

Tips on Writing Good Survey Questions*

You have several format options when creating survey questions. The type of question depends on the information you want to collect and the specificity of that information. Each type has advantages and disadvantages.

Yes/No Questions

These are questions with only two possible responses.

- Be sure that there are not other possible responses.
- Determine whether you need a “don’t know” or “maybe” response.

Example: Are you currently enrolled at Texas A&M? Yes No

Multiple Choice and Checklist Questions

These questions consist of a question followed by a list of answers to choose from.

- The stem should ask a complete sentence, even if it is phrased as an incomplete sentence.
- Limit the choice to about five or six.
- Your choices should be mutually exclusive.
- If there is a dominant response that you’re not interested in, include it in the stem (Aside from the food, what would you improve about Camp?).
- Order the responses logically—numerically if the answers are numbers.

Example: What was your primary reason for choosing to live on campus?

- Convenient location
- Lower cost
- Wanted to meet people
- Safety and security
- My parents wanted me to
- Etc. ...

If this was in checklist format, the stem might read, “What were your reasons for choosing to live on campus? (Check all that apply)”. Or you could say, “Check the top THREE reasons for choosing to live on campus.”

Likert Rating Scales

The responses to these questions range from one end of the spectrum to the other.

- Determine whether you want a “neutral” middle response or forced choice.
- Determine whether you want a “Don’t know”/“Undecided” response.
- Determine whether you need a “Not Applicable” response.

Example: (Scale: 5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=neutral, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree)

The instructor spoke clearly.	5	4	3	2	1
I turned in homework on time.	5	4	3	2	1

Open Ended Questions

These questions allow respondents to formulate their own response, rather than choose from a list.

- The amount of space allotted for a response should provide an indication of the expected response length.

Example: What did you learn from this activity?

Rankings

The respondent is asked to number responses according to some criteria.

- Make sure the directions are complete and the criteria for ranking are clearly specified.
- Keep the list no longer than ten items.
- Clarify if you want all items ranked or just, say, the top three.

Example: Please rank each item below to indicate your favorite ice cream flavors, with "1" as your most favorite and "5" as your least favorite.

- ___ Chocolate
- ___ Cookies and Cream
- ___ Peanut Butter Swirl
- ___ Raspberry Cheesecake
- ___ Vanilla

Ecosystem Rating Scales

You might want to understand the satisfaction of something as well as its importance, so you might be asking two questions about one concept.

- Have very clear directions for the rating scales.

Example: (Scale: 4=very high, 3=somewhat high, 2=somewhat low, 1=very low.)

How well did your coursework in Educational Psychology prepare you in:

	satisfaction	importance
Learning Theories	_____	_____
Child Development	_____	_____
Etc.	_____	_____

*From *Questionnaire Survey Research: What Works*, 2nd Edition. Linda Suskie, Association for Institutional Research, 1996.

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