

Designing Quality Surveys

Susan Fox-Forrester, Student Life Studies
November 12, 2014

Today's Outcomes

- Following today's session, participants will be able to:
 - Determine when to develop a home grown survey
 - Create basic survey questions
 - Describe good practices in survey design



When to use a survey

- Assessment options—a few examples
 - *Focus group/interview*—provide deep and narrow information from a small number of people
 - *Portfolio*—demonstrate skill or knowledge area
 - *Reflective journal*—show thought processes and critical thinking skills
 - *Survey*—provide wide and shallow information for a large number of people



Questions to Ask Before Starting

- What do you really need to know? (not just what is interesting or nice to know)
- How do you plan to use the information for improvement?
- What data analysis do you expect to do?
- Is there a national or other instrument available (and cost effective)?
- Is there a sense of ownership for the



Constructing a Survey

- Introduction (most of this may be in the cover letter)
 - Purpose, use of information, deadline, importance of their participation, time required, instructions, sponsor, contact information
- Content
 - Start with easy but interesting questions first, ask demographics last
- Conclusion
 - Thanks, when/if results available, contact information, resources



Creating Survey Questions

- Yes/No Questions
 - Typically, these are questions with only two possible responses.
 - Determine if there are other possible responses such as “don’t know” or “maybe” that need to be included.
 - Example:
 - **Are you currently enrolled in 12 or more hours at this university?**
 - Yes
 - No



Creating Survey Questions (cont.)

- **Checklists/Choose One/Choose Many**

- Questions consist of a question followed by a list of choices.
- The stem should ask a complete sentence and the task should be clear.
- Choices should be mutually exclusive.
- Order responses logically.

- Example:

What was your PRIMARY reason for living on campus? (choose one)

- Convenient location
- Low cost
- Proximity to dining hall
- My parents wanted me to
- Safety
- Other:

- This example could also be phrased as:

What were your reasons for choosing to live on campus? (check all that apply)



Sample Question 2

- How many times have you used TAMU Pathways System in the last year?
 - 1-10 times
 - 10-20 times
 - Daily
 - Not at all



Sample Question 3

- Which of the following is not an example of a non-example of a research method?
 - Surveys
 - Wikipedia
 - Podcasts
 - Slideshows



Creating Survey Questions(cont.)

- Likert-type Rating Scales
 - The responses to these questions range from one end of a spectrum to the other.
 - Determine whether you want a “neutral” middle response or a forced choice.
 - Determine whether you want/need “don’t know,” “undecided,” or “not applicable” responses.
 - Example:
I can articulate the health resources on campus.
 Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree



Sample Question 4

- Community organizing is hard. Do leadership trainings help you feel prepared for community organizing?
 - Much more prepared
 - Somewhat more prepared
 - Slightly more prepared
 - Not more prepared



Creating Survey Questions (cont.)

- Rankings

- The respondent is asked to number a series of responses according to some criteria.
- Make sure the directions are complete and the ranking criteria is specified.
- Keep the list no longer than ten items.
- Specify if you want all, or just some, of the items ranked (i.e., the top three).
- Responses do not tell you the relative distance between items.

- Example:

Please rank each item below to indicate your perception of the importance of each service (even if you have not used the service) with “1” as the most important and “5” as the least important.

- ___ Career Services
- ___ Health and Wellness Center
- ___ Counseling Services
- ___ Tutoring Center
- ___ Study Abroad Office



Creating Survey Questions (cont.)

- Open Ended Questions

- These allow respondents to answer in their own words.
- The amount of space allotted for the answer should provide an indication of the expected response length.
- Example:

How will you apply what you learned from this session?



Demographics

- Ask only if you plan to use it for analysis
- Explain why you are asking the questions
- Numerous ways to ask the questions
- Example:
 - **Age:**
 - **In what year were you born?**
 - **Age:**
 - Younger than 18
 - 18-21
 - 22-25
 - Older than 25



Words and Questions

- Make sure the question applies to the respondent (use branching/filter questions)
- Make sure the question is technically accurate
- Ask one question at a time
- Avoid jargon
- Use specific and concrete words
- Use complete sentences
- Be sure the question specifies the response task



Sample Question 1

- In your opinion, how would you rate the speed and accuracy of your work?
 - Excellent
 - Good
 - Fair
 - Poor



Some Practical Issues

- **Survey fatigue/timing**—sampling, campus calendar, day of the week, repeating surveys
- **Self report data**—accuracy, truthfulness
- **Ethics**—know and follow institution's guidelines
- **Pilot Survey**—have a few people test it before fully implementing it
- **Using the data**—plan ahead, involve stakeholders



References

- Roberts, D. (2012, June). Developing Quality Surveys. *Student Life Studies Brown Bag Series*. Lecture conducted from Texas A&M University, College Station, TX.
- Dillman, D. A., Smyth, J. D., & Christian, L. M. (2009). *Internet, mail, and mixed-mode surveys: The tailored design method* (3rd ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.
- Porter, S. R. (Ed.). (2004). *Overcoming survey research problems*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Rea, L. M., & Parker, R. A. (1997). *Designing and conducting survey research* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Suskie, L. A. (1996). *Questionnaire survey research: What works* (2nd ed.). Tallahassee, FL: Association for Institutional Research.
- Umbach, P. D. (Ed.). (2005). *Survey research: Emerging issues*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.





Department of Student Life Studies

222 Koldus Bldg, 862-5624

sls@tamu.edu

<http://studentlifestudies.tamu.edu>



TEXAS A&M
UNIVERSITY.