



Tips for Writing Good Survey Questions

Big picture questions

- Does the question require an answer?
- To what extent do survey recipients already have a ready-made answer for the question?
- Can people accurately recall and report past behavior?
- Are they willing to reveal the requested information?
- Will they feel motivated to answer each question?
- Is the respondents' understanding of response categories likely to be influenced by more than words?
- Is survey information being collected by more than one mode?
- What is the best question structure for your closed-ended questions: ordered response, unordered response categories, few, many, standard?

Principles of question writing

- Choose simple over specialized words
- Choose as few words as possible
- Use complete sentences
- Avoid vague quantifiers when more precise estimates can be obtained
- Do not request a level of specificity that someone might not be able to answer
- Use equal numbers of positive and negative categories for scalar questions
- Distinguish undecided from neutral by putting it at the end of the scale
- Avoid bias from unequal comparisons
- State both sides of attitude scales in the question stems
- Eliminate "check all that apply" question formats to reduce primacy effects
- Make sure response categories are mutually exclusive
- Use cognitive design techniques to improve recall
- Provide appropriate time referents
- Make sure questions are technically accurate
- Choose question wordings that allow comparisons to be made with previously collected data
- Avoid asking respondents to say yes in order to mean no
- Avoid double-barreled questions
- Soften the impact of potentially objectionable questions
- Avoid asking respondents to make unnecessary calculations