

MRS Advanced Certificate in Market & Social Research Practice

Preparing for the Exam: Section 2 Q6- Answer Guide & Sample Answers

This answer guide was developed to provide support for examiners in marking the **Section 2 Question 6**. 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 6: ANSWER GUIDE

6. A government agency is conducting a nationwide research project to find out ways of increasing engagement in politics. You are the lead researcher for the qualitative phase of the project, working with a team of 3 colleagues. Each of you will be conducting 4 group discussions.
- a) Describe the steps you would take to ensure consistency of approach across the 16 groups. Give reasons for each of the steps you suggest.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

Candidates are expected to identify a minimum of two steps, with detailed rationale, to meet pass level. Candidates with more steps may provide more limited rationale. Stronger candidates may identify sequential steps which can be taken and will provide clear justification for their suggestions.

- *Review the research objectives: Ensure that there is shared understanding of the aims and the type of information required.*
- *Moderators to have early sight of/involvement in discussion guide development to ensure all are clear and comfortable with content and sequence.*
- *All moderators briefed at the same time to ensure all have sufficiently similar understanding.*
- *Review the discussion guide: Do all moderators agree on the aim and interpretation of the questions? Do all feel it can be covered in the time given for the discussion group?*
- *Discuss the approach and structure of tasks. How are groups going to be warmed up? What types of techniques are to be used (e.g. projective techniques)? What (if any) materials are to be used and how will they be used?*
- *Give approximate times to be spent on each section of the discussion to ensure consistency across groups.*
- *Ensure agreement on how data will be recorded. Also what data will be recorded – e.g. are you going to record non-verbal behaviour?*
- *Review the make-up of the groups (i.e. geographical spread, age groups etc): What similarities and differences are there? Can possible impacts on the data collection be anticipated?*
- *First group observed by other moderators and reviewed before continuing other groups?*
- *Arrange meeting/communication following the first round if possible to discuss and resolve any problematic issues and to do debrief of early findings and examine their impact.*

- b)** As the lead researcher, you are responsible for analysing the data and writing up the findings. Outline your approach to the analysis, giving reasons for the approach you take.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

Candidates are expected to identify a minimum of two suggestions, with detailed rationale, to meet pass level.

- *Think ahead to the analysis stage at the planning stage:*
 - *What type of information is being looked for and what information will client want? E.g. respondent permission needs to be given at the outset if client is going to watch videoed data/get attributable quotes.*
 - *How and when is the data going to be transcribed? What resources are going to be needed for transcription?*
 - *How much time is available for analysis? This will have an impact on the approach taken.*
 - *Ask all moderators to complete detailed debrief notes (use an agreed pro forma) at end of each group.*
 - *Ask all to outline main themes/issues/points arising in relation to objectives.*
 - *How will you analyse and distil the data? This may impact on resources needed.*
- *What is the data going to be used for?*
 - *Identify decisions to be taken on basis of the findings, and what outputs are expected. This will help guide the range and depth of analysis.*
- *Ensure that you and the other researchers keep detailed field logs, identifying themes or recurrent points.*
- *Before beginning main analysis, ensure data is organised in a way which makes it easy to handle, e.g. by group? By region? By question? By respondent type?*
- *Ensure that you are familiar with all of the data – review it all, making notes of themes and impressions to be tested later.*
- *Use topic guide and observed recurrent themes to generate a framework for analysis of the data.*
- *Identify recurrent themes using the most appropriate format (e.g. key words highlighted on hard copy or on screen; using software package).*
- *Identify recurrent themes and responses, and test for frequency, consistency and strength.*
- *Review data for emerging ideas – e.g. are there identifiable patterns between groups?*
- *Go back to outputs required in order to pull together findings appropriately.*

Section 2 – Q6

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

Question 6a

Each of the 16 groups should be managed in the same way. The questions to open and steer the discussions should be the same and the research heading each of the discussion groups should be aware of any strong personalities in their group which may lead to one person within the group dominating other quieter participants. There is also the factor that some participants may not be as open regarding certain political views as others within the group. So that the results of the discussions can be analysed later I would recommend that the discussion groups be tape recorded or video recorded. If there were to be the case the groups must give their permission for this to occur and be assured that any recordings made would only be used in the final analysis and would be subject to the Data Protection Act, i.e. people would not be identified in the report.

