The Bus Puzzle

Choosing sociological methods to investigate a community question

S.1.5 "Identify the research methods commonly used by sociologists including survey research, content/historical analysis, secondary analysis, controlled experiments, observation, participant observation, and case study..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Number the seven research methods in the passage, underline one strength of each, and circle one weakness of each.

Why Is the Bus Half Full?

1 At a downtown bus stop, the last bus leaves half full, yet neighbors say they need a later ride. A sociologist might use survey research, asking many residents identical questions about schedules and safety. Surveys reveal broad patterns, but people may forget trips or give answers they think sound good. With observation, the researcher watches who boards and how long people wait. This captures behavior directly but cannot show what riders privately think. With participant observation, the researcher rides the route regularly and talks with riders over time. That builds context and trust, though involvement can shape what the researcher notices.

2 A second team turns to existing evidence. Through content/historical analysis, researchers examine old news stories and city meeting notes to trace how public debate about bus service has changed. Those sources show language and decisions across time, but surviving records may leave out some voices. In secondary analysis, researchers study ridership counts already collected by the transit agency. This saves time and can cover thousands of trips, but the counts do not explain why anyone traveled. A case study follows one route closely, drawing on interviews, notes, and records. It gives rich detail about that route, but its findings may not fit others.

3 Suppose the city tests whether better signs reduce missed buses. In a controlled experiment, researchers randomly assign some comparable stops to get new schedule signs while other stops keep old signs. They count missed buses at both groups of stops. Random assignment helps isolate the effect of signs from other differences, but results from a few stops may not apply across the city. Researchers should also avoid changes that put riders at risk. No method answers every question: records can show trends, direct watching can reveal behavior, and riders can explain their choices. Combining methods can expose gaps in any single source.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. If the city wants to know why residents say they skip the last bus, would a survey or observation be more useful? Explain one weakness of your choice.

2. Which method would better trace changes in public debate about bus service: content/historical analysis or secondary analysis of ridership counts? What might that method miss?

3. How does participant observation differ from a case study in the passage? Give one strength of each.

4. Why does the sign experiment assign stops randomly, and what is one limit of its findings?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Your school wants to learn why students do or do not attend after-school clubs. Propose two different methods from the passage, describe what evidence each would collect, and explain one strength and one weakness of each for this question. Write 4 to 6 sentences.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Number the seven research methods in the passage, underline one strength of each, and circle one weakness of each. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	If the city wants to know why residents say they skip the last bus, would a survey or observation be more useful? Explain one weakness of your choice.	**A survey can ask residents for their reasons, but they may forget trips or give answers they think sound good.**
2	Which method would better trace changes in public debate about bus service: content/historical analysis or secondary analysis of ridership counts? What might that method miss?	**Content/historical analysis would trace the debate through old stories and meeting notes, but surviving records may leave out some voices.**
3	How does participant observation differ from a case study in the passage? Give one strength of each.	**In participant observation, the researcher regularly rides and talks with riders, building context and trust. The case study examines one route using several sources, giving rich detail about that route.**
4	Why does the sign experiment assign stops randomly, and what is one limit of its findings?	**Random assignment helps isolate the effect of the signs. Results from a few stops may not apply across the city.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would survey students about club times and their reasons for not attending. Surveys could reveal patterns across many students, but some might give answers they think adults want. I would also observe club arrivals and departures for several weeks. Observation would show who attends and when, but it would not reveal why absent students stay away. Comparing the two sources could show whether reported schedule problems match attendance patterns.

Accept other well-supported method choices and limitations grounded in the passage. For Your Turn, each proposed method should collect relevant evidence and have a distinct, accurate strength and weakness.