

# Forming Survey Questions

## 1.) Create a list of everything you want to know

- Where people live
- Gender
- Class and ethnic background
- Immigration history
- Family makeup
- Jobs and work
- Living conditions
- Working conditions

## 2.) Arrange them thematically

- Demographics
- police/community relations
- Education and schools
- Healthcare
- Housing

**An important survey design principle:** As you design the types of questions you will use, imagine the potential answers you will generate and how you will analyze the data you collect.

## How to Form Questions

| <b>Designing a closed-ended question</b>   | <b>Use Non-leading questions</b>   |
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| <p>Weak: How do you feel about the police?</p> <p>Strong: Which of the following best describe your feelings about the police?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a) trust</li><li>b) neutral</li><li>c) fear</li></ul> | <p>Leading: Do you think the police are doing a bad job?</p> <p>Non-leading: How would you rate police performance in providing safety in your neighborhood?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a) good</li><li>b) average</li><li>c) bad</li></ul> |

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| <b>One-Dimensionality</b><br>Avoid questions with more than one dimension | Consider the types of questions needed to generate substantive answers |
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|--|------------------|
| Weak: Do you feel you cannot travel freely due to your immigration status? | Open ended?      |
| Strong: Two separate, one-dimensional questions                            | Multiple Choice? |
| Do you feel you cannot travel freely?                                      | Ratings?         |
| If Yes, is this due to your immigration status?                            |                  |

### Types of Questions

Example: A group wants to know the frequency of visits to its website by its constituents.

How often do you visit our website? \_\_\_\_\_

The respondent may answer “a lot” or “once in a while.” These answers don't provide specific information. The next two questions set up a more specific response.

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On average, how many times a month do you visit our website? \_\_\_\_\_

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In the last month, how often did you visit our website?

A) More than once a day  
 B) Once a day  
 C) Once a week  
 D) 1-2 times a month  
 E) Rarely or never

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On a scale from 1 to 5 (one being rarely, five at least once a day), how often in the last week did you visit our website? \_\_\_\_\_

### More TIPS on Forming Survey Questions

- 1.) **Keep it Neutral.** “How poorly is the president doing on job creation?” is not a neutral question. “How would you rate the president’s performance on job creation?” 1) Very Good 2) Good 3) Average 4) Bad 5) Very Bad-- gives the respondent the opening to make her or his own judgment.
- 2.) **Mix it up.** Survey-takers tend to respond to serial questions habitually. If you ask five “yes/no” questions in a row, they may repeat their most common answer- even if it doesn't apply!
- 3.) **Vary the types of questions.** A multiple choice can be followed by a yes/no; then a ranking question (rate 1 through 5) or a content-related question. 10 yes/no

questions in a row can give you 10 “yes” answers even though the respondent meant to say “no” to several of the questions!

- 4.) **Avoid questions that can be answered with "I don't know."**
- 5.) **Ensure that your questions are designed consistently.** Avoid broad questions such as “How often you do you read the magazine?” Rather “In the last six months, how often did you read the magazine?” You would design all frequency-based questions with this type of clause.
- 6.) **Do not combine two questions into one.**
- 7.) **Try to avoid designing questions with multiple answers.** For example a question that begins with “circle all that apply” will be more difficult to work with when you are analyzing data.

### **More Tips about the Survey Framework**

- ✓ First questions are “warm up” questions that are non-invasive, easily answered. This can build trust.
- ✓ Follow immediately with important questions; don’t leave these toward the end of the survey.
- ✓ 30 minutes or less is appropriate time for a survey.