

Creating Questions for Surveys, Interviews and Focus Groups



NYU A-Team

Creating Questions = Common Sense?

- Some of the following material may seem obvious...BUT!

By the end of this session, you will [hopefully!]:

- Understand (1) how to prepare to create a questions, (2) how to write effective items, and (3) how to pull the items together into a comprehensive product.
- Recognize common pitfalls.

The Question Process

1 - Objectives

2 - Items

3 – Full Survey

Create objectives and a blueprint that mirror the assessment's purpose

Develop purposeful items that address the survey objectives and blueprint

Bring items together into a comprehensive instrument

Objectives

Purpose of Survey Objectives:

- Lead the assessment process
 - Clear goals/objectives make it easier to create instruments, analyze data, and report results
- Communicate the intentions of the assessment to future students, administrators, parents
- Serve as guides for planning future assessments

Objectives

A Framework for Survey Objectives:

- As a result of participating in a student affairs program, the student will:
 - Enjoy the program → **Satisfaction**
 - Learn something from the program → **Learning**
 - Behave differently because of the program → **Behavior**
 - Believe his or her time/money/energy was well-spent → **Return on Investment**

Developing a Blueprint

- List objectives in a table
- Choose number of total items (e.g., determine total length)
- Designate number of items per objective
 - Base on importance of objectives
 - Should relate to amount resources that would be allocated based on the responses

Objectives

□ Sample Blueprint: Leadership Training

Priority	%	Aspect
1	55%	Identify what students already know about leadership techniques so the program can address new content
2	35%	Determine ways in which students say they can best benefit from the target material
3	10%	Learn what students would want to get out of a leadership training program

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Items: The “Big Idea”

- Ultimately, you want to get information from students that taps into the objectives
- It’s impossible to ask *everything*, so you need to create good items that tap into your objectives.
- You want to be sure that the items you create are measuring your survey objective, and NOT students’ biases, motivation, reading ability, or other factors

Thus, item writing tips!!



Types of Questions

- ❑ Open-Ended vs. Closed-Ended
- ❑ Multiple Choice (single answer)
- ❑ Multiple Choice (choose all)
- ❑ Scale Questions
- ❑ Fill in the blank

Content guidelines

- Make sure to get the information you *need*
- Avoid assessing *trivial* questions
 - Do not ask for information unless you can act upon it! (Fink & Kosecoff, 1998)
 - If everyone will respond the same way, you really don't learn that much
- To assess *future behavior*, try couching questions in scenarios or past situations

Items: Basic Style and Format Tips

- ❑ Avoid excess words – be succinct!
- ❑ Use specific, appropriate vocabulary
- ❑ Avoid bias (age, ethnicity, gender, disabilities)
- ❑ Underline and bold negative or other important words
- ❑ Have others review your items!
- ❑ Proofread, proofread, proofread!

Items: Tips for Writing

- ❑ Each question should be meaningful to respondents
- ❑ Specific questions provide specific information
- ❑ Keep the stem as short as possible
- ❑ Place the main idea of the question in the stem, not the item options
- ❑ Don't provide clues to a response you're looking for (e.g., grammatical clues)
- ❑ Don't use negative stems too frequently

Items: Tips for Writing Response Options

- Develop as many effective options as possible, but three are sufficient (Rodriguez, 2005)
 - Better to have fewer options than to write BAD options to meet some quota!
- Keep options independent
- Keep options similar (in format)
- Use “all of the above” and “none of the above” sparingly!
- Use “always” or “never” sparingly!

Items: Response Scales

- Ordinal rating scales that measure attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs (Rosenthal, 2006)
- Use at least five options (you can always combine responses later)
- Describe each option with words whenever possible
- Use a middle option **when appropriate**
- If you think there will be a “ceiling” or “floor” effect, use Copyright 2007 more options

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Pulling it Together: Introduction

Stuff to Include in the Written Introduction:

- Importance of the survey
- How results will be used
- The confidentiality of responses
- How long it will take to complete the survey
- Who to contact with questions

Pulling it all Together: Order

Use item order to get the most accurate responses possible:

- ❑ Start with “ease-in” items. Starting with tough/challenging items will increase the abandon rate.
- ❑ Keep a logical order: There is no advantage to having survey items totally randomized.
- ❑ Intersperse different item types – you don’t want all the open-ended items at the end.
- ❑ Whenever possible, leave demographic items until the end.



Pulling it all Together: Length

- Keep it as short as possible!
- People tend to tune-out after 15 minutes; less for Web-based surveys.
- Remember: You don't have to answer all your assessment questions at once. Consider saving some items for later.



Once you have it together...

- Proofread and have someone check for order, content, etc.
- If you have time – PILOT with students, staff, someone who can give you an idea if your questions are effective

References

- Downing & Haladyna (2006). *Handbook of test development*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Fink, A. & Kosecoff, J. (1998). *How to conduct surveys: A step-by-step guide* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Haladyna, T. M. (1999). *Developing and validating multiple-choice test items*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Rodriguez, M. C. (2005). Three options are optimal for multiple-choice items: A meta-analysis of 80 years of research. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*, 24, 3-13.