

MRS Advanced Certificate in Market & Social Research Practice

Preparing for the Exam: Section 2 Q1- Answer Guide & Sample Answers

This answer guide was developed to provide support for examiners in marking the **Section 2 Question 1**. It is not intended as a 'model answer' or a completely exhaustive list of all points which could be made. Instead, it summarises a range of points which candidates may be expected to include in answers.

The key to an effective answer is to provide information which is both relevant and clearly justified. If, when writing your practice answer, you have made points which are not included in this summary, don't worry. Examiners are briefed and trained to take into consideration all relevant points in their marking.

Similarly, don't worry if you have not included all the points mentioned in the answer guide. Again, the examiners will be looking for a range of points in which your rationale is clear. Credit will be given for all relevant points which you have made.

In Section 2 there is a recommended time of 100 minutes and answers account for two-thirds of the total marks.

Candidates are required to answer any TWO questions from the six, giving a full answer to each of the questions you choose.

Section 2

QUESTION 1: ANSWER GUIDE

1. A small charity needs to gather information to inform its next fund-raising campaign. A member of staff has suggested adding questions to an omnibus survey.
- a) Discuss the strengths and limitations of selecting an omnibus survey as opposed to other research methods that the charity could have used.
(Weighting: one-half of total)
- b) Taking into account the limitations which have been identified, what steps can a charity take to ensure that a suitable omnibus survey is selected? Give reasons for the suggestions you make.
(Weighting: one-half of total)

This question requires candidates to discuss the pros and cons of omnibus surveys, but in relation to a given context. Weaker answers may fail to take account of this context. At pass level, candidates are expected to identify a minimum of two strengths and two limitations, and relate these clearly to the context given in the question.

The strength of answers to Part 2 is largely dependent on the strength of the answer to Part 1. Candidates are expected to make clear links between the two parts. At pass level candidates should provide solutions which would deal adequately with the limitations. Stronger answers are likely to address a wider range of issues and to provide clear and convincing rationale for the solutions suggested.

Strengths	Limitations	Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Can be a cost effective option – voluntary sector has limited funds</i> • <i>Will get expert input for the formation of questions – may not be available otherwise</i> • <i>Can reach a wide audience – maybe wider than would be possible with other affordable options</i> • <i>Large nationally representative samples</i> • <i>Speed of turnaround</i> • <i>Can repeat exercise in one or more further waves to increase sample size</i> • <i>Can put new/additional questions onto a further wave</i> • <i>Reputation of omnibus supplier can add to credibility of information</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>May not adequately reach the correct target group for this charity</i> • <i>Depending on the size of the charity, it may still be an expensive option</i> • <i>Response rate may not be very high, depending on the demographics of the omnibus</i> • <i>Overall length of questionnaire might be limited</i> • <i>Other topics covered in the omnibus may have an impact on the response</i> • <i>May need to run on several waves to get sufficient number of respondents answering key/specific questions</i> • <i>May achieve less information than had hoped for</i> • <i>If telephone omnibus, stimulus material will not be shown</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>When selecting omnibus, check:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>the background of the study – have other relevant charities used it?</i> - <i>does the structure of the omnibus allow for a range of suitable question types?</i> - <i>typical response rates?</i> - <i>does the normal demographic of the response match the charity’s population of interest?</i> - <i>if expensive, can charity share costs with another, similar organisation?</i> • <i>Decide on whether a telephone, online or f2f omnibus would be most appropriate</i> • <i>Establish where questions would be positioned within the interview, and ask what other topics will be covered before these questions (although such information may not be forthcoming)</i> • <i>Establish timescales and costs of using another wave</i> • <i>If stimulus material is needed decide on whether a f2f or online approach offers appropriate solution</i>

Section 2 – Q1

Sample answer 1: This sample answer was awarded a mark in the FAIL band.

Question 1a

For a charity wishing to gather information to inform its next fundraising campaign, using space on an omnibus survey could be a suitable proposal.

