

Guidelines for Research Questionnaire Design

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General considerations

- Have well-defined goals and be sure to commit the study goals to writing.
- Decide how you are going to use the information gathered from the survey.
- Maximise your response rate by minimising the length of the questionnaire.
- Understand how every question will be analysed and be prepared to handle missing data.
- Give your questionnaire a title that is short and meaningful to the respondent.
- Include clear and concise instructions on how to complete the questionnaire.
- Begin with a few non-threatening and interesting items.
- Eliminate misunderstandings by emphasising crucial words.
- Leave white space for open ended questions.
- Test the questionnaire on representatives of the target audience.

Qualities of good questions

- Evoke the truth.
- Ask for an answer on only one dimension.
- Accommodate all possible answers.
- Have mutually exclusive options.
- Produce variability of responses.
- Follow comfortably from the previous question.
- Do not presuppose a certain state of affairs.
- Do not imply a desired answer.
- Do not use vaguely defined words.
- Do not use unfamiliar words or abbreviations.
- Do not ask the respondent to order or rank a series of more than five items.
- Follow-up questions are independent of responses to previous questions.

Order of questions

- Questions should be grouped into logically coherent sections. Grouping questions that are similar will make the questionnaire easier to complete.
- Questions that use the same response formats should appear together.
- Each question should follow on from the previous question.
- Questions in the latter half of a questionnaire are more likely to be omitted.
- Responses become more distorted when subjects feel threatened that their identities will become known.

Questionnaire length and question wording

As a general rule:

- Long questionnaires yield less accuracy in responses than short questionnaires.
- Questions should be meaningful and interesting to the respondent.
- Beware of the *Don't know*, *Undecided* and *Neutral* responses.
- Words like *usually*, *often*, *sometimes*, *occasionally*, *seldom* and *rarely* are *commonly* used in questionnaires, although they may not mean the same thing to all people.
- Some adjectives have high variability, *most*, *numerous*, *a substantial majority*, *a large proportion of*, *many*, etc.
- Some adjectives have low variability, *lots*, *almost all*, *virtually all*, *nearly*, *all*, *a small number of*, *not very many of*, *almost none*, etc.

Ten tips

1. What are you trying to find out?
2. How are you going to use the information?
3. Telephone, postal, web, face-to-face?
4. Qualitative or quantitative?
5. Keep to the point.
6. Use simple and direct language.
7. Begin with something general.
8. Place the most important questions in the first half of the questionnaire.
9. Leave enough space to record the answers.
10. Test your questionnaire on your colleagues.