

Guidelines for Writing Good Survey Questions

Vikram Koundinya, Associate Professor of Extension & Evaluation Specialist

Conducting a Needs Assessment Training

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1. Questions should be short, simple, and direct.
2. Phrase questions so that they can be understood by every respondent.
3. Do not use abbreviations, slang, or acronyms.
4. Phrase questions to elicit unambiguous answers. Quantify answer choices whenever possible.
5. Phrase questions to avoid bias that may predetermine a respondent's answer.
6. Avoid questions that might be misleading because of unstated assumptions.
7. Avoid leading questions, which imply a desired response.
8. Avoid questions that may elicit embarrassment, suspicion, or hostility in the respondent.
9. Avoid "double-barreled" questions.
10. Avoid random questions. Only include questions related to your objectives or outcomes.
11. Avoid double negatives.
12. Make sure the alternatives to each item are exhaustive – that they express all possible alternatives on the issue.
13. Have answer choices as mutually exclusive.
14. Make sure the respondents have the information necessary to answer the questions.
15. Have equal variation on both sides of a rating scale. Have equally balanced positive and negative answer options.
16. Whenever possible, use a descriptive scale (i.e. too little / about right / too much, instead of "rate ____ on a scale from 1-5").
17. Ensure that the question stem matches the answer choices.
18. Have the number of scale points based on the purpose of the study.
19. Give a timeframe/time range when necessary.
20. For open-ended questions, have an importance prompt and a bigger text box.
21. Write questions in a culturally appropriate manner.
22. Include a question inviting any other comments about the survey.
23. Keep the questionnaire as short as possible.

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