

# Survey Guidelines, Tips, and Resources

**Take time to PLAN YOUR SURVEY.** Bad information is worse than no information at all.

- What is the purpose of your survey? Think about what you want to learn.
- Who is your audience? What do they need/want to know?
- Draft an outline of your report NOW to help guide survey development. Having a clear idea about how you will present your results will help you design the survey in a way that makes it easier for you to talk about the data.

**Define the survey population.** Requires more thought than you might expect.

- Do you need to characterize subgroups separately (e.g., women versus men, young versus old)?
  - Link to records (e.g., gender, class level, race/ethnicity) or ask for the information in the survey.
- If you need the information to write the report, get it.
- Example 1 – survey of students: Undergraduate and graduate? Degree-seeking only? Full-time only? Include professional? If undergraduate, only traditional age? Include international? All class levels? Transfer students?
- Example 2 – survey of faculty: Tenure and tenure track only? Full-time and part-time? Include visiting? TA/GPTI/other students?

## Questionnaire Development

- Use the purpose of the survey to guide decisions about what questions to ask.
- Write clear questions that the respondent can understand and answer. Avoid ambiguous or compound questions.
  - Example
    - Do you think teenagers and the homeless are threats to safety?"
      - Does "no" mean both aren't, but one may be? whose safety?
      - Does "yes" mean these groups are more of a threat than other groups?
      - Better: "How much of a threat to the safety of you and your family do you consider each of the following groups? The homeless--no threat, some, or significant threat? Teenagers?"
- Keep it short but adequate to get the information you need.
- Keep the words simple. Avoid jargon and keep the use of technical terms to a minimum. When you do use a technical term, give a brief definition of it; do not assume that everyone you are surveying understands the term.
- Every question should have a specific purpose. Many people get carried away here. Keep focused. Separate what is "nice" to know from what you "need" to know.
- Consider giving respondents some opportunity to say things in their own words. Comments are useful for enhancing reports and can often lead to discoveries you'd not be able to make from check-off items. Include only a few such items.
- Pilot test the questionnaire with a few people. Have them tell you what they don't understand and the thinking behind their answers.

## Questionnaire Design

- Think of the questionnaire as a "conversation" with respondent. Consider the flow of items.
  - Is the progression through the survey logical; are like items grouped together?
  - How might earlier questions affect answers to questions asked later?
- Make it easy for the respondent to navigate through the survey (arrows, "go to next page," skip patterns, etc.).

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## Data Collection

- Entice cooperation
  - Tell what the benefit is to your client (e.g., benefit to social services agency)
  - Tell what's in it for them (incentives, e.g., lottery drawing? maybe offer to send report of results?)
  - Tell how they can check up on your authenticity, get questions answered, etc.
- Maintain anonymity/confidentiality.
  - In your invitation and on the survey questionnaire itself, let respondents know that you will keep their results confidential/anonymous. If you need to track individual respondents, you can still assure them of confidentiality. Set up a system to ensure confidentiality and make sure that the system is implemented.
- Follow up with non-respondents, e.g., reminder emails.

## Resources from Qualtrics:

<http://www.qualtrics.com/university/researchsuite/survey-building-tips>

<http://www.qualtrics.com/blog/create-online-survey/>

## Other resources:

[http://www.stanford.edu/group/ssds/cgi-](http://www.stanford.edu/group/ssds/cgi-bin/drupal/files/Guides/Tips_for_survey_design_2011.pdf)

[bin/drupal/files/Guides/Tips\\_for\\_survey\\_design\\_2011.pdf](http://www.stanford.edu/group/ssds/cgi-bin/drupal/files/Guides/Tips_for_survey_design_2011.pdf)

[http://psr.iq.harvard.edu/files/psr/files/PSRQuestionnaireTipSheet\\_0.pdf](http://psr.iq.harvard.edu/files/psr/files/PSRQuestionnaireTipSheet_0.pdf)

<http://blog.surveymonkey.com/blog/2012/04/13/10-online-survey-tips/>

<http://brammresearchblog.com/>

<http://home.wmin.ac.uk/srs/SPSS/SPSSStatisticsSurveyTips.pdf>

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