

## **Writing Good Survey Questions Tips & Advice**

Adapted from UCSD Student Research & Information

- Step 1: Establish goals
- Step 2: Develop questions and responses
- Step 3: Pilot test questions
- Step 4: Re-evaluate each question

### General Tips

- A. Identify what you want to learn.
- B. Remove “wouldn’t it be nice to know” questions. Only include questions that directly shed light on what you want to learn.
- C. Know how you will use and present the information.
- D. Remove questions for which a respondent will not have immediate access to the information needed to answer the question (or tell the respondent beforehand what is needed).
- E. Remove questions that a respondent may not be willing to answer.

### Wording Questions

- F. Use clear wording without abbreviations or jargon.
  - G. One issue, skill, ability per question. Split “double-barreled” questions into two questions
    - **Problematic:** I am confident in my ability to write a cover letter and resume.
    - **Better:** I am confident in my ability to write a cover letter.
    - **Better:** I am confident in my ability to write a resume.
- H. Avoid double negatives
  - **Problematic:** I am not incompetent when I am part of a multi-disciplinary team.
    - a) Strongly Disagree    b) Disagree)    c) Neutral    d) Agree    e) Strong Agree •
  - **Better:** I am competent when I am part of a multi-disciplinary team.
    - a) Strongly Disagree    b) Disagree)    c) Neutral    d) Agree    e) Strong Agree
- I. Avoid leading questions
  - **Problematic:** Would you be willing to attend a weekend job fair if it increases your chances of getting a job interview?
  - **Better:** Would you attend a weekend job fair if it were available?
  
  - **Problematic:** To what extent do you agree that opportunities for community service are important to you?
  - **Better:** To what extent do you agree or disagree that opportunities for community service are important to you?

- J. Make questions as specific and concrete as possible
- **Problematic:** I am confident in my ability to communicate effectively.
  - **Better:** I am confident in my ability to present my research findings at a conference.

### Wording Responses

- K. Response alternatives should be exhaustive and mutually exclusive
- **Problematic:** How many conferences did you attend this semester?  
a) 1            b) 2            b) 3            c) 3 or more
  - **Better:** How many conferences did you attend this semester?  
a) 0            b) 1            b) 2            c) 3 or more
- L. Use balanced scales (i.e., equal number of positive and negative response options)
- **Problematic:** How would you rate on-campus apartment housing?  
a) Satisfactory  
b) Good  
c) Excellent
  - **Better:** How would you rate on-campus apartment housing?  
a) Poor  
b) Fair  
c) Good  
d) Excellent
- M. Be careful where you place “No Opinion” or “Unsure.” Usually they should be placed at the end of a scale
- **Problematic:** To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: “Our campus is a safe place to work”?  
a) Strongly Disagree  
b) Disagree  
c) Unsure/No Opinion  
d) Agree  
e) Strongly Agree
  - **Better:** To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: “Our campus is a safe place to work”?  
a) Strongly Disagree  
b) Disagree  
c) Agree  
d) Strongly Agree  
e) Unsure
  - **Better:** To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: “Our campus is a safe place to work”?  
a) Strongly Disagree  
b) Disagree  
c) Neither Agree or Disagree  
d) Agree  
e) Strongly Agree

**Writing Good Survey Questions  
Useful Answer Categories**

**If you want to know how often something occurs, ask for the exact number of times or ask, “how often...” and choose from the following categories:**

Never	Almost Never	Never
Rarely	Occasionally	Almost Never
Occasionally	Sometimes	Sometimes
Regularly	Often	Fairly Often
Don't Know	Don't Know	Very Often

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Never	Not At All
Rarely	Occasionally
Sometimes	Frequently
Most of the Time	
Always	

**If you want to find out the degree of people’s feelings, their attitude, or belief, ask “to what extent...” and choose from the following categories:**

Not Very Effective	Not Very Prepared	Very Dissatisfied
Somewhat Effective	Somewhat Prepared	Dissatisfied
Moderately Effective	Moderately Prepared	Neutral
Very Effective	Well Prepared	Satisfied
Not Sure	Uncertain	Very Satisfied

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Strongly Disagree	Very Poor
Disagree	Poor
Neither Agree or Disagree	Fair
Agree	Good
Strongly Agree	Very Good

**If you want to find out people’s intentions or aspirations ask, “do you expect to...” and ask them to choose from the following categories:**

Definitely No	No Chance
No	Very Little Chance
Uncertain	Unsure
Yes	Some Chance
Definitely Yes	Very Good Chance

**Sources:**

Kiernan, Nancy Ellen (2004). *Useful Categories: Tipsheet #44*, University Park, PA: Penn State Cooperative Extension. Available at <http://extension.psu.edu/Evaluation/pdf/TS44.pdf>  
 Henning, Gavin. *Ordered Response Options*. Dartmouth College. Available at [http://www.dartmouth.edu/~oir/docs/Ordered\\_Response\\_Options.doc](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~oir/docs/Ordered_Response_Options.doc)