blank survey or questionnaire to record the number of responses for each choice for each question. Convert the responses to a percentage for ease in expressing the data. Check to see if different types of respondents (for example, male/female) give significantly different answers to questions. Then use the data to draw some conclusions about your topic or hypothesis. Your summary should clearly state the purpose, survey sample size and type, and your conclusions or results. Include a copy of the questionnaire with your summary.

Do a survey or questionnaire on one of the following:

1. Are there common Canadian family roles, norms, or values?
2. What are Canadian attitudes toward the institution of marriage?
3. Do teens feel pressured by schools to adopt certain roles, norms, or values?
4. Which theory on the purpose of education is more accepted: functionalist or conflict?
5. How different would you say adult and teen attitudes are toward one of the following institutions?
  - a) the military
  - b) law enforcement
  - c) businesses
  - d) religions
  - e) government

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## CONDUCTING AN INTERVIEW

Social scientists use interviews to do first-hand research about current topics or topics that have not been well researched in the past. Interviews are a good way to get details about a few people's experiences, behaviours, attitudes, or ideas. This activity will help you learn how to design, conduct, and write up an interview.

### Steps in Designing an Interview

- Clarify the purpose or reason for your interview. Are you trying to test a hypothesis such as, Dating practices vary widely among different cultures in Canada? Or do you just want views on a topic such as, Teen attitudes toward sexual relations?
- Decide whether you will use closed questions that have fixed answers, either yes/no or some limited choice. These can help you focus quickly on basic information. Or you may need to use open questions that allow the interviewee to answer in his or her own words, giving you a more detailed response. Use your purpose to draw up a series of questions that will get you the information you want on the topic. Type the final questions for ease of readability and to create a professional appearance.
- Test your questions on a friend. Make sure the questions are clear, concise, direct, well organized, and not offensive or biased.
- Decide who you will question. Ensure that the range of your respondents is wide enough to ensure that the respondents are willing and able to answer your questions and give you sufficient information.
- Practise asking questions and recording answers to avoid awkwardness and delays.

### Steps in Conducting an Interview

- Arrange an appointment for the interview in advance and explain the purpose and the format of the interview. Be polite and friendly. Remember that they are helping you.
- If possible use a tape recorder, but ask for the interviewee's permission first. Always take notes.

P.12

- Do not comment on the answers to closed questions since you do not want to influence the answers. With open questions you may want to encourage the person or use follow-up questions to get more details or to focus the interview.
- Always thank the person you interviewed for his or her time and effort.

### **Writing Up an Interview**

Check with your teacher as to the expected written results. You may be required to use the evidence and quotes from your interview or a series of interviews to write an essay, short report, or magazine article. Or you may be asked to simply provide a descriptive summary of the highlights of your interview. Show the person you interviewed your written results to confirm that the information is accurate.

1. Choose one of the following to do a series of short interviews:
  - a) Interview several high school students from different cultures to find out if dating practices vary widely among different cultural groups.
  - b) Interview adults to find out what they think are the three most significant adult rites of passage in their lives so far.
  - c) Interview people from different age groups and cultures to compare their attitudes toward death and dying.
2. Prepare a presentation of your interview for the class. You can use any format; for example,
  - ◆ video
  - ◆ re-enactment
  - ◆ oral presentation
  - ◆ computer-based presentation