



Methods for Change

Graphic Interviews: Graphic Elicitation and Sketch Reportage

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Graphic Interviews involve a combination of talking and engaging with visual materials. This guide considers two Graphic Interview techniques: Graphic Elicitation using architectural plans, and Sketch Reportage. These two techniques can be used independently, or can be brought together in a single research project to provide multi-layered insight into the world of the respondent by combining different visual registers.

Graphic Elicitation entails the use of drawing methods in the context of an interview, with drawings either produced by the participant or researcher. Architectural drawings and layout plans, for example, can be introduced, with participants then invited to draw on and engage with the plans in response to prompts or questions. This can enable researchers to understand how participants experience, navigate, inhabit or work within a space.

Sketch Reportage involves a skilled artist joining the research team and visually documenting the content of interview discussions in situ, capturing and representing aspects of life disclosed by respondents. This method can result in the production of visually compelling drawings or paintings which may be valued by participants, and can also be useful for communicating research findings. Both of these approaches provide ways of concretising what has been said and give the described experiences a material form.

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How do Graphic Interviews create or contribute to change?

Graphic Interview methods can encourage self-reflection on aspects of daily life such as the way people move through and use buildings. Viewing and handling architectural plans – which are rarely accessible to building users – can be empowering and insightful for participants. The experience of being sketched, and then immediately presented with a beautifully crafted representation of oneself can be moving, and participants may feel that their experiences have been recognised and validated.

By disrupting assumptions about what people do day-to-day, these methods ‘**make the familiar strange**’, and can therefore enable researchers and participants to access experiences that are not easily expressed in words.

Feeding back findings generated through Graphic Elicitation methods can lead to tangible changes in the building or space in question such as reconfiguring rooms or routes in response to participants’ concerns. Such findings can also highlight organisational practices that could be reworked. When shared with architects and planners, this type of research can in the longer term also inform the redesign of existing spaces and the design of new spaces. Visual materials produced through this approach can be particularly useful for communicating the experiences of a particular group to the wider public or policy makers.

The method of Sketch Reportage can itself also be used as part of a strategy for sharing research findings. For example, inviting an artist or visual minuter to document a professional or academic conference where findings are presented could create a memorable experience and visual record for those involved.

What ideas or concepts are connected with this approach?

Like other creative and elicitation methods that use visual or material stimuli to encourage participants to talk about their ideas, Graphic Interviews bring a participatory and embodied dimension to more traditional interviewing techniques. Visual participatory approaches often aim to disrupt power dynamics by giving participants the opportunity to lead aspects of the research through drawing, pointing, handling materials, or engaging with maps, for example. Research encounters aim to be interactive and meaningful for participants, including those who may struggle with verbal communication.

Sketch Reportage is particularly useful for communicating non-verbal and embodied observations which can be lost in a standard interview transcript, such as gestures, expressions, postures, coughs, or moments where participants pause or need to refresh themselves. While Sketch Reportage involves an artist rather than the participant leading the creation of a visual artwork, it can also work to shift the power dynamics of an interview. The artist introduces creative materials into the setting, and produces something that can be given back to participants as a recognition of their involvement.

Bringing Graphic Elicitation and Sketch Reportage together can be thought of as a form of ‘triangulation’, in that it allows researchers to consider the complexity of a particular research problem by studying it from various angles, using different forms of visual representation. Architectural layout drawings are abstract, flat representations of space, which can be quite unfamiliar to participants. Sketch Reportage methods, in contrast, are narrative, biographical and can capture the person as well as the space. Integrating these two very different visual registers can therefore be a powerful tool for understanding the world of the respondent.

- Graphic Interviews offer a tactile, visually compelling form of engagement in which participants have the opportunity to share their experiences, perspectives and day-to-day practices in creative ways that go beyond verbal communication.
- Graphic Elicitation using architectural plans can be particularly useful for understanding how building users experience a place. They can show routines, pathways and movements through a space, as well as identifying participants' perspectives or feelings about particular areas of a building or location.
- After plans or maps have been drawn on, coloured in or annotated, they can be compared to show how different groups use or perceive a space in contrasting ways. In a hospital setting, for example, this could highlight how wellness or occupational hierarchy can influence routes through the building, as well as showing embodied repetitions and routines, or areas that are perceived as safe or risky.
- Sketch Reportage methods can provide a record of not only what is said in an interview, but also how it is said and other contextual details. They bring narrative and a sense of the person and place into conversation with the more abstract journeys and movements represented on an architectural plan. At the end of the interview, participants may value the opportunity to see their experiences reflected in a beautifully crafted work of art.
- Sketch Reportage introduces an artist and a creative practice into the setting of the interview, which may work to disrupt power dynamics and diffuse potential anxiety on the part of participants. It is important to be aware, however, that participants may find the process of being studied and drawn whilst talking unsettling. The researcher has an ethical responsibility to ensure participants understand and feel comfortable taking part, are aware of how the visual materials generated will be anonymised and used, and to make accommodations or adaptations where needed.
- Producing something visual during the interview encounter provides an opportunity for participants to reflect on the data and the experience of taking part in the research. Conventional interviews usually do not produce immediate outputs that show or feedback what has been discussed. In contrast, by the end of an interview using Graphic Elicitation methods, the participant can see their journeys and observations scribbled onto a layout plan as well as an aesthetically creative reflection of themselves.



