

# Conducting “People Research”

Conducting “people research” allows students to get specific information and opinions from individuals using prepared questions. Interviews are a focused person-to-person conversation while questionnaires can be used to ask questions of a wider audience. Both methods of research require careful consideration of what the student already knows and what he or she needs to know more about in order to create clear, focused questions.

**Time:** 30 minutes

**Materials:**

- chart paper and markers, or interactive whiteboard
- prompt cards (*Who?, Where?, When?, Why?, How?, Which?, If? What do I already know?*)
- file cards or large sticky notes (optional)

**Grouping:** whole class and partners

### Procedure:

1. Using an interactive whiteboard or chart paper, record a sample inquiry question (e.g., “What are the threats to nature in our community?”).

2. Explain to students that they are going to learn how to conduct “people research” as a way to gather information for their inquiry.

*By asking people questions, we can gather information for our inquiry. It is important to carefully consider who we want to question, decide if we want to conduct an interview or use a questionnaire, and then create clear and focused questions. Later, we look at the information gathered and evaluate our findings.*

3. **Selecting and Contacting:**

Tell students that in order to decide if they want to conduct an interview or use a questionnaire they need to ask themselves some questions:

- What do I already know about the topic?
- What do I want to find out?
- Can I get this information by speaking with one knowledgeable person?
- Would it be more helpful to get information or opinions from a wide variety of people?

Model by thinking aloud. For example, if the inquiry question is, “What are the threats to nature in our community?” discuss whom you might want to talk to.

*Let’s think about who we might talk to. If we want to get detailed information, interviewing an expert such as someone from the conservation authority or a local ‘green’ business owner would be a good idea. If we want to get information or opinions from a wide variety of people, such as the people in our community, then a questionnaire might be a better choice since it would take a long time to speak to everyone individually.*

4. **Research and Preparation:** Model, by thinking aloud, how you prepare good questions. Remind students that we are looking for questions that require a more detailed response and not just a “yes” or “no” answer. **Brainstorm** with students a couple of ideas about what is threatening nature in our community and form one question together. Record the question on the chart.

*How is traffic pollution affecting nature in our community? I know this question can't be answered with a simple “yes” or “no.” I'll write this question on the chart.*
5. Display the question prompts (*Who?, Where?, When?, Why?, How?, Which?, If? What do I already know?*), and ask pairs of students to come up with another question and record it on a file card or large sticky note. Collect the questions and choose a few more to record, explaining the reasons for your choices.

*I added these questions because they ask for detailed information, “Are pesticides good or bad for the environment? How can we ensure that pesticides are used safely, if they are used in our community?”*
6. Remind students that they will need a series of questions to ask. Explain that it is easier for the person responding if the questions flow in a logical order and are focused on only one idea at a time.
7. Provide time for students to practise asking the formatted questions as they conduct a brief interview with a partner to ensure that the questions are clear and focused. If the questions are grouped into a questionnaire, students could give their questionnaire to another set of students to try out.

**Teaching Tip:** If you are doing a whole-class research inquiry, small groups or pairs of students can prepare for and conduct an interview—each with a different person; or create and hand out a questionnaire related to the inquiry.