

Handout

Writing Good Questions¹

Tips

1. Make sure your question is one dimensional (i.e., asks about one issue).
2. Check that your response options are all inclusive *but* mutually exclusive.
3. Be sure your question has no presuppositions about your respondents (e.g., their knowledge about an online resource).
4. Check that the question does not imply a desired response or imply that certain options are more socially desirable.
5. Avoid rank-ordered questions; use rating scales instead.
6. For rating scales
 - Label for each response value.
 - Use 5-point scales if you believe the respondents may have no opinion in either direction (positive or negative) about the issue under question. Use terms like “neutral” or “neither agree or disagree.”
 - Have 4-point scales to force respondents to express a positive or negative position or opinion.
 - Include a “don’t know/not applicable” option.
 - Have an equal balance of positive and negative options. Avoid labeling your mid-point as “fair” or “adequate.” Neither term is completely neutral.
 - Keep question layout linear (vertical or horizontal). Do not double-bank options to save room
7. Group questions by topic
8. Consider the flow of your questions – they should flow logically from one item to the next.

¹ For more information about writing survey questions, see *Planning and Evaluating Health Information Outreach Projects, Booklet 3: Collecting and Analyzing Evaluation Data*, pp 5-9. [<http://nnlm.gov/evaluation/booklets/>] and also *Internet, Mail, and Mixed-Mode Surveys, Third Edition*. Dillman, et al., 2010, pp. 65-233.)