

Developing Effective Surveys

Steps in Survey Building

Creating an effective survey is essential for obtaining the most accurate and relevant information you can collect.

1. Define a Purpose

In order to develop an effective survey, you need to know exactly what information you need to gather, why you need that information, and what will you use the information for after you collect and analyze the data. Clearly outline each of these points before developing your survey and refer to this purpose as you review drafts of the survey, pilot test, and analyze survey data.

2. Make a Plan

With a clear purpose, you can define the steps that need to be taken to create, distribute, and analyze the survey. Consider the following components of your plan:

- a. Survey – Furthermore, the amount of time it takes to complete the survey is a determining factor to take into consideration. Survey length can determine which mode of disseminating the survey would be most appropriate and what kinds of data can be obtained from the survey.
- b. Budget – How much is the process going to cost in terms of money, physical facilities, and personnel.
- c. Participants – Who do you need to collect data from and why? This is one of the most important steps in the process. Start from the purpose and then determine what the demographics of your intended audience is, how many people would be available, and how you can reach them. Consider: target population, sample size, and other factors.
- d. Methods – Plan how you will disseminate the survey to participants (e.g., e-mail, phone calls, mail, etc.). Also, plan for how long you plan on collecting results. What will your deadlines be and how do you determine whether you have collected enough data? With these questions in mind, create a specific plan to follow for collecting data.
- e. Data Analysis/Using Results – After you have collected and analyzed your data, how will you use it? Consider how you will present results to others (if applicable)

3. Creating the Survey

- a. Developing Questions – determine which questions would best address the objectives of the survey
- b. Developing Answer Choices – determine which answer choice format would be best for answering the question and meeting your data needs

4. Disseminating the Survey

- a. Online – fast, convenient, and inexpensive, but may limit access to those who may not have computers or e-mail addresses.
- b. Phone – time consuming and resource heavy, but appropriate for populations who may not have access to internet

- c. Mail – slow, costly method with a low response rate, but appropriate for populations who may not have access to internet
- d. On Location – This method of distributing surveys is convenient and generates high response rates because audience may be captive

5. Data Analysis

- a. Summarizing Data
- b. Reporting Data

Tips for Effective Survey Questions

The following tips demonstrate ways that you can refine survey questions and avoid some common errors.

Keep it Short and Simple

Too lengthy and complex: How many times in a day (in days that you attend class), do you purchase food (including any of the food locations in the Graham Center, in the Markey Station parking lot, in the library, in the vending machines, and any other on-campus location)?

Edited version: How often do you purchase food on campus per day?

Eliminate Leading and Biased Questions

Leading and biased: Research shows that most students prefer dining in an open food court setting rather than in a traditional cafeteria. Do you agree?

Edited version: On a scale from 1 (most preferred) to 5 (least preferred), which dining area setting would you prefer?

Split Questions That Ask Two or More Questions in One

Two questions in one: Do you think that more food venues should be added and what food venues should be added (if yes)?

Edited version: Split question into two separate questions:

- 1) Should more food venues be added to the Graham Center?
- 2) If yes, list the food venues would you like available in GC.

Other Tips

Springly use questions with multiple answers (e.g., list the all of the vendors, circle all that apply, etc.)

Avoid changing the format of the questions too frequently (e.g., Likert rating scales, fill-in the blanks, multiple choice). However, it is good to include multiple formats if to group questions with the same format together within the survey.

Eliminate questions that are not related to your purpose (if you are not going to use it for your research or for improving something, do not ask it)

Use open ended questions if you cannot predict what answers participants would choose.

However, keep in mind that open-ended questions are more prone to getting skipped and take more time to answer than closed-ended questions.

Avoid surveys that take longer than 30 minutes. It takes about 1 minute to answer 3-4 closed-ended questions.

Ask important questions in the first half of the survey. The questions in the last half of the survey are less likely to be answered (especially for longer surveys). Also, if the first questions are perceived as more engaging and important, participants are more likely to continue to later questions.

Resources for Developing Surveys

Step by step guidelines of creating surveys:

<http://www.qualtrics.com/university/how-to-create-a-survey/>

A thorough guide in creating and designing surveys:

<http://www.datacenter.org/research/creatingsurveys/index.htm>

Websites for Creating and Distributing Surveys

Qualtrics very complete tool for creating and disseminating surveys hosted by FIU for all faculty, staff, and students with virtually no restrictions <http://fiu.qualtrics.com/>

Kwik Surveys free website for creating and disseminating surveys with less limits than some of the other popular online tools listed below <http://www.kwiksurveys.com/>

eSurveyspro free survey creation tool that has capacity for unlimited questions, respondents, and surveys, but has limitations on e-mailing surveys <http://www.esurveyspro.com/>

Survey Monkey free online tool with 10 question limit and 100 respondents limit

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/>

Zoomerang similar to Survey Monkey, with a 12 question limit and 100 respondents limit

<http://www.zoomerang.com/>