# Cognitive Interviewing and what it can be used for

## Section 3 - Other uses of cognitive interviewing – Transcript

In this section, we will explore what else cognitive testing methods can be used for.

There are also case studies to be read about various projects we have carried out.

Cognitive interviewing methods can be used to test:

Other survey materials such as advanced letters and leaflets.

Other messages such as health information leaflets or messages on slot machines

Consent questions such as consent to recontact, consent to carry out further research with someone or consent to data linkage.

Cognitive interviewing methods can also be combined with usability testing to look at web questionnaires, websites or other documents.

Slide- What else can cognitive interviewing methods be used for?

What types of survey materials can be tested?

A number of survey materials can be tested using cognitive interviewing methods. This can include advance letters, information leaflets and opt in or opt out instructions.

How is this done?

Usually, the testing is done alongside testing of the survey questions. Advance materials are tested at the start of the interview, and this may mean that you can test fewer questions due to timing. Documents are placed with the participant, sometimes in an envelope. Participants are asked to think aloud whilst looking at the documents and asked to look at the documents as if they had arrived in the post and the interviewer was not present.

Probes are then asked about whether the information was clear, if anything could be amended and hypothetically whether they would opt in or want to take part in the study and what could be done to encourage this.

What are the benefits of testing these materials?

Similarly to testing survey questions, testing these types of documents will allow us to try and create the best letters and leaflets that we can. We can collect feedback on whether the information is clear, if anything is missing and what can be done to encourage people to take part in the study.

Is there anything that should be kept in mind?

It’s important to remember that this testing can’t predict response rates. We have small sample sizes and it’s to get a more general feel for how participants might react to the materials and their understanding of them.

An example of some testing we did for the National Survey for Wales on survey materials can be read in the case study.

What types of other messages can be tested?

We have tested public health information, for example, a leaflet inviting people to get their cervical screening and return to player messages which appear before you play slot machines.

How does testing these messages work?

Using the cognitive testing techniques, we can explore people’s understanding of the messages. For the return to player messages, we had a variety of message wording printed onto show cards.

We asked people to look at them and tell us what they thought the messages meant. We also used probing questions to explore whether they had noticed the messages on the slot machines, if they read them and if they understood them. This can help to ensure the messages tested are clear and fit for purpose.

What types of consent questions can be tested?

Any types of consent questions can be tested. We have tested consent to data linkage from government departments, consent to a follow-up physical survey on a property, consent to Twitter data being linked to survey data.

How are these consent questions tested?

We usually try and have some context. It’s often just a single question that we are testing so we would ask it amongst some of the other survey questions. They are usually asked at the end of surveys so they will be placed at the end of the interview as well.

We get participants to think aloud whilst answering and ask them about the information provided in the question. Was it clear, was it off-putting or encouraging? Would they consent in a real-life survey situation, why or why not, and can anything be done to encourage consent.

How could I combine cognitive testing with usability testing?

The aim here is to ensure the layout and format of the survey is working as intended. You would ask the participant to complete a web questionnaire whilst you observe, nowadays we tend to get someone to share their screen on Zoom. The interviewer observes how the participant is using the web survey, if they trigger error messages, if the format of the questions looks ok on the screen, if they are able to navigate from page to page and give their response. Participants are asked to think aloud as they complete the web questionnaire, the focus is on the format of the questions, not necessarily the content.

Either after a small set of questions or once the survey has been completed the interviewer will then use probing questions to ask how they found navigating, what they thought of the design and how the survey worked for them.

Can you use this as well as testing question wording?

You can just have a user testing interview where the sole focus is on the design of the survey.

You could ask if they noticed certain elements such as extra information buttons, or you could combine and just have a section at the end of a normal cognitive interview where you ask about content of the question, or you ask for general feedback on the layout and ease of use of the survey.

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eEfY3_0JaIM>

National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM)  
Social Sciences  
Murray Building (Bldg 58)  
University of Southampton  
Southampton SO17 1BJ  
United Kingdom

**Web** www.ncrm.ac.uk   
**Email** info@ncrm.ac.uk  
**Tel** +44 23 8059 4539  
**Twitter** @NCRMUK