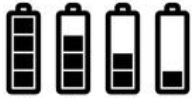


Survey Design Tips and Tricks



Each respondent has a finite amount of power for your survey. Your goal is to get the information you need before they run out of power. This document outlines just a few of the most important tips and tricks to maximize your survey's potential.

COMMON QUESTION TYPES

Multiple Choice: These questions provide a finite list of response choices for respondents to select from. They take less energy for respondents than open-ended questions but can alienate respondents if their preferred response is not available or represented multiple times. Use these questions when you can fully enumerate (nearly) all the possible responses (without overlap between responses) but want to understand the distribution of responses.

Select One: Use when only one response can logically apply at a time.

e.g., How did you first learn about Vantage Evaluation?

Select All That Apply: Use when multiple responses can logically apply.

e.g., How did you learn about Vantage Evaluation?

Best practice: Always include an “other” option with a text box to capture responses that do not fit into an existing option

Scales: These questions ask respondents to select a single rating along a continuum of equally spaced options. These questions have a high risk of “socially desirable” responses, for example, when respondents mark “5” to a whole series of scale questions. Use these questions when a scale can capture differentiation in an emotional response to a concrete program aspect. Scales capture a raw rating—if you instead want a relative rating of a group of items, consider a **Ranking** question.

e.g., How satisfied are you with the survey design workshop overall?

(1 = not at all satisfied, 5 = highly satisfied)

Best practice: Always use the same scale direction and remind respondents (does 1 mean high or low?)

Open-ended: These questions do not provide any prepopulated response options, rather ask respondents to type in their unique answer. They take more energy for respondents than a multiple choice question but can paint a more rich, complete picture of respondents' experiences. Use these questions when you cannot enumerate possible responses and/or wish to capture rich description of respondents' opinions or experiences.

e.g., Looking back, what could the survey design workshop have done better to prepare you to write high quality surveys?

Best practice: Always write questions that are truly open ended. Yes/no questions will not generate informative responses.

QUESTION WORDING

Will the respondent understand the question in the same way the writer wanted it to be understood?

- Avoid double-barreled questions that combine two questions
e.g., In a typical week, how often did you interact with your research supervisor and your peers?
- Avoid leading questions
e.g., How good was the training program?
- Be careful with negatively worded questions
e.g., Do you not like research as much as you did before the program?
- **Use simple, concise, and clear language**

SURVEY STRUCTURE

- **Use mandatory questions sparingly, if at all.** “Are the responses to the rest of the survey worthless without the response to this question?” Only make the question mandatory if the answer is yes. If a respondent comes across a mandatory question they do not want to answer, they will drop out, and you will lose the responses to all subsequent questions.
- **Be aware of how early questions can influence answers to subsequent questions.** Questions and responses can prime respondents by narrowing the scope of their thought process. Think through the order of questions and what question flow makes logical sense. For example, start with broad questions about the program before narrowing to specific program aspects.
- **Put the most important content first.** Sometimes survey respondents drop out. Put things like demographics last so that you increase the likelihood that you capture the most important information even from partial responses.
- **Cautiously ask sensitive questions.** Universally, be respectful of respondents time and only ask questions when you will use the information. This is doubly important when the question is sensitive or personal, for example, income level.