Make Decisions with Data | Data Collection

Survey Questions

Key Concepts

What makes a survey question effective? A survey is a formal way to collect data on people’s opinions. Effective survey questions provide data that helps you make decisions. Complex decisions often call for several different kinds of data.

One of the keys to creating an effective survey is writing effective questions. Two basic types of survey questions are close-ended and open-ended. Each type has advantages and disadvantages. Both types must be carefully written to be effective. The list of questions to be asked in a survey is called a questionnaire.

When conducting a survey, collect some basic information about your respondents. This type of information is called demographic data. Demographic data will allow you to analyze how people with certain characteristics responded to your survey questions.

How can you make sure a survey gives you the data you want? Does it make any difference how you ask questions? How you ask questions and put them together in your questionnaire can have a significant influence on the answers you get. Critical thinking skills can help you write effective survey questions and put together effective questionnaires.

Look Ahead

Task: Create a questionnaire for your survey.

Goal: Show that you know how to write effective survey questions.

You may want to review an example of survey questions before you begin.

See the example: Survey Questions
Vocabulary

Words to Remember
This page gives basic definitions for some important terms that can help you learn about survey questions. You can get a more complete definition of each term from Fact Monster*

New Words
Bias: Tendency to favor one particular point of view.

Close-ended: A type of question that has a limited number of answers from which to choose.

Open-ended: A type of question that allows for several different, detailed answers.

Questionnaire: A list of questions asked in a poll or survey.

Respondent: A person who answers questions in a poll or survey.

Survey: Gather facts and opinions from a sample population by asking questions.

Review Words
Accurate: Careful to provide true information.

Complex: Consisting of many parts that are connected or related to one another.

Concept (or Idea): A thought that combines specific information into a general statement.

Conclusion: A judgment, decision, or solution reached for specific reasons.

Critical: Careful to evaluate information and draw correct conclusions.

Data: Information collected by observation or measurement.

Dataset: A collection of data records.

Decision: A choice made after considering available alternatives.

Demographics: Basic statistics about a human population. For example, age, gender, race, residence, education, and income.

Fact: Information widely believed to be true and supported by objective data.

Information: Anything that can be used to create knowledge. For example, words, numbers, images, audio, and video can all contain information.
Logical: Capable of thinking in a clear and consistent way to draw correct conclusions.

Objective: Able to put aside personal feelings and opinions.

Opinion: Beliefs that may or may not be supported by facts.

Point of View: The way a person tends to think about people, places, and events based on individual experiences.

Precise: Careful to provide only accurate and relevant information.

Reflective: Careful to focus on thinking about important ideas and concepts.

Relevant: Provide important information about a particular topic.

Statistics: Facts and data that can be represented by numbers; also the study of numerical facts and data.
Exploration

Learning from the Web
When conducting a survey, writing effective questions is important. You want to make sure you understand how the people you survey think about your topic. Explore some Web sites about writing effective questions for a survey. Learn how to write effective questions.

While you explore the following Web sites, think about the guiding questions. You may want to take notes to help you answer the questions. If you think of other questions that could help you create a more effective questionnaire, keep those in mind too.

Guiding Questions

- What kinds of questions should you ask in your survey?
- What kinds of questions should you avoid?
- What characteristics do most effective questions have in common?

Some of these Web sites are quite advanced. Do not worry if you cannot understand everything that you read. Exploring every Web site listed is not necessary. Find one or two Web sites that you can explore to answer the guiding questions.

Web Sites

- Types of Survey Questions* from the Encyclopedia of Educational Technology*
- How to Write a Good Survey* from InfoPoll*
- Survey Questions* from the SuperSurvey Knowledge Base*
- Constructing the Survey* from the Center for Social Research Methods*
- Types of Questions*
- Question Content*
- Response Format*
- Question Wording*
- Question Placement*
- 20 Top Tips To Writing Effective Surveys* from Survey Galaxy*
Information

What to Know
This page summarizes some of the information from the Web sites you explored. This information helps you learn what you need to know for this activity about survey questions. You may want to take notes to help you remember the most important points. You can return to the Web sites for more exploration if you want to learn more.

Guidelines for Effective Surveys
One of the keys to creating an effective survey is writing effective questions. The two basic types of survey questions are close-ended and open-ended. Each of these types has advantages and disadvantages. Both types must be carefully written to be effective. The list of questions to be asked in a survey is called a questionnaire.