An omnibus survey would allow the charity to put a small number of questions on a survey, perhaps a CATI survey, alongside those of other clients. The charity would save costs of setting up an ad-hoc survey as the survey set up is regular and consistent. They would be able to find an omnibus which targets participants about general 'social views' so there would be little issue with targeting the right market.

There will be drawbacks, perhaps most notably in the area of sensitivity. There could be an issue with participants being asked for their opinions on a less sensitive area for another client and not being comfortable with giving their views on charity. This may affect the response rates for those questions.

In terms of the strengths and weaknesses in comparison to other methodologies, an ad-hoc survey could be better suited. An omnibus would mean that the charity has not control over the sample, whereas an ad-hoc survey would mean that a better sample design could be achieved – this depends on what the information is to be gathered.

An online ad hoc survey would be beneficial over the omnibus as it provides a certain amount of anonymity which may boost the response rate for a sensitive subject.

A drawback to the omnibus could be if the unit of analysis is both the individual and a company as omnibus are usually concerned with either one or the other. The charity should consider whether they need the 'whole' picture and also whether they wish to analyse variations across these units.

Question 1b

A suitable omnibus survey, first and foremost would need to target the correct type of market. Many omnibus surveys are business to business and so may not be suitable if the charity wishes the unit of analysis to be the individual. It may however be that they want to target businesses.

An appropriate type of omnibus may be one that is conducted by the social research department of a research agency. This would help to ensure that, the right key demographics for social research are obtained and the questions would be suited alongside those of similar natures.

Section 2 – Q1

Sample answer 2: This sample answer was awarded a mark in the MERIT band.

Question 1a

An omnibus survey is favourable to clients whose research needs are not sufficient for a full ad hoc study or if their budget is small. Omnibus surveys are versatile because clients can have only one question, or they can have 5-10 minute sections depending on availability.

The main advantages are that omnibus surveys are quite cheap in terms of cost per interview, and they are quick to set up, fieldwork is fast, and results are generally available the following week.

The disadvantage is that the research may lack depth and provide insufficient data. However, since we are dealing with a charity's fundraising plans, it seems likely that everyone interviewed would be suitable and so you could get a sample size of 1000 from one survey.

In this scenario, an omnibus survey could be a quick way to gauge levels of interest in the fundraising activity and may even identify the most popular idea. In this respect, the client could feasibly exclude qualitative research because the omnibus combines exploratory elements while quantifying them at the same time.

Other research methods may not give reliable results. For instance, if you conducted in-home interviews about respondents' attitudes to fund-raising, you run a high risk of biasing the data through so-called social desirability. Most people would claim that fund-raising is a good idea, and you would find skewed results at the positive end.

The same could be said for telephone interviewing, but with this approach you can take measures to reduce social desirability. You could make the questions very general about charity and fund-raising, and you could include introductions to questions which say that some people do not take part in fund-raising or donate to charity, thus making the respondents feel less guilty if giving a negative answer. Also, a brief section on the telephone is less intrusive than in-home interviewing.

Importantly for the client, there are three methodologies available for omnibus: web, telephone and face-to-face either at home or in a venue for self-completion. This leads onto the next answer.

Question 1b

In order to select the most suitable omnibus survey for the charity, the charity would probably need to have an idea about its target population and some suggestions about fund-raising schemes and events. This is important because survey length is restrictive, and so all questions must be well tailored to collect very specific data.

Depending on the nature of the questions, social desirability may come into play. If you ask outright, 'would you donate to our charity?' respondents would probably say yes. Of course no one would ask such a crass question, but it illustrates the point. If you want to ask about the importance of charity work, again you would get very positive answers, but it is not quite as confrontational.

In order to strike a balance, I would suggest using a self-completion approach either on the web or in a venue. You could ask questions and reduce the 'halo effect' because of anonymity. Both methodologies should also ensure the sample includes a suitable cross-section of the population (by using quotas).

If depth is an issue and if the budget permits (this is a charity and probably won't have a big budget) you could select two methodologies and ask different questions. It depends on how the results will be used. Since omnibus is exploratory and not descriptive, this should be acceptable. To reduce costs, you could arrange for the questions to be asked of every nth respondent.