Question 6b

Each of the key topics for discussion would be listed and any comments expressed by more than one group would be identified and recorded also with a number to show how many people expressed that comment. As the data is qualitative rather than quantitative statistical investigation is not possible as qualitative data is more about peoples thoughts and feelings, so analysis would need to list any common thoughts and ideas while also rating any strong feelings expressed in the different topics of discussion. Thus I would list each of the discussion topics as a heading and write a section showing general views, common thoughts, strongly expressed opinions etc. underneath each title. At the end I would produce a summary.

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

Question 6a

Because qualitative research is often highly flexible and moderators differ in their individual style, it can be difficult to ensure consistency across the research; however steps can be taken to minimise discrepancies.

It is important to ensure discussion guide is thorough and well written. It should include the overall project objectives, along with the most important questions, and any relevant prompts. This will lead the moderators within the groups ensuring they cover all the important areas, and address the objectives.

In selecting moderators, those used should have adequate training, and a full understanding of the MRS Code of Conduct. This will ensure their moderation is of a good standard, and they behave ethically at all times.

Before the research begins a meeting should be organised between all of the moderators. Within this, the background and objectives should be conveyed, to ensure all approach the groups with the same objectives in mind. In addition this would be a good opportunity to go through the discussion guide and explain each area, to make sure all moderators share an understanding of what each part means, and any terminology, particularly relevant due to the political nature of the project.

For the first group, if possible all moderators should attend and view behind a mirror/through a video link (to minimise disruption). This ensures that any difficulties with the discussion guide, for example timing problems, can be solved with all the moderators present to ensure all apply the same solution.

Finally, it is advisable to have ongoing meetings throughout the fieldwork to feedback any issues, and arrive at shared solutions. This will also be an opportunity to feedback topline findings, and ensure all moderators are collecting data which addresses the research objectives.

Question 6b

In order to conduct good qualitative analysis, the first step is ensuring the data is collected accurately during the fieldwork. In this case, because groups are being used, it would be wise to video the groups themselves. Not only does this provide rich visual data in terms of non-verbal communication, but it also provides cues as to who is speaking, preventing confusion during analysis. In addition any mood boards, collages or other visuals must be photographed. By having these records, rather than relying on moderator notes, memory issues will not confound the analysis. This said, moderators should also note anything of particular interest.

These recordings will then be transcribed, preferably with notes as to body language and intonation. This will provide the richest source for the next stage of analysis, with no detail omitted, although there will be a cost implication for this expensive process.

Analysis will then involve coding themes within this data, leading to the emergence of

dominant themes. This will involve taking the contents of the dialogue within the groups themselves and interpreting in terms of various other factors: the intonation of the dialogue, the body language of the participant, the context of the discussion etc. It is important that whilst individual episodes of dialogue are coded for meaning and themes, they are interpreted in the wider context of the group. The moderators notes are particularly useful for this task.

These can then be discussed with the moderators to ensure they match with their impressions from the groups, and if not, work out why. This process ensures the data is accurately analysed, working up from the raw data, then checking it with the other sources. In addition, if possible any hypotheses should be checked against the data (transcriptions) by another objective researcher.

These themes should outline some of the ways in which the public can be encouraged to take an interest in politics. Each of these can be taken forward into the report, to provide an action plan of methods in which engagement can be increased. By providing a report which focuses on actions, it can be ensured that the research moves on to drive change.

These findings will be supplemented within the report with verbatim quotes from the transcripts. These will help to show evidence for the findings, and all rights to the research.