

Appendix 2 – Advice on Writing Good Surveys

Clearly define the purpose of your survey. Advance planning helps ensure that the survey asks the right questions to meet the objectives and generate useful feedback/data.

Note the purpose of the survey. To ensure focused responses, outline at the beginning of the survey the reason you are asking questions and how you will use the results.

Keep it concise. Draw a mental line between what you "must know" and what would be "interesting to know." There is also a third category of information that "doesn't matter."

Keep it simple. Use plain language that is direct and familiar to the respondents. Avoid jargon or technical terminology – the recommended reading age for any audience is 12 years.

Spell it out. Do not ask questions that assume respondents are familiar with the specifics of the issue. Include details or additional information if necessary. Titles, abbreviations, and product names are often sources of misunderstanding. When in doubt, spell it out.

Start with easy questions. Begin the survey with questions that are likely to be easy to answer to get the respondent involved. Yes/No questions or simple multiple-choice questions are ideal to start with. Rating scales should come later. Open-ended questions usually come last as they give the respondent the opportunity to reflect on the topic throughout the survey.

General before specific. The issues raised in one question can influence how people think about the next question. It's a good idea to ask general questions first and move on to more specific questions later.

Avoid leading questions. You don't want to lead your respondents into answering a certain way based on the wording of the questions. For example, instead of asking, "We have recently upgraded our equipment to world-class levels. What are your thoughts on the world-class equipment?" ask, "What are your thoughts on the changes to our equipment?"

Avoid loaded questions. These types of questions use emotionally charged items like words or stereotypes, which can push respondents towards a specific answer choice.

Use closed questions whenever possible. Specific choices (e.g., Yes or No) make it easier to analyse results. Closed-ended questions can take the form of yes/no, multiple-choice, or rating scale. Open-ended survey questions allow people to answer in their own words and may provide useful qualitative information and insights.

Test your survey. Before you send the survey to real respondents, ask a sample group to take the survey (not people who were involved in creating it). After they've completed it, ask if they had problems understanding any questions or had answers that were not available on the list of choices. It's much easier to change the questionnaire before you send it than after!

Consider sending reminders. While not appropriate for all surveys, sending out reminders can often provide a significant boost in response rates. This is easier with online surveys.