How to choose your research method(s) Basic guide

- **Interviews** or **focus groups** involve talking to people to find out their views and experiences. Interviews involve talking to one, or maybe two, people at once. Focus groups usually have 6 - 10 people in them. These two **qualitative** methods:
  ✅ are great for answering 'why?' and 'how?' questions and getting to the
      bottom of complex issues
  ✅ involve collecting detailed information from a fairly small number of people
  ✅ produce rich, insightful information by, for example, using open questions
  ❌ can require quite a lot of time for data collection (e.g. to carry out interviews or
      facilitate focus groups and write up your notes) so are not the best method for
      getting data from a lot of people
  ❌ can result in a lot of data that can be time consuming to categorise and analyse.

- **Surveys and questionnaires** are a **quantitative** method that involves asking people to fill in a paper or online questionnaire. They:
  ✅ are great for answering 'what?' questions and getting factual data
  ✅ can be completed anonymously, so are good for investigating sensitive   subjects that people may not want to talk about
  ✅ offer a relatively quick way of gathering data from a lot of people at once
  ✅ provide data that is fairly easy to categorise and analyse
   - use mainly closed questions, with responses as scales

  ❌ aren't good for getting answers to open questions, as people may not want to write much
  ❌ are of limited help in understanding more complex issues
  ❌ aren't suitable for getting information from very young children.

- **Observation** involves looking at and recording how people behave in particular situations in a structured way. This method:

✅ is great for finding out people's behaviour - what they actually do, rather than what they say they do requires that you make sure that people have given their consent to being observed

❌ needs to be approached with an awareness that people being observed may behave differently because they are being observed

❌ is not appropriate for investigating people's views

- **Pictures, photos and videos** are also data sources, which you can analyse. They:

  ✅ are great for getting data from younger children or people who cannot tell you
  their views

  - require the photographer to ensure that people don't mind being captured on film

  ❌ can be tricky to analyse unless people verbally explain what their drawings show or represent

- **Literature reviews** involve searching for and synthesising other people's research. They:

  ✅ are great for finding out about topics that other researchers have looked at

  ✅ reveal where there are gaps in the research literature

  ✅ help you to contextualize your own research, in line with best practice

  ✅ make sure that you're not repeating research that someone else has already done

  ❌ are not helpful if there is little available or recent research into your chosen topic.