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Little Quick Fix: Write a Questionnaire

Helen Kara

London: Sage Publishing, 2019. 124pp. ISBN: 9781526467751

\$9.00 / £6.99

<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/write-a-questionnaire/book265899>



Little Quick Fix: Do Your Interviews

Helen Kara

London: Sage Publishing, 2019. 124pp. ISBN: 9781526467744

\$9.00 / £6.99

<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/do-your-interviews/book265898>

Reviews by Amanda Haste. Published in *The Independent Scholar* Vol. 6 (February 2020): pp. 83-4.

The Little Quick Fix series of books is designed to “provide quick but authoritative answers to the problems, hurdles and assessment points students face in the research course, project proposal or design.”⁵⁹ Designed to be read in an hour, they focus on the main issues which can faze students when faced with a mass of dense reading material – a boon in this Twitter-fed age of short attention spans.

Helen Kara’s two contributions to this series are on writing questionnaires and conducting interviews, topics which may seem simple enough but which involve important aspects the novice researcher may well overlook.

In *Little Quick Fix: Write a Questionnaire*, the sections outlined on the Contents page are phrased as questions, including: “How do I know I should use questionnaires in my research project”, “What kinds of questions should I use?”, and “How do I find people to fill in my questionnaires?” The next page elaborates on

these questions, with each section beginning with an encouraging “60-second summary” before presenting the nuts and bolts of constructing a questionnaire in a very informal, conversational style, much as one (and certainly this reviewer) would address a class. There is plenty of color, with pretty (and pretty random) pictures galore reminiscent of the graphics-heavy appearance of social media.

The questions are short and to the point, and the seven sections cover the questions students are likely to ask...or maybe daren’t ask for fear of looking stupid...or again don’t even think of asking. Each section ends with a “checkpoint” in various formats (gap-fill, checklist, spot-the-error, etc.) – repetitiveness is never an issue, despite the closely structured form of the Little Quick Fix books.

The final section, on preparing and processing the data collected by questionnaire, includes information on “preparing your data for analysis”, “dealing with

⁵⁹ <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/lqf>.

missing data” etc., and the book ends with a glossary....and an invitation to explore the next element in the research process – data analysis (handily supplied in the Little Quick Fix series).

Helen Kara’s second contribution to the series, *Little Quick Fix: Do Your Interviews*, is similarly structured: as the author herself says, she was writing to a series template in which she needed to “cover the same ground three ways – in under 25, 130 and 600 words – without being repetitive” and then had to “devise interactive exercises to reinforce and embed the points” she had made.⁶⁰

As with the book on questionnaires, this book on interviewing “speaks” conversationally, and goes on to introduce research terminology clearly: the first section introduces the concepts of structured/semi-structured/unstructured interviews producing rich/thin data, while the section on choosing interviewees introduces populations, sampling etc. As well as sections on the most effective types of questions in different contexts, this little book includes the important issue of care for the interviewees, including “dealing with distress”, and self-care for the interviewer. Indeed, the last page before the checklist for the last section of *Do Your Interviews* features the caption “Congratulations! You are ready to do your interviews” (complete with a picture of a luscious-looking celebratory slice of chocolate cake), tempered with an ersatz-handwritten note pledging that “I will follow the steps in this book with care for my interviewees, my research, and myself” (115), a statement that all ethnographers could usefully post above their desks.

All in all, I found these little books beautifully written, and chock-full of key information, dealt with in a jargon-free but never condescending way. They initiate a mature understanding of both the practical issues and the human factors at play in both questionnaires and interviewing, and end with a “What next?” section which makes it clear that this is only one stage in the process of building a set of research skills.

As an independent ethnographer who has stumbled through constructing questionnaires for my own research with no institutional support, I would very much have welcomed these resources as an introduction to the process. I would therefore recommend these to undergraduate students and, given the welcoming layout and the clear use of language, I would also recommend them to non-native-English speakers learning research skills in English.

Amanda Haste is a British musicologist and academic translator whose research interests include identity construction through music and language. She is a member of the Chartered Institute of Linguists (London, England) and teaches courses in Translation and in English for Specific Purposes as adjunct faculty at Aix-Marseille University, France. Her largely ethnographic research has been published in leading journals and in books by major editors such as Palgrave MacMillan, Taylor & Francis, and Routledge; she co-authored (with Prof. James Block, DePaul University) *Constructing Identity in an Age of Globalization (Paris: Ex Modio, 2015)*.

⁶⁰<https://helenkara.com/2018/10/17/little-quick-fixes-for-research>