Writing Questions & Designing Survey Questionnaires

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Learning Outcomes

By the end of this presentation, you will:

- Be able to articulate the purpose for your survey and your main research question.
- Know the different types of questions and how they are structured.
- Have a better understanding of principles that guide question writing for surveys.
- Learn what considerations to take into account when writing questions and designing surveys.
Constructing a Survey Instrument

- Two Major Purposes for Surveys
  - Formal research
  - Informal inquiry

- Two Major Types of Surveys
  - Questionnaires (by paper, phone, by mail, technology/web-based)
  - Interviews (by phone or face-to-face)

- Three Key Considerations for Writing Questions
  - Determining the content, scope, and purpose
  - Choosing the response format for collecting information
  - Wording the question to get at the issue of interest
Asking Survey Questions

- What is the purpose?
  - To determine students’ level of satisfaction with Welcome Week programs and events.

- Have you identified a research question?
  - “Did students’ knowledge of campus resources increase as a result of participation in Welcome Week?”

- How will you collect data and analyze/use the results?
  - Via StudentVoice, use results to improve programs

- What are resources for writing questions?
  - Inquire among content experts and in relevant literature
  - Ask colleagues with related interests for guidance – both at UC San Diego and at other campuses
Asking Survey Questions

- What is the purpose of your assessment project?
- What is your research question?
- How will you collect data and analyze/use the results?
- Take a few minutes to draft a purpose statement, research question, and method for collecting data and using results.
- Share with a partner and give each other feedback.
Types of Questions

- **Structured or fixed-response questions**
  - Structured questions are questions that offer the respondent a closed set of responses from which to choose.

- **Partially structured questions**
  - You may have a partial list of answer choices, but may still have some doubt or uncertainty about other possible responses.

- **Non-structured or open questions**
  - Non-structured questions, or open-ended questions, are questions where there is no list of answer choices from which to choose. Respondents are simply asked to write their response to a question.
Types of Questions

- Dichotomous Response Formats
  - Please enter your student status:
    - Undergraduate
    - Graduate
  - Do you believe UC San Diego students are satisfied with their social experience?
    - Yes
    - No
Types of Questions

- Structured Questions Based on Level of Measurement
  - *Ordinal Response Format*
    Please rank the following UC San Diego social events from best to worst (1=best; 4=worst)
    - Welcome Week
    - Sun God
    - Fall Fest
    - Marshallpalooza
  
  - *Interval Level Response Format*
    Sun God contributes in positive ways to UC San Diego’s social life. (1=strongly agree; 5=strongly disagree)
    1 2 3 4 5
Filter or Contingency Questions

- Have you ever attended an event at the Loft?
  - Yes, I love the Loft!
  - No, because all I do is study!
- If no, continued to Question #2. If yes, how many times did you attend an event in the past six months?
  - Once
  - 2-5 times
  - 6-10 times
  - 11-20 times
  - More than 20 times
Types of Questions

- Partially-structured questions
  - What activities are you involved in outside of your academic coursework (check all that apply)?
    - Leadership development program
    - On- or off-campus internship or job
    - Study abroad
    - Community service
    - Other _______________________

- Unstructured or open-ended questions
  - Please comment on your overall experience at Transfer Orientation.
    __________________________________________________________________________
    __________________________________________________________________________
    __________________________________________________________________________
    __________________________________________________________________________
Is the question necessary and/or useful?
- “Does the question I ask address the research question(s)?”

Are several questions needed?
- “How would you rate your RA training experience and the food?”

Does the question imply causation?
- “Do you feel that the new format for RA training caused an increase in your knowledge of campus resources?”

Is the question ambiguous and need to be more specific?
- “How did RA training contribute to the development of your communication skills?”

Is the question biased or loaded?
- “Do you feel the hard-working and dedicated Resident Assistants should get priority registration for classes?”
Question Content

- Does the question ask for secondhand information?
  - “How do you think your fellow Resident Assistants feel about their experience working as an RA?”

- What assumptions does the question make?
  - “Have you used services provided by Counseling & Psych Services?”

- Is the time frame specified?
  - “How has the Residential Life Staff contributed to your student experience?”

- Does the question contain hidden contingencies?
  - “How has your role as a Resident Advisor contributed to your Sixth College experience?”

- Is the question free of technical jargon or acronyms?
  - “Please rate your knowledge of the role of CSOs in residential living.”
Questionnaire Design

- Clearly mark the beginning and end of survey.
- Instructions should be placed where they are needed.
- Order questions consecutively and from top to bottom, left to right.
- Use a consistent background and font type, color and size.
- Use large and bold font for questions.
- Use color shading to show groupings or to distinguish between questions.
- Use shading or spacing to show groupings by topic.
A Checklist of Considerations

- **Question Placement**
  - Answers may be influenced by prior questions (aka, carryover effect).
  - Question placement may influence level of interest in responding.
  - Question may not receive sufficient attention from respondent.

- **You Can Use the Following to Review Your Survey:**
  - Start with easy, relevant, nonthreatening questions (sets the tone).
  - Put more difficult, threatening or sensitive questions near the end.
  - Leave open-ended questions until later in the survey.
  - Demographic questions should be asked last.
  - Ask about one topic at a time and organize accordingly.
  - When switching topics, use a transition statement.
  - Thank the respondent for their time.
References

Writing Survey Questions

Questions and Comments

For more information, please contact us!
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