

Welcome to the Mass Observation Project

MO

MASS OBSERVATION

Recording everyday life in Britain

Welcome to being a Mass Observer

Thank you for signing up to be a Mass Observer!

Without you, the current work of Mass Observation simply wouldn't exist. By being a Mass Observer you will be one of thousands of people who have provided their stories, thoughts and feelings to the archive, helping us tell the stories that make up life in everyday Britain for current and future generations.

This booklet contains all the information you need to write for Mass Observation. However, if your question isn't covered here, the MO team is always happy to reply to questions via email or post.

Contact details

Email: moa@sussex.ac.uk

Telephone: 01273 482349

Post: The Mass Observation Archive

University of Sussex

The Keep

Woollards Way

Brighton

BN1 9BP

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Responding to Directives

Approximately three times a year you will receive one of our 'Directives'. The Directives generally consist of three parts, each part made up of a different theme and set of questions.

When responding to Directives you can provide as long or as short a response as you like. In fact, if there is a theme that doesn't interest you or you don't feel comfortable writing about you do not have to respond at all.

However, it is helpful for future researchers to also have these responses on file too. For example, if there is a political event you do not feel able to comment on in-depth or do not feel you have an opinion on, saying this is also a useful resource demonstrating public thought and opinion. Similarly, if we ask about driving, but you do not drive, we would still want to hear what you have to say. We want as many varied opinions as possible!

You also do not have to provide written responses. We welcome art, poems and other creative responses. Provide us with what you feel comfortable with!

We ask you always include a mini-biography at the start of every page. This should include your MO code, your age, occupation, where you live and marital status. If you are retired, please state your last employed role as well as stating you are retired.

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Responding to Directives

If you see something online which you wish to include in your response, for example, an article or social media post or image we would much rather you send us a screenshot of this and include this in the body of your response, as opposed to a link.

With the rate at which technology is developing, we don't know if these websites will exist in a year, ten years, or beyond! Therefore it is much easier for us to preserve an image of the site in question, as we cannot preserve the site itself.

Similarly, please do avoid sending newspaper/magazine clippings where possible. These are hard to preserve and most surely will be being archived elsewhere. We are interested in your opinions, so if a particular article has evoked a reaction in you please feel free to reference it or quote it but you do not need to send it to us.

You can either email your responses to moa@sussex.ac.uk post them to us:

The Mass Observation Archive
University of Sussex
The Keep
Woollards Way
Brighton
BN1 9BP

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Anonymity

Maintaining the anonymity of our writers is very important to us. We want you to feel assured that your responses are private and cannot be traced back to you. To help us with this we ask the following things:

- Never put your name on your response only your code
- Only use first initials for other people you are talking about, for example if you have a son called John, you would refer to him as J.
- Try avoid names of buildings or places that may disclose your location, e.g. your local hospital, cinema or shopping centre.
- If you live in a small town or village, please avoid including this. An alternative example would be, 'lives in a village near Brighton'.
- If you have quite a specific job role please generalise.
- Do not include your place of work or volunteering.
- Be mindful of identifying other people, for example providing their name, place of work or where they live.

The MO team read all the responses that we receive to help protect the anonymity of our writers, so if you miss something we will be there to check as well!

That being said, if you wish to be public about writing for MO, then you are welcome to do so! Just be aware that researchers may be able to link you to your responses if you do this.

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Example Responses

There's no set way to respond to a directive! We encourage Observers to respond in whatever way they feel most comfortable. However, we've included the extracts below as a starting point for how you might lay out a written or visual response.

MO code: W7854 - Male, 50, Partnered, Brighton, Railway Manager

Mass Observation Summer 2023 Directive

1. Digital technologies in the home

In our house we have: a smart television in the lounge; a laptop each (so there are two and these are mobile); a personal smart phone each (again, two in total, and these are mobile); and I also have a work smart phone (mobile).

We have an internet and digital tv package which we pay for monthly, via direct debit: this includes access to Netflix as well as all the usual digital television and radio channels provided by the BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and five. We also have a 'shared' Spotify account on each of our personal mobile phones. We only have one television, with a 28-inch screen, and this is in the lounge, opposite the sofa and to the right of the fireplace; it is free-standing. It is way smaller than several televisions that you can now get – I am not a fan of a huge 60- or 70-inch screen which is affixed to a wall in a room.

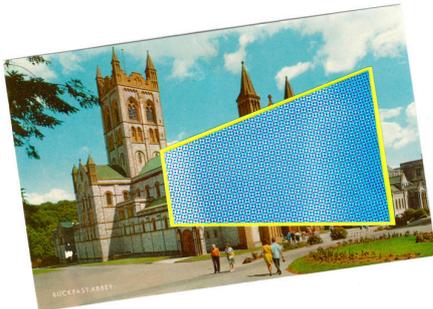
We both watch the television when we have something we want to watch – which may sound odd, but it isn't: unlike many people, who will come home from school/work and plonk themselves down in front of the television for the remainder of the day, we both watch only what we want to; in addition, we increasingly watch something via 'catch-up', so not 'live'. The same applies for any music/radio which we might listen to via the television. Our laptops are used anywhere in the house: mine isn't for work purposes, so it might be used for news, writing documents (such as this!), browsing forums, social media apps and purchasing stuff online. My partner's laptop is also used for work purposes: when working, this usually takes place in the attic which has been converted to a study/workspace. Our mobile phones are also used anywhere around the house (as well as outside the house) for any number of reasons – for example, I will listen to music via Spotify or via the BBC Sounds app when out on a walk or on a train journey. My work mobile is switched off at home unless I am 'on call' in which case it is switched on and I answer it when it rings.