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Step by step guide to using Graphic Interviews

Graphic Elicitation with architectural drawings and layout plans

- 1. Prepare the plans or drawings:** Layout plans for public buildings are usually readily available and can often be sourced through the estates department or equivalent of the organisation in question. Detailed drawings need to be large enough (i.e. at least A3) to be seen easily and made sense of by participants. Architectural plans can be confusing, so the researcher will need to be prepared to talk through the plans and explain what different areas are to help orient the respondent.

It helps to initially visit the site and ideally be given a tour by a member of staff, or to get someone to help identify areas of the plan by email. Before printing the plans, they may need some modification, such as cutting out and enlarging some aspects of the building or editing room labels to make them clearer.

- 2. Explain the method:** The reasons for using layout plans need to be clearly communicated to participants. It is important that they understand the purpose of the research, what they are being asked to do, and what will happen to the drawings subsequently. Some participants may need some encouragement to 'go for it' and to pick up a pen and begin drawing, or, in some cases it may work better if the researcher draws with instructions from the participant.

Different interviewers will have different ways of resolving the reticence of interviewees to draw. It can be tempting for the interviewer to take over and do it for them. It is important to be aware and sensitive to the fact that drawing and writing in an interview is also a subtle and delicate question of confidence, control, delegation and even power.

- 3. Prompts and questions:** Participants are guided through the process of annotating and drawing on the plans through a series of prompts from the researcher. Initially, participants could be asked to describe their usual routes through the building, for example, by asking:

Could you walk me through what you did today? What do you normally do when you arrive at the building? Where would you go next? How long does it take?

Different coloured pens can be used for different types of prompts. For example, participants could be asked to use a red pen to highlight areas they see as risky, and a green pen to show things that they would like to change. Participants may need to be reminded to keep drawing as they talk through their answers.

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Care and consideration needs to be given to the fact that layout plans can be a 'give away' in identifying buildings and facilities that might be recognised beyond a specific site. In publications, reports and feedback to stakeholders there is always the possibility that a site could be identified, and respondents within the same site might well be able to identify one another. Removing text that names hospitals or departments and cropping areas of plans in publications can mean they are less identifiable, but does not remove the possibility of spaces being recognised. It is however, important to be aware of this possibility, and the sensitivities that may be involved.

- 4. Draw on the plans:** Multiple copies of the plans can be printed and then drawn on or marked with stickers or post it notes, for example. Another option is to use transparent acetate sheets which are overlaid on top of the plan or drawing, and attached with masking tape. Participants can then use permanent markers to write and draw on the acetate sheet. Multiple acetates from different interviews can later be placed on top of each other to compare one set of responses against another. Graphic Elicitation interviews could also be carried out online using the annotation option in the 'shared screen' or 'whiteboard' function of your preferred online platform.

Sketch Reportage

- 1. Identify and recruit the artist:** The specific artistic and research skills required will vary depending on the research context and focus. Some styles of artwork – e.g. cartoons – may be appropriate in some contexts but not in others. If Sketch Reportage is to be a key component of a research project, the artist will be playing a significant role within the interviews. It is therefore important that they have a clear understanding of the method, the purpose of the research, and are able to work sensitively around the needs of participants.
- 2. Plan the interviews together with the artist:** It can be helpful to involve the artist in planning meetings, and ideally they will be part of the research team from the start of the project, with involvement in designing the research. Discuss beforehand if there are particular things you would like them to document, such as gestures, expressions, written quotes, or elements of the environment. Sketching and writing down what people say at the same time can be challenging – it may be useful for the researcher to send selected quotes from the interview transcript to be added to the artwork afterwards. The artist may also wish to leave space to draw things or places that were mentioned in the interview later on.

