There are no right answers to wrong questions.

—Ursula K. LeGuin
BASIC PRINCIPLES OF GOOD SURVEY QUESTIONS

Good survey questions are essential to collecting good data. The basic principles below are intended to guide the review or creation of high-quality survey questions:

1. Language is simple and direct; questions are free from jargon, acronyms, and ambiguous terms.
2. Each question asks about only one thing at a time.
3. No more than one positive term is used in a question, including its response options.
4. Response options are exclusive; all reasonable answers to a question are included, with an other option if needed.
5. Response options are mutually exclusive; i.e., possible answers do not overlap.
6. Response options in each question avoid both leading and suggestive answers with prompts.
7. Terms used in a questionnaire do not influence a respondent’s thinking or represent a continuum of the same concept (plural or of opposite concepts bipolar).
8. At least one and not applicable are included only when they are reasonable responses.
9. Questions can be readily answered by respondents.
10. Entire questionnaire is as concise as possible; extraneous or duplicate information is omitted from questions, instructions, and communications.
11. All questions are appropriate for all respondents; branching used only when one or more questions are pertinent to only some types of respondents.
12. All questions support the survey’s purpose, which is aligned with a larger research or evaluation question.

ATE PI Conference 2018
**ORDINARY SCALE EXAMPLES**

Ordinal scales - measurement scales for data that have a logical order, but no standard distance between categories. The example below is a table to illustrate the scale of agreement or disagreement. Below are some examples of scales in varying lengths.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGREEMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMPORTANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly Important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Unimportant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**GOOD SURVEY QUESTIONS**

- Good survey questions are generally positive and neutral.
- They should be clear and unambiguous.
- They should be unbiased.
- They should not lead the respondent.
- They should be direct and to the point.
- They should be relevant to the topic.
- They should be concise.
- They should be easy to understand.
The instructional design was appropriate in relation to the workshop objectives and knowledge level of participants.

Strongly disagree  |  Disagree  |  Neither Agree nor Disagree  |  Agree  |  Strongly Agree  |  Don’t Know/Not sure
---|---|---|---|---|---
○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○
The instructional design was appropriate in relation to the workshop objectives and knowledge level of participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
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<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
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**PRINCIPLE 1**
Language is simple and direct; questions are free from jargon, acronyms, and ambiguous terms.

The instructional design was appropriate in relation to the workshop objectives and knowledge level of participants.

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**PRINCIPLE 2**
Each question asks about only one thing at a time.
The instructional design was appropriate in relation to the workshop objectives and knowledge level of participants.

**PRINCIPLE 9**
Questions can be readily answered by respondents.

It will not be difficult for me to apply what I learned.
It will not be difficult for me to apply what I learned.

PRINCIPLE 3
No more than one negative term is used in a question, including its response options.

I am very interested in learning more on this topic.
I am **very interested** in learning more on this topic.

<table>
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<td>○</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

**PRINCIPLE 6**
Response options match question stem; all possible answers make sense with prompt.

The room in which this workshop was conducted was comfortable.

<table>
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<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PRINCIPLE 8**

*Don’t know* and *not applicable* are included only when they are reasonable responses.

What is your role?
- ○ Principal Investigator
- ○ External Evaluator
What is your role?
- Principal Investigator
- External Evaluator

PRINCIPLE 4
Response options are exhaustive; all reasonable answers to a question are included, with an other option if needed.

What is your role?
- Principal Investigator
- External Evaluator
- Co-principal investigator
- Project staff
- Grant specialist
- Other _____________________________

PRINCIPLE 4
Response options are exhaustive; all reasonable answers to a question are included, with an other option if needed.
How long have you been an evaluator?

- 1 year or less
- 1-5 years
- 5-10 years
- 10-15 years
- 15 or more years

**PRINCIPLE 5**
Response options are mutually exclusive, i.e., possible answers do not overlap.
How long have you been an evaluator?

- 1 year or less
- 1-5 years
- 5-10 years
- 10-15 years
- 15 or more years

**PRINCIPLE 11**
All questions are appropriate for all respondents; branching used is when one or more questions are pertinent to only certain types of respondents.

Are you an evaluator?  
- No
- Yes

How long have you been an evaluator?

- 1 year or less
- 1-5 years
- 5-10 years
- 10-15 years
- 15 or more years

**PRINCIPLE 11**
All questions are appropriate for all respondents; branching used is when one or more questions are pertinent to only certain types of respondents.
What is your opinion of the overall quality of this workshop?

- Met my expectations
- Good
- Very good
- Exceeded my expectations

**PRINCIPLE 7**

Terms used in a response scale are consistent and balanced; they either represent a continuum of the same concept (unipolar) or of opposite concepts (bipolar).
What is your opinion of the overall quality of this workshop?

- Met my expectations  *Fair*
- Good
- Very good
- Exceeded my expectations  *Excellent*

**PRINCIPLE 7**
Terms used in a response scale are consistent and balanced; they either represent a continuum of the same concept (unipolar) or of opposite concepts (bipolar).
How satisfied are you with this workshop?

- Not at all Satisfied
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Mostly Satisfied
- Completely Satisfied

4-point scale
Fully anchored
Unipolar
No mid-point

How satisfied are you with this workshop?

- Very Dissatisfied
- Moderately Dissatisfied
- Slightly Dissatisfied
- Neutral
- Slightly Satisfied
- Moderately Satisfied
- Very Satisfied

7-point scale
Fully anchored
Bipolar
With midpoint
How satisfied are you with this workshop?

- 1 – Very Dissatisfied
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10 - Very Satisfied

10-point scale
Partially anchored
Bipolar
No midpoint

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF GOOD SURVEY QUESTIONS

10. Entire questionnaire is as concise as possible; extraneous or duplicate information is omitted from questions, instructions, and communications

Good survey questions are essential to collecting good data. The basic principles below are intended to guide the review or creation of high-quality survey questions:

1. Language is simple and direct; questions are free from jargon, acronyms, and ambiguous terms.
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3. No more than one negative term is used in a question, including its response options.
4. Response options are exhaustive; all reasonable answers to a question are included, with an other option if needed.
5. Response options are mutually exclusive, i.e., possible answers do not overlap.
6. Response options reflect operation since all possible answers are within scope with prompts.
7. Terms used in a questionnaire or any instruction or feedback they offer represent a continuum of the same concept (unipolar) or of opposite concepts (bipolar).
8. Don’t force ‘not applicable’ on questionnaire or responses, especially if any reasonable responses.
9. Questions can be readily answered by respondents.
10. Entire questionnaire is as concise as possible; extraneous or duplicate information is omitted from questions, instructions, and communications.
11. All questions are appropriate for all respondents; branching used is when one or more questions are pertinent to only some types of respondents.
12. All questions support the survey's purpose, which is aligned with a larger research or evaluation question.
12 All questions support the survey’s purpose, which is aligned with a larger research or evaluation question.
Ways to pretest your survey:

- Checklists & assessment tools
- Expert review
- Think-aloud
- Focus group
- Pilot testing

To what extent did this workshop meet your expectations?

- Not at all
- Somewhat
- Mostly
- Completely
DISCUSSION

OTHER RESOURCES

Internet, Phone, Mail, and Mixed-Mode Surveys: The Tailored Design Method by Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2014)
OTHER RESOURCES

Designing Quality Survey Questions
by Robinson & Leonard (2018)

OTHER RESOURCES

More online resources at:

bit.ly/ATEPI