

Survey Questions

Get It Right from the Start. Choose the Right Type of Survey Questions.

When you're looking for insights, it's important you start off on the right foot. How you get information and the survey question type you ask play a big role in creating a successful survey. Before you start creating survey questions, ask yourself how you intend to use the answers from your survey. Knowing the goals of your survey and the information you'd like to collect will guide which survey question type to choose.

Popular Survey Types

Below are some of the most commonly used survey question types and how they can be used to create a great survey. To see what each type of survey question might look like, visit the sample survey questions page.

Multiple Choice Questions

This question type allows the survey taker to select one or more options from a list of answers that you define. You should use multiple choice questions when you have a fixed number of options.

Rating Scales

With rating scale questions, the survey taker selects a single rating for your question along an equally spaced continuum of possible choices. Customer satisfaction survey question often use a Likert scale to measure customer opinion or attitudes.

Comment/Essay Box Question

Open-ended survey questions require respondents to type their answer into a comment box, and do not provide specific pre-set answer options. Responses are then viewed individually or by sophisticated text analysis tools, such as SurveyMonkey's Open Ended Question Analysis tool.

Demographic Questions

To gather information about a respondent's background or income level, for example, demographic survey questions would serve you well.

Once you get the hang of it, you'll quickly know which survey question and answer type to use and why — and the technical names will no longer elude you. In the meantime, survey creation tools from Survey Monkey can help you choose the right survey questions.

Take the Guesswork Out of Survey Questions

Most of us are better at interpreting results than building the perfect survey. It's a good thing that creating a survey with SurveyMonkey is fast and easy. Start by using one of our hundreds of free, professionally designed survey templates built by expert survey methodologists. Or create a survey from scratch with the help of our expert-built tool, Question Bank. Either way, you're sure to have a survey or questions our survey methodologists say will leave you with unbiased results. Promise.

Writing Good Survey Questions

Online Polls Illustration

If you take the time to write good survey questions, you'll be well on your way to getting the reliable responses you need to reach your goals.

The first choice you'll have to make is what type of question to use. We offer both open-ended questions that ask respondents to write comments, essays, or any other kind of free-response text, as well as closed-ended questions that give respondents a fixed set of options to choose from. These closed-ended response choices can be simple yes/no options, multiple choice options, likert rating scales, and more.

But the decisions don't end there! Not only do you have to pick what type of question to ask, you have to decide how to ask it. Below are 3 basic tips for how to create great survey questions. Read through these and you'll be writing survey questions like a pro in no time.

If you want to skip a step, start a survey and use an expert-certified survey template. You can also preview our pre-written survey templates [here](#).

Tips for Writing Good Survey Questions:

1. Speak Their Language:

Keeping language simple and direct in general is very important. Talk to people on their level. Avoid grammatical messiness like double negatives and off-putting vocabulary like industry jargon or overly technical concepts. If you are going to reference a concept that your respondents may be unfamiliar with, don't just gloss over it. Remember, these people are interrupting their busy days to do your survey and they've got a lot on their minds. For example, take the question:

How likely would you be to enroll in CookieDirect?

This question could be made better by simply providing a few extra details. For example:

CookieDirect is a baked goods delivery service that sends a new type of fresh baked cookies straight to your door every Monday night at 7pm. How likely would you be to enroll in CookieDirect?

If you don't explain what you're talking about, you risk respondents getting frustrated and quitting your survey, or, even worse answering the question randomly. The former will raise the cost of getting your data, and the latter will lower your data quality.

2. Keep it Simple:

Always ask about just one idea at a time. If you ask about multiple ideas in the same question it makes it hard for your respondents to answer and impossible for you to interpret their answers. For example, take the question:

How organized and interesting was the speaker?

If a respondent answers “moderately” to this question, what does that mean? Moderately organized AND moderately interesting? Extremely interesting but only slightly organized? Or vice versa. This confusion on how to interpret the answer becomes a real problem when you want to give feedback to your speaker. Do you tell her to be more organized or more interesting next time? End all of this confusion simply by writing two questions instead of one. For example:

How organized was the speaker?

How interesting was the speaker?

Now you have separate ratings for each idea—this makes providing feedback quicker and easier for your respondents, and it makes that feedback easier for the speaker to respond to. A win-win scenario.

3. Balance Not Bias:

Writing survey questions that bias respondents toward one answer violates a survey’s objectivity and biases the answers you get to your questions. For example:

We think our customer service representatives are really awesome. How awesome do you think our customer service representatives are?

