Best Practices in Survey Design

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You've decided that a survey is the best method for gathering data. Below are some recommendations and suggestions to help you design your survey and get the best results possible.

Who will be completing the survey?

Think carefully about who will take the survey and be in your sample. Most surveys should be written in plain language, with a reading level of 8 or lower (try the Hemingway Editor, www.hemingwayapp.com.) You may need to translate the survey and decide what type of format (online, paper, or a combination) works best for your respondents.

How will you get enough responses?

Your response rate (the number of people who completed the survey divided by the number in the sample, seen as a percentage) should be, at a minimum, between 30% to 50%. Your responses represent the group that completed the survey, and the rate should be reported. To get more responses, customize the message to your audience, keep the survey short, and/or use an incentive.

What types of questions will be asked?

Only ask questions on the survey if you plan to use the results, whether good or bad. There are many kinds of question types, including open-ended, multiple choice, ranking, etc. Open-ended questions, while a rich source of information, will require additional effort to interpret responses. Other question options are easier to analyze and may allow for results to be reported faster. Avoid "leading" questions and keep each question to one topic.

What else should be included in the survey?

Keep your respondents well-informed. They should be told how much time it will take to complete the survey, who to contact with questions, how the results will be used, and if results will be confidential or anonymous. If asking for demographic information, inform your respondents why this particular data is being collected.

How will you share results?

Respondents should be given the final results (report, presentation, summary, etc.). Remember to protect your respondents' identities and suppress any information that could identify specific respondents.

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The following is a list of potential resources when creating and implementing a survey. The list is not exhaustive and is meant as a starting point during the initial planning process.

Free survey options
- Google Forms: forms.google.com
- Qualtrics: https://www.qualtrics.com/free-account/
- Survey Monkey: https://www.surveymonkey.com/

Best practices for surveys
- 11 Tips for Building Effective Surveys: https://www.qualtrics.com/blog/10-tips-for-building-effective-surveys/
    - *Short guide for developing a survey*
- 25 Ways to Increase Survey Response Rates: https://www.snapsurveys.com/blog/25-ways-increase-survey-response-rates/
    - *Easy-to-use tips and tricks on how to increase your responses*
- Questionnaire Design: https://www.pewresearch.org/methods/u-s-survey-research/questionnaire-design/
    - *A more detailed look at survey design from Pew Research*
- Tip Sheet on Question Wording: https://psr.iq.harvard.edu/files/psr/files/PSRQuestionnaireTipSheet_0.pdf
    - *General considerations in survey design from Harvard*

Question options
- Likert Scale Options: http://media.clemson.edu/cbshs/prtm/research/resources-for-research-page-2/Vagias-Likert-Type-Scale-Response-Anchors.pdf
    - *Response options for Likert Scale questions (strongly agree, strongly disagree, etc.)*
- Survey Questions, Examples, and Tips: https://www.questionpro.com/article/survey-question-answer-type.html
    - *Guide to survey questions, including examples*