

Survey Tips

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Content guidelines

- ▶ Prioritize the information you *need*
- ▶ Avoid assessing *trivial* questions
 - Do not ask for information unless you can act upon it! (Fink & Kosecoff, 1998)
 - Do not ask what you don't need to know
 - If everyone will respond the same way, you really don't learn that much
- ▶ To research *future behavior*, try couching questions in scenarios or past situations

Items: Basic Style and Format Tips

- ▶ Avoid excess words – be succinct!
- ▶ Use specific, appropriate vocabulary
- ▶ Avoid bias (age, ethnicity, gender, disabilities)
- ▶ Underline and bold negative or other important words
- ▶ Have others review your items!
- ▶ Proofread, proofread, proofread!

Items: Tips for Writing the Stem

- ▶ Each question should be meaningful to respondents
- ▶ Specific questions provide specific information
- ▶ Keep the stem as short as possible
- ▶ Place the main idea of the question in the stem, not the item options
- ▶ Don't provide clues to a response you're looking for (e.g., grammatical clues)
- ▶ Don't use negative stems too frequently

Items: Tips for Writing Response Options

- ▶ Develop as many effective options as possible, but three are sufficient (Rodriguez, 2005)
 - Better to have fewer options than to write BAD options to meet some quota!
- ▶ Keep options independent
- ▶ Keep options similar (in format)
- ▶ Use “all of the above” and “none of the above” sparingly!
- ▶ Use “always” or “never” sparingly!

Items: Response Scales

- ▶ Ordinal rating scales that measure attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs (Rosenthal, 2006)
- ▶ Use at least four–five options
- ▶ Describe each option with words whenever possible
- ▶ Use a middle option when appropriate
- ▶ If you think there will be a “ceiling” or “floor” effect, use more options; beware of “neutral” effect as well

Items: Response Scales

- ▶ **Frequency:**
Always → Never
- ▶ **Likelihood:**
Definitely Like Me → Not at all Like Me
Always True of Me → Never True of Me
- ▶ **Proficiency:**
Excellent → Extremely Poor
- ▶ **Importance:**
Very Important → Unimportant
- ▶ **Agreement:**
Completely Agree → Completely Disagree
- ▶ **Amount** (good for confidence questions):
All → None

Pulling it all Together: Order

- ▶ Use item order to get the most accurate responses possible
- ▶ Start with “ease-in” items. Starting with tough/challenging items will increase the abandon rate.
- ▶ If its long –put important items first
- ▶ Keep a logical order: There is no advantage to having survey items totally randomized.
- ▶ Intersperse different item types – you don’t want all the open-ended items at the end.
- ▶ Whenever possible, leave demographic items until the end.

Pulling it all Together: Length

- ▶ Keep it as short as possible!
- ▶ Combine questions when you can to give appearance of being shorter (e.g. Matrix)
- ▶ People tend to tune-out after 15 minutes; less for Web-based surveys.
- ▶ Remember: While its nice to ask some questions for future research, don't sacrifice length to gather data you won't be using

SurveyMonkey (or any on-line tool)

Tips

- ▶ Pilot using the on-line tool, download data to make sure coding is correct
- ▶ Put words with scales
- ▶ Combine questions when possible into Matrix
- ▶ Use page settings appropriately to break up survey but don't make it too long
- ▶ Explore all options settings
- ▶ Important your email lists (if possible), helps with tracking and follow-ups
- ▶ Can probably do just about anything you need it do, if you can't figure it out use their help tool or ask someone