This question will likely pressure your respondents into answering more favorably than they actually feel about the customer service representatives. How do you fix it?

To write a more effective question, try to focus on more specific qualities (“awesomeness” is a pretty vague generalization), it will dilute the power of sweeping generalizations. For example:

How helpful do you think our customer service representatives are?

Even with this change, however, the question is still slightly biased toward positive responses. It’s best if you can avoid inserting your own opinions into the question altogether, as these opinions will bias the answers. This, however, is not always possible. In that case, try to keep the survey balanced as a whole. Frame some of your survey questions in a positive way and some in a negative way. For example:

On average, how helpful are our customer service representatives?

On average, how frustrated do you get when speaking to our customer service representatives?

Keeping the tone of your survey balanced and even-handed will ensure that you get people’s “true” attitudes instead of what they think you want to hear. This will help you make the right decisions, and alert you when you have a problem.

Survey Sample Size

How many people do I really need to send my survey to?

Sample Size Illustration

When you're asking "how many survey respondents do I need?", what you're really asking is, "how big does my sample need to be in order to accurately estimate my population?" These concepts are complex, so we've broken the process into 5 steps, allowing you to easily calculate your ideal sample size and ensure accuracy in your survey's results.

5 steps to make sure your sample accurately estimates your population:

STEP 1

What is Your Population?

By population we mean the entire set of people who you want to understand (your sample is going to be the people from this population who end up actually taking your survey).

So, for example, if you want to understand how to market your toothpaste in France, your population would be residents of France. If you're trying to understand how many vacation days people who work for your toothpaste company would like to have, your population would be employees of your toothpaste company.

Regardless of whether it's a country or a company, figuring out what population you're trying to understand is a vital first step. Once you know what your population is, figure out how many people (roughly) make up that population. For example, roughly 65 million people live in France and we're guessing that your toothpaste company has fewer employees than that.

Got your number? Okay then let's keep going...

STEP 2

How Accurate Do You Need To Be?

Think of this step as an assessment of how much of a risk you're willing to take that the answers you get to your survey will be off by a little bit due to the fact that you're not surveying your entire population. So here are your two questions to answer:

How sure do you need to be that the answers reflect the views of your population?

This is your margin of error. So if, for example, 90% of your sample likes grape bubble gum. A 5% margin of error would add 5% on either side of that number, meaning that actually 85-95% of your sample likes grape bubble gum. 5% is the most commonly used margin of error, but you may want anywhere from 1-10% for a margin of error depending on your survey. Increasing your margin of error above 10% is not recommended.

How sure do you need to be that the sample accurately samples your population?

This is your confidence level. A confidence level is the likelihood that the sample you picked mattered in the results you got. The calculation is usually done in the following way. If you picked 30 more samples randomly from your population, how often would the results you got

in your one sample significantly differ those other 30 samples? A 95% confidence level means that you would get the same results 95% of the time. 95% is the most commonly used confidence level but you may want a 90% or 99% confidence level depending on your survey. Decreasing your confidence level below 90% is not recommended.

STEP 3

How Big a Sample Do I Need?

Using the chart below, select your approximate target population, then choose your margin of error to estimate the number of completed surveys you'll require.

Now that you have your numbers from Step #1 and Step #2 check out this handy chart below to figure out how big a sample you'll need...

Note: These are intended as rough guidelines only. Also, for populations of more than 1 million you might want to round up slightly to the nearest hundred.

STEP 4

How Responsive Will People Be?

We're sorry to say that not everybody you send your survey to will fill it out.

The percentage of people who do actually fill out a survey that they receive is known as the "response rate". Estimating your response rate will help you determine the total number of surveys you'll need to send out to obtain the required number of completed surveys.

Response rates vary widely depending on a number of factors such as the relationship with your target audience, survey length and complexity, incentives, and topic of your survey. For

online surveys in which there is no prior relationship with recipients, a response rate of between 20-30% is considered to be highly successful. A response rate of 10-15% is a more conservative and a safer guess if you haven't surveyed your population before.

STEP 5

So How Many People Do I Send It To?

This part's easy!

Just divide the number you got from Step #3 by the number you got from Step #4. That's your magic number.

So, for example, if you need 100 women who use shampoo to fill out your survey and you think about 10% of these shampoo-using women that you send the survey to will actually fill it out, then you need to send it to $100/10\%$ women – 1000!