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3. Think about space and positioning:

The space in which interviews take place needs to be private and big enough to accommodate the researcher(s), participant(s), artist and their equipment. The artist will need to position themselves somewhere they can see the participant, and it is important the researcher does not obstruct their view! Sketch Reportage can also produce interesting results when used during walking interviews, though this can require the artist to sketch at a very quick rate and to be able to multi-task.

4. Introduce the artist and the method and carry out the interview:

It is crucial that participants feel comfortable, and understand why the artist is sitting in on the interview, what they will be doing and how the artwork will be used, including whether participants will receive a copy. The researcher can then carry out a semi-structured interview, following a series of questions or prompts, which may also be audio recorded. The artist will sketch or paint as the interview unfolds, and they may be involved in the conversation or add questions at certain points where appropriate.

5. Use the visual data to share findings: It is important to have a plan in place for how the artworks will eventually be used. The drawings or images produced using these methods can be used to illustrate reports or websites, and can be a powerful method for communicating research findings, such as featuring in a display stand at professional or academic events. The original artworks could also be displayed in an exhibition or in the settings in which they were produced - the 'art in hospitals' movement is one example.



Graphic map of Outpatients Department by 'Rachel', a physiotherapist.



An example of using Graphic Interviews in social science research

**Pathways, Practices and Architectures: Containing Antimicrobial Resistance
in the Cystic Fibrosis Clinic (PARC)**

Researchers: Prof. Nik Brown, Dr Christina Buse, Prof. Sarah Nettleton
and Dr Daryl Martin, University of York; Dr Alan Lewis, The University of Manchester

Wider project team: Prof. Mike Brockhurst, The University of Manchester;
Lynne Chapman, artist; Prof. Craig Winstanley, University of Liverpool

Exhibition design: Hamza Oza and Jonathan West, Royal College of Art

The PARC project compares different approaches to managing antimicrobial resistance in the design, practices and architectural layout of three cystic fibrosis clinics. Cystic fibrosis is one of many life-threatening respiratory conditions characterised by frequent infections and antibiotic treatment, giving rise to resistant cross infection between people with cystic fibrosis. Prevention increasingly depends on building containment and segregation of people and pathogens into practices and material design. And yet, there are significant variations in the way lung infection clinics perform segregation within transitional spaces of healthcare environments. Clinics have much to learn from each other, and much to offer the wider clinical community in limiting antimicrobial resistance.

The PARC Project used a range of qualitative research methods, including ethnographic and innovative visual approaches. Fieldwork took place across three cystic fibrosis clinics between September 2018 and August 2019. It included the development of a physical and virtual exhibition and the dissemination of findings in bespoke co-design workshops across fieldwork sites.

In the PARC project researchers used layout plans and architectural drawings of hospital environments, including respiratory outpatient clinics but also long-stay wards, as well as the wider hospital estate in which they are located. These are generally the routine everyday environments in which clinical staff work and in which patients are treated, and sometimes the environments in which patients will spend weeks in semi-isolation. This Graphic Elicitation method enabled clinicians and patients to describe and document how they move around a building, their routes and pathways, their spatial routines and habits, to document things that they liked or things they were worried about. Some areas might be perceived to be potential hot spots of infection, cross-infection and contamination, such as toilets, lifts, sinks and basins, waiting areas, or canteens, and retail pharmacies. In this particular research, pens were a concern in terms of cross infection. The research team disinfected pens after use, and if interviewing patients on the same day or within a short period of time would always use new pens.

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As part of this project, the team also employed the graphic artist, Lynne Chapman, a specialist in creating drawn and painted illustrations produced in situ during fieldwork and interviews. The aim was to document the journeys, both biographical and spatial, discussed by participants. Given this focus on journeys and pathways, Lynne used long narrow strips of water colour paper resulting in 'time-lines' that tell the interviewee's story of navigating clinical space and negotiating the practical aspects of cross-infection avoidance. Each painting is a colourfully vibrant and detailed medley of interview quotes, figurative portraiture detailing embodied gestures, and sketches of spaces and objects that feature in the interviewee's account. By the end of the project several dozen visually compelling Sketch Reportage drawings were produced.

The drawing-based methods were useful in capturing the embodied aspects of the interview which are often missed, including participants' gestures, or the fact that they were drinking water during the interview. Although the drawings were anonymised (e.g. changing hair colour, adding glasses), when drawings were shown at clinics some people still thought they could identify participants. While some participants may be happy to be identified, it is worth considering whether anonymity is possible or desirable, and communicating this clearly to participants at the outset.

