



# Chapter 2



Observations



# Observations<sup>2,6</sup>

- Definition: Watching and recording key aspects in real-life settings for data collection. For example, you might conduct observations to:
  - Collect information about processes or situations.
  - Study interactions and behaviors.
  - Describe a physical environment.
  - Record characteristics of individuals or groups.
- You might also conduct observations to obtain complementary data to confirm or challenge perceptions gathered from other data collection methods.
- You might conduct observations when other data collection methods are not feasible.

## Guidelines for Observations

### When to Use Observations

You might conduct observations in the following situations:

- To collect information about processes or situations.
- To study interactions and behaviors in a naturalistic setting.
- To describe a physical environment.
- To record characteristics of individuals or groups.
- To confirm or challenge perceptions gathered from other data collection methods.
- When other data collection procedures are not feasible.

### Steps in Conducting Observations

**Step 1: Identifying evaluation questions to be answered through observations**

**Step 2: Identifying items to observe**

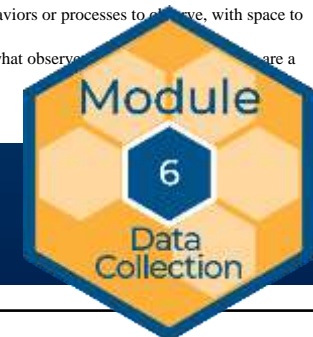
For example, you might observe the following:

- **Interactions:** Level of participation, interest, power relationships, decisionmaking, general climate, levels of support, and cooperation.
- **Nonverbal behavior:** Facial expressions, gestures, and postures.
- **Evidence of implementation:** Participation in program or intervention, achievement of goals, and completion of activities.
- **Actions of program presenters:** Clarity of communication, group leadership skills, awareness of group climate, flexibility, and knowledge.
- **Physical surroundings:** Rooms, amenities, and seating arrangements.
- **Products of a program:** Project demonstrations, plans, brochures, and manuals.

**Step 3: Choosing an approach for collecting data**

You might use the following approaches to collect your observation data:

- **Recording checklists:** Standardized forms, with preset questions and responses, for observing specific behaviors or attributes.
- **Observation guides:** Forms that list behaviors or processes to observe, with space to record open-ended data.
- **Open field notes:** Narrative records of what observed. They are a flexible way to document observations.



# Step 1: Identifying Evaluation Questions to Be Answered Through Observations



# Step 2: Identifying Items to Observe<sup>6</sup>

- Interactions
- Nonverbal behavior
- Evidence of implementation
- Actions of program presenters
- Physical surroundings
- Products of a program



# Step 3: Choosing an Approach for Collecting Data<sup>3,6</sup>

- Recording checklists
- Observation guides
- Open field notes



# Step 4: Choosing Controlled or Natural Observations<sup>1,4,5</sup>

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- Controlled: Conducted in structured and arranged settings.
  - Overt: Observers make their presence known.
- Natural: Conducted in unstructured and real-life settings.
  - Overt: Observers make their presence known.
  - Covert: Observers do not make their presence known.
- Ethical issues and consent procedures.

# Step 5: Determining the Timing<sup>2</sup>

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- When will you observe?
- How frequently will you observe?
- How long will your observations be?
- Will the time of day, week, season, or year influence your findings?



# Step 6: Selecting Observation Sites<sup>2,6</sup>

- Where will you conduct the observations?
- Are there enough sites to ensure representative data?





# Step 7: Developing an Observation Protocol<sup>6</sup>

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- The observation protocol should include:
  - The evaluation question(s).
  - The items to observe.
  - The data collection approach (recording sheet or checklist, observation guide, or open field notes).
  - The type of observation (controlled or natural, overt or covert).
  - Directions related to the approximate timing of observations and the use of the data collection form.
  - Information about the observation sites.

# Step 8: Identifying and Training Observers<sup>6</sup>

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- Potential observers include stakeholders, other professionals, program participants, graduate students, and interns.
- Train observers on the observation protocol.
  - To ensure they understand the protocol and can apply it consistently.
  - Include practice observations in the training to ensure calibration.
  - If the protocol includes a rating scale, make sure observers clearly understand each level.

# Step 9: Conducting Observations



# Observation Protocol Example for AMMP!

- What barriers exist that prevent AMMP! participants from completing homework?
- How many students attended AMMP each month?

## AMMP! Observation Protocol

### Which Evaluation Question(s) Am I Trying to Answer?

What barriers exist that prevent AMMP! participants from completing homework?

How many students attended AMMP! each month?

### Observation Notes

**Directions:** To begin, introduce yourself as the observer, as this is an overt observation in a natural environment. For each 45 minute tutoring session observed, spend 10 minutes at each tutoring table. Use this recording checklist and observation guide to record students' behaviors or comments that might indicate barriers to completing their homework as well as the tutor's response. At the end of the 10 minute segment, check off any of the listed barriers that you have observed.

### Setting Information

Observer name: \_\_\_\_\_

Tutor name: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of students at the session: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Start time: \_\_\_\_\_

End time: \_\_\_\_\_





# Chapter 2 Complete

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2

3

Recommended next: Chapter 3 – Surveys



# Thank You

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