Guide 11: Research customer preferences

Unit 2, Task 3

Your goal

Use primary research to test what your target customers prefer. Learn which features or experiences matter and use the findings to make a product decision.

Do not ask people only whether they like your idea. Find out how they currently solve the problem and what they would gain or lose by choosing your product.

What to produce

Record research findings about customer preferences. Include your hypothesis, method, actual evidence, and the decision the evidence helped you make.

You can keep this record on paper or in your own document. The prompts below help you organise it; they are not extra official requirements. Follow your teacher's research instructions.

Key terms

- **Primary research:** information you collect directly for your research purpose.
- **Preference:** what someone values or chooses over another option.
- **Hypothesis:** a prediction you can test.
- **Neutral question:** a question that does not push towards a particular answer.
- **Sample:** the people included in your research.

Interviews can explain why people prefer an option. A small sample can reveal useful ideas, but it may not represent your whole market.

Step 1: Choose one useful question

Return to your product concept and customer profile. Which uncertain preference could change your next design decision?

Examples include size, material, ease of use, waiting time, or how a service is delivered. Keep the question focused enough to investigate.

Write a prediction before collecting answers. For example: “Customers who carry small bags will prefer a compact pouch to a larger pouch with extra pockets.” Decide what evidence would support, challenge, or leave this prediction unclear.

Step 2: Prepare an interview

Use open questions that encourage explanation:

- “How do you carry your supplies now?”
- “What works well? What is difficult?”
- “Which of these options would fit your routine better? Why?”
- “What would make you choose neither?”

Avoid “Wouldn't more pockets be better?” It suggests the answer. Describe alternatives fairly. If you show sketches, keep their detail and presentation similar so that colour or drawing quality does not decide the result.

Practise with a classmate. This checks your questions; it is not a real customer interview unless the person genuinely fits your research purpose.

Step 3: Conduct real research safely

The CED suggests at least one real interview outside class with someone who matches your target profile. Arrange contact through an approach approved by your teacher. Do not approach strangers alone.

Explain the project and ask whether the person is willing to help. They can refuse, skip questions, or stop. Do not pressure them to praise or buy your product.

Use anonymous notes such as “Participant A.” Do not collect names, private contact details, or sensitive information. Ask permission before any recording and follow school rules. You can take notes instead.

Listen without defending your idea. Record what the person says or does, including reasons for rejecting both options.

Step 4: Compare evidence with your prediction

Look for patterns and differences. Keep comments separate from your interpretation.

Write down who you asked in general terms, when, what you showed, and what happened. Explain limits: friends may be polite, a sketch cannot show durability, and your sample may be small.

Choose a response: keep a feature, change it, remove it, or gather more evidence. Do not hide results because they challenge your prediction.

Example: Ready Pouch

Ready Pouch is our fictional example business. Its proposed product is a small pencil pouch for students.

This is invented teaching data, not real research.

In a fictional test, six target users compare a compact design with a larger design that has extra pockets. Four prefer the compact design; two prefer extra pockets. The reasons include bag space and the number of supplies carried.

The team chooses to develop the compact design for its initial target group. It also records the different preference of users who carry more supplies. The result does not prove that all students prefer small pouches, or that any participant will buy one.

Your own findings must come from your research. Do not copy these results into your project as evidence.

Your turn

Complete your research record:

1. What did you predict? What result would challenge it?
2. Who did you ask, and why did they fit your target profile?
3. What method and questions did you use?
4. What did you actually find? Include different views.
5. What decision followed, and what remains uncertain?

Check your work

- My questions tested a specific preference.
- I collected genuine answers without leading participants.
- I respected permission and privacy.
- I connected the findings to a decision.
- I explained sample and method limits.

Next: Research the market and competitors

In Unit 2, Task 4, use existing sources to investigate the wider market and present a research finding in a chart.

Independent guidance based on the AP Business with Personal Finance CED, printed pages 162-163. This is not an official College Board resource.