

Types of Questions

- Closed ended – Participants choose, among a list of possible choices, the response option that best reflects their opinions.
- Open ended – Participants are not given a list of response options, but rather are asked to answer the question in their own words.
- Combination of closed and open-ended (e.g., provide an “other” option which participants can define).

Types of Response Options for Close Ended Survey Questions

- Dichotomous (e.g., yes – no)
- Multiple Choice - Choose one response option (e.g., How would you characterize your political views?)
- Multiple Choice - Select multiple responses (e.g., Select all the factors you consider when choosing a college)
- Likert Rating Scale (e.g., Participants are asked to indicate their level of agreement with a statement on a defined scale)
- Ranking (e.g., Rank in order of importance the factors that influenced your decision to attend this college)

Advantages to Using Surveys

- Easy to administer and can be administered remotely (mail, e-mail, telephone)
- Relatively inexpensive
- Can reach a large number of people in a short amount of time
- Typically yield quantitative data that is easy to analyze
- Can cover a variety of topics in a brief amount of time
- Candid responses

Disadvantages to Using Surveys

- Response options may not capture participants’ true opinions
- Cannot provide clarification
- May suffer from low response rates
- Limited sample – with online surveys, the sample of participants is limited to those with a computer and internet access

Tips for Designing Surveys

Survey questions should:

- Be clear and concise
- Be specific (i.e., cannot be interpreted in more than one way)
- Be free of jargon
- Not use acronyms
- Avoid using universals such as “all”, “always”, “none”, and “never”
- Avoid using words such as “only”, “just”, “merely”, and others of a similar nature

Tips for avoiding response bias:

- **Do not use double-barreled questions**
 - Example: Do you think professors should have more contact with university staff and university administrators?
 - Clearly, this question asks about two different issues:
 1. contact with staff, AND,
 2. contact with administrators.Combining the two questions into one question makes it unclear which attitude is being measured.

Tip: If the word “and” appears in a question, check to verify whether it is a double-barreled question.

- **Make sure questions are not leading or loaded**
 - Example: Don’t you agree that the University would benefit from converting to a test-score optional admissions policy?
 - The phrase “Don’t you agree” leads the respondent. A more neutral wording would be: Do you believe the University would benefit from converting to a test-score optional admissions policy?
- **Avoid using double negatives**
 - Example: It is not true that the University does not support its students.
 - The use of negative words like “not” in survey questions can be confusing for respondents.
- **Reverse the wording in some questions to guard against the tendency to answer all questions in the same way (this phenomenon is often called a “response bias”)**
 - Explanation: People have a tendency to answer in the affirmative. To ensure you are getting discriminating responses, it is best to ask at least one question phrased in an opposite manner. In the example below, the first three statements are phrased positively, while the fourth one is worded negatively.
 - Example: Please express your level of agreement with the following statements:
 - This program was helpful.
 - This program achieved its goals.
 - This program was organized well.
 - This program was a waste of time.

Tips for designing response categories:

- Include a response of “No Opinion”/“Not Applicable” when appropriate.
- Avoid overlapping response categories – response categories should be mutually exclusive.
- Response categories should be exhaustive – they should include all relevant options.
- Using the same response categories for multiple questions makes it easier to compare results between questions.