

SURVEY TIPS

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Completing a survey requires effort on the part of a respondent. If survey questions are too difficult, or a survey is too long, people will have to work hard to provide accurate answers. The harder they work, the more tired they get, and the less accurate their answers will be. Short surveys with simple, clear questions will generate the most useful data. The following are some general guidelines that will help produce effective surveys with simple and clear questions.

Survey Introduction

- Briefly state the nature, purpose, and length of the survey.
- Indicate who is being asked to complete the survey (people are more likely to participate if they think they are one of a select group).
- Let people know how their answers will be used, and that their answers will be used.

Question Content

- Make the first question intrinsically interesting and meaningful to the customer.
- Ask about only one concept per question.
- Avoid using examples to describe question content.
- Use the fewest words necessary to ask a question.
- Use words with three or fewer syllables.
- Use common language without jargon, acronyms, subtle nuances, and vague terms.

Response Options

- Use the fewest and simplest words needed to define each response option.
- Make sure response options are mutually exclusive and exhaustive.
- Limit scalar response to 6 or 7 options.
- Use “very much”, “a lot”, or “completely” instead of “extremely” in response scale anchors.
- Use an odd number of options for bipolar scales (i.e. the scale ranges from one high value to another high value, such as from “Strongly Support” to “Strongly Oppose”).
- Use an even number of response options for unipolar scales (i.e. the scale ranges from a low value to a high value, such as from “Not At All” to “Completely”).
- Use the same response scale for several questions when possible.
- Attach labels to each response scale option.
- Limit response categories to 10 or fewer options.

Open-ended Questions

- Open-ended response option boxes (for Web surveys) should be reasonably small.
- Use open-ended formats when asking for numerical responses (e.g. “How many times...”).

Question Sequence and Timing

- Ask if a person has done participated in an activity before asking for opinions about the activity; or, include “have not...” as a response option.
- Ask about an activity shortly after the person completes the activity.
- Separate a general question (e.g. “overall satisfaction”) from a set of similar but more specific questions (e.g. “satisfaction with specific functions”).

After Building the Survey

- Try to rewrite each question using fewer words, conjunctions, and punctuation.
- Proofread for logical and grammatical errors.
- Solicit feedback from a survey expert.