Close-Ended Survey Questions
Close-ended questions simplify data collection because they have a finite number of possible answers. Effective close-ended questions:

- Collect numerical data that is easy to analyze
- Give three or four logical answer choices for each question
- Avoid very long questions or answers

Open-Ended Survey Questions
Open-ended questions can provide more detailed information, but they may require more time and effort. Open-ended questions should only be asked when detailed information is really needed. Open-ended questions are often useful in collecting data that can help you understand how respondents answered your close-ended questions. Effective open-ended questions:

- Provide detailed information or quotes
- Are limited to ideas or concepts that are too important or too complex to understand adequately with close-ended questions

Effective Survey Questions
Both close-ended and open-ended questions are effective only when they are carefully written. No strict rules exist for writing effective survey questions, but some basic guidelines help in most cases. Effective survey questions:

- Collect data that helps you make a decision
- Do not favor any point of view
- Are easy for respondents to understand
- Ask about only one idea in each question
- Do not influence the answers given by respondents
Effective Survey Questionnaires
Once you have written effective questions, you must think carefully about how to put the questions together on your questionnaire. No strict rules exist for creating an effective questionnaire, but some basic guidelines help in most cases. Effective survey questionnaires:

- Are as short as possible without sacrificing important information
- List questions and answers in a logical order
- Do not list questions in an order that influences the answers
- Include basic demographic questions relevant to the decision you defined

Thinking Critically About Survey Questions
Critical thinking skills can help you write effective survey questions and put together effective questionnaires. For example:

- *Clear and precise* thinking helps you write questions that are easy to understand.
- Write questions that provide *accurate* data that is directly *relevant* to your decision.
- Being *objective* and *consistent* helps you treat different points of view with fairness.
- *Logical* thinking helps you put together a questionnaire that does not confuse respondents.
- Being *persistent* helps ensure that you collect enough data to make your decision.
- Being *reflective* helps you keep an open mind and revise questions when needed.
Task

What to Do
Complete the following task to show what you have learned about survey questions. While you work through the task, think about whether you are achieving the goal. You may want to review an example of survey questions before you begin.

Task: Create a questionnaire for your survey.

Goal: Show that you know how to write effective survey questions.

See the example: Survey on Bullying

1. Start a new word processing document.
   Always remember to type your name and the date at the top of the document.

2. Type a title for the document. You may want to include your topic, such as Survey Questions for ______________.

3. Write some close-ended questions on your decision. Make sure they can be answered by other students at your school.

4. Create a list of three of four possible responses for each question. Make sure the possible responses cover any answer that someone might give.

5. Write one or two open-ended questions on your topic. Make sure they provide important information that you could not get with a close-ended question.

6. Remember to save your document often while you work.

7. Review your questions to see if they follow the guidelines for effective questions. Revise questions that do not follow the guidelines.

8. Check with your teacher to make sure your survey questions are effective. Be prepared to answer the following questions:
   - How will survey data help you make the decision you have defined?
   - What information from this data would help make the decision?
   - What are some alternative that could be chosen?
   - What are some possibilities of each alternative?
   - What choice would you make?
9. Check the spelling and grammar of your survey questions.

10. Double-check your work by reading the document carefully one more time.

11. Review the checklist and revise your survey questions to make sure they are complete.

12. Share your survey questions.
Task Example

Name

Date

Survey on Bullying: What Do You Think?

Directions: In this survey, you will be asked questions about bullies. It feels bad to be bullied so we want to know your thoughts and opinions about bullies and why they do it.

All your answers will be kept confidential and will not be shared with anyone else. Thanks for taking this survey.

Closed-ended questions

1. What is your gender?
   - Girl
   - Boy

2. Do you know any bullies in your school?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Not Sure

3. Do you think bullying is a problem at your school?
   - No, our school does not have a bullying problem
   - Yes, there is a bullying problem at our school
   - Yes, there is a severe bullying problem at our school.

4. Where does most bullying usually take place?
   - School
   - After School
   - Other

5. Bullies are usually:
   - Girls
   - Boys
   - Both girls and boys
**Open-ended questions**

6. What kind of bullying has happened to you?  
(Students can select more than one answer.)

- Cyber (sent nasty emails or text messages)
- Racial or religious
- Name calling
- Left out of activities
- Humiliated because I look different
- Physically attacked – kicked, punched or hurt in someway
- Asked for money and things
- Intimidated from doing something I wanted to do
- I have never been bullied.
- Other answers: ___________________________________ 

7. Why do you think that kids bully others?  
(Students can select more than one answer.)

- Other kids are mean to them
- They want to be in charge
- They are not doing well in school
- They do not like themselves
- They think it makes better than the victim
- They like to be cruel to others.
- Other answers: ___________________________________ 

8. Why do victims get bullied?  
(Students can select more than one answer and can write in an answer.)

- Tattling in front of the bully
- Being the new kid
- Saying frivolous (not needed) facts
- Interacting with the bully in a way he/she doesn't like
- Telling the bully what to do
- Being an outsider
- The victims have high irritating voices
- No reason--bullies just pick on whoever they can
- I don’t know
- Other answers: ___________________________________