The final phase of the project included detailed feedback to each clinic through clinic-specific workshops designed to create critical reflection on our findings, and to identify both modest and ambitious design interventions. Each of the workshops involved a combination of clinical, ancillary,

estates and sanitary staff, and a patient representative. Each of these workshops led to a bespoke schedule of potential design changes, and a rationale for achieving them. A final stakeholder workshop brought a wider range of stakeholders including healthcare architects and microbiologists together to discuss the project's findings and strategies for embedding impact.

Our findings highlight how hospital buildings can constrain or enable practices of segregation and distancing – lifts, narrow corridors, busy waiting rooms and tight spaces make keeping a safe distance more challenging. Participants emphasise the importance of regular air change for the quick dispersal of 'bugs', but window opening in hospitals can be limited by window restrictors, or by issues such as people smoking outside of windows. Specialist mechanical ventilation is costly and difficult to retrofit into buildings. Findings also illustrate how flexibility is important when designing new hospital buildings, so that designs can be adapted to the changing requirements of infection prevention. Our findings are relevant for cystic fibrosis clinics, but also for infection prevention and antimicrobial resistance more widely, as has become apparent during the COVID pandemic.

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Where else could Graphic Interviews be used?

Graphic Interviews lend themselves to many kinds of questions and contexts. However, they are particularly useful in understanding experiences of the built environment, and in generating a sense of ownership for those who use, live and work in different kinds of buildings. In the research described above, this was particularly valuable for empowering both patients and clinicians. But this could so easily extend into other therapeutic settings including mental health settings, cancer care, and palliative care. Wider application of Graphic Interviews could include exploring the experiences of different groups in relation to public spaces, transport infrastructure, parks, shopping centres, libraries, schools, universities and other institutional settings.

The involvement of a Sketch Reportage artist has gained increasing popularity both within and beyond social science and humanities research, including their input into workshops, conferences and other events. This element of the research can be important in validating the experiences of interviewees, and has been used in a variety of settings, including in research by members of the PARC project team. [This includes research on the work of architects and building contractors](#), who are involved in the design of buildings for later life care. Sketch Reportage methods were used when shadowing architects and building contractors on site, and also documenting project meetings and conferences, and Graphic Elicitation was used in interviews with architects. Sketch Reportage has also been used in research on the [daily lived experiences](#) of people with [dementia](#). This method has also been used to capture the [everyday practices of academics](#), in research by the University of Manchester.

Top tips

1. When you initially access the plans and develop them for Graphic Elicitation interviews, if possible, ask for a tour of the building, or ask someone to talk you through the plans. Participants might need you to explain what they are seeing, and it can be difficult to do this if you are unfamiliar with the space.
2. Some architectural plans might be more workable for this method if they are slightly simplified or modified. This can be done with picture editing software. Or alternatively use health and safety layout plans if available instead of architectural plans.
3. Be flexible. Some people are less comfortable drawing in interviews, so it is important to think about how you will address this, and whether you could instead draw for participants if required.
4. When using Sketch Reportage methods, agree in advance of the project who will own the artwork and how it may be used in future. Most illustrators and graphic artists tend to provide high quality scans to clients, whilst retaining rights over the original, physical artwork. In most cases, scans are fine for dissemination, publishing and display, but if an art exhibition is part of the dissemination plan then an agreement will need to be in place to exhibit the work temporarily or to purchase the art as part of the contract. Make sure that the hourly and day rates of the artists and creatives involved are costed in the initial plans for the project.

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Further reading

- Reports from the PARC project
- Lynne Chapman, artist

Academic articles:

- Air care: an 'aerography' of breath, buildings and bugs in the cystic fibrosis clinic.
- The coughing body: etiquettes, techniques, sonographies and spaces.
- Pathways, practices and architectures: Containing antimicrobial resistance in the cystic fibrosis clinic.

To reference: Brown, N., Buse, C., Pottinger, L. and Barron, A. (2021). 'Graphic Interviews' in Barron, A., Browne, A.L., Ehgartner, U., Hall, S.M., Pottinger, L. and Ritson, J. (eds.) *Methods for Change: Impactful social science methodologies for 21st century problems*. Manchester: Aspect and The University of Manchester.

Funding Acknowledgement: The research project 'Pathways, practices and architectures: containing AMR in the CF clinic' was funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AH/R002037/1). The related project 'Pre-antibiotic, antibiotic and post-antibiotic: the co-design of an exhibition' was funded by the University of York and Wellcome Trust Centre for Future Health.



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