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”)**
  - 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.