

Thank you for joining the Student Life Studies assessment podcast. Our goal is to educate people about assessment resources and topics, so they can more easily incorporate assessment into their daily lives. Feel free to contact Student Life Studies by calling 979-862-5624, emailing sls@tamu.edu, or coming by 222 John J. Koldus Building. Let's get on with the podcast.

Today, I want to provide some tips for designing good survey questions, one of my favorite assessment activities. By no means will this be an exhaustive list, but it will help you get started and avoid a few pitfalls along the way.

Before you even start thinking about specific questions, create a strong purpose statement that will guide question development. Keep that purpose statement handy, so you can compare each survey question to the purpose statement. This exercise keeps you focused to create relevant, valuable questions. It can be really easy to get off track when you begin to create questions. Your purpose statement stops you from going down an extraneous path and creating a really long survey that no one is interested in.

In addition, you need to continuously consider your target audience for the survey. Think about the survey from their perspective. You want to make it as easy as possible for them to answer the questions correctly and quickly. They are giving you the gift of time and opinion, so your job is appreciate that by making an interesting, understandable, brief survey.

As you begin to create questions, also think about the order of questions and flow through the whole survey. Move from easiest to harder. Typically include quantitative questions first before moving to open-ended qualitative questions because the quicker quantitative questions can serve as a warm-up to more in-depth thinking-required qualitative questions. Cluster like questions together, so respondents see the connection and can respond easily. Typically, put demographic questions at the end

of the survey, so you can gather the important information first if respondents stop answering the survey part way through.

There are several common survey question types: Yes/No, choose one, choose all that apply, ratings, rankings, and open ended. With all of them, wording is incredibly important. Yes/no questions are the simplest—either the condition exists or it doesn't. But, it's not always that easy. You may need to include a "don't know" or "maybe" option. Be sure that your question can actually be answered in a yes/no format.

Choose one questions provide a list, and respondents are asked to choose one item on that list. The list should be in some logical order such as amount or numeric value—think of age range or time spent in an activity. Putting a list in alphabetical order may also make sense. As an example, if you were asked which state you lived in, you would not want to see them in a random order. You might have a chronological list as well. Think of months of the year or days of the week. We expect those options to be in a familiar order.

In a choose all that apply question, you are asking respondents to pick one or more items from a list provided. Be sure that the list has a manageable number items for respondents to digest. You may also want to instruct the respondents to check up to three items, for example, so they don't just pick all of them. Consider including an "other" write-in option, in case respondents don't see an option that they think should be included.

Rating scale questions are very common. For example, if you have eaten at a restaurant, or ordered something online, you have probably seen some sort of customer service survey. The ratings may be on a scale of excellent to poor, strongly agree to strongly disagree, or always to never, for example. Respondents are providing a value along a continuum. The length of the scale should be taken

into consideration, so that it is not so granular that it loses meaning, but not too few that don't differentiate strength of opinions.

Rankings give you an order of preference. They are similar to ratings, but they do not give you the strength of the preference. Think of some sort of race: NASCAR, the three-legged race at the company picnic, or some Olympic sports. What you get is first, second, and third place, but it may not matter the distance between first and second, and second and third finishers.

Open-ended, or qualitative, questions let respondents reply in their own words, rather than picking from options provided. Be sure that these questions are truly worded to gather more than one word responses. Rather than asking, "Did you learn something from the speaker?", which can be answered with a yes or no, it would make more sense to ask something like "What did you learn from the speaker?"

That's a quick overview of designing survey questions. There are many more considerations, depending on how you are collecting data, from whom, and when. As with many assessment skills, practice makes better and this is a team sport. Be sure to seek out colleagues, students, or others to help you in the process. A well-designed survey can give you actionable and useful information from a large group of people in a relatively short period of time.

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