There is no set time for using any of our various digital devices, but the television will generally be off when we are both at work (which would usually be Monday-Friday daytime) and we will probably both have a burst of activity on our personal mobile phones when we wake up and pre-bed. The beauty of being able to watch/listen to programmes 'on demand' means we do this when we have time, to fit around whatever else we might be doing.

It is hard to specify how much time each day we spend on any digital activities – there are no fixed routines in this house! With regards to carrying out more than one digital activity at a time – yes, often – for example, whilst listening to music we might both look on social media or buy something online; we're less likely to combine activities if one of them involves watching the television though. With regards to digital activity going wrong – we both look after our own hardware and accounts, but if the television were to break, say, then one of us would take responsibility for replacing it or having it repaired; the same goes if there was a problem with the internet account: we would not both get involved. The person most likely to do something would be my partner!

My level of engagement ebbs and flows: I have fewer social media accounts than I used to, and I might go some time before looking at Twitter, for example, but they have their place. I increasingly listen to music, because I can do this whilst doing something else, thus saving time, and I am increasingly more selective with what I watch on television, ensuring that I watch only what I really

Summer 23 Directive. Digital Tech. 26/09/2023



MO Number: 66602.
Female.
48
Divorced.
Bristol.
Lecturer.



Who sees what I submit?

MO Staff

When your response reaches the Archive, it is read and recorded by a member of the MO team. After three months it will be made available to researchers.

Researchers and Visitors to the Archive

Researchers who use MO work in many different disciplines such as sociologists, psychologists, historians and geographers. Your responses will remain anonymous and researchers cannot contact you. They will have access to the information you provide on your response and via your biographic form.

We do also make responses available for events, such as school visits or public engagement events and workshops. Again, attendees will only have access to the information which you provide on your response. If parts of your response have been redacted by the MO team, the redacted response is what will be provided and the original will be placed in your embargoed personal file along with your written biography. Everything in this file is embargoed for 50 years, unless you provide us with written directions to the contrary.

Family and Friends

We do not automatically allow friends or relatives to see your contributions, even if they are close family members. If you wish to ensure that your members of your family see what you have written either during your lifetime, or afterwards, we suggest you keep your own copies.

If you are happy for your family members to read what you have written, please write and say so.

Online

If you have signed a copyright agreement with us your responses may appear in publications by those accessing the archive, it may also appear on our website and social media.

Who sees what I submit?

Publications

Most use of the Archive is by students for their essays, dissertations and theses. More senior scholars use the material for articles in journals or in teaching materials.

Sometimes we are asked for permission to use extracts from the Archive in books, films, TV or radio programmes. Providing mutually satisfactory agreements are made, the Trustees of the Archive are normally able to give their consent. In fact, the Archive depends on the income it receives from the fees and royalties from the publication of the early papers.

Formal contracts with authors and publishers are negotiated for the Archive by our literary agent in London so you can be sure that our interests are professionally protected.

This is why we ask respondents to sign a copyright agreement with us. There is no obligation to share copyright but it is a way of ensuring that we have a formal agreement with you. Most requests to quote are for very small passages. Every precaution is taken to ensure that no identifiable information appears in public unless you have given your written permission.

Due to the number of respondents and publications we cannot tell you if your writing has been specifically quoted from, however, we will always do our best to inform Mass Observers of new publications that make use of MOP material.

Visiting the Archive

We love it when Mass Observers come to visit the archive!

The Archive is a public resource and is located at The Keep. Anyone can visit The Keep, you just need to register as a Reader beforehand. You can find out more about that [here](#).

We also often hold in person events at The Keep. We advertise these on our social media channels, as well as via our quarterly mail outs and email newsletter. For those that can't visit us in person we always try to run online events too.

FAQs

Does it matter if I reply late or even miss a Directive?

No. Sometimes correspondents are too busy to reply. This is fine, although we are always interested to know if you don't like the Directive and why. However, if you haven't been in touch with us for a year we will stop sending you Directives - we simply haven't got the resources to keep sending them out and we don't want to become a nuisance to someone who has lost interest.

Will I receive an acknowledgement?

We always try and acknowledge email contributions, however, we don't currently have the capacity to acknowledge postal contributions.

Can I leave the project?

Of course! Just send us an email or letter to let us know.

What should I do if a Directive theme triggers an emotive reaction?

We are aware that some subjects can affect our Mass Observers emotionally and this can sometimes take people by surprise. If you experience a challenging response to the subject, then please seek support. If possible, talk to a friend or family member, alternatively the Samaritans 116 123 (lines are open 24hrs) and SANEline 0300 304 7000 (lines are open from 4.30pm-10.30pm).

Question not answered here? Please do send us an email or letter and we'll get back to you as soon as we can!