

Session 4: Putting together a survey questionnaire



How long should your survey questionnaire be?

- In other words, how many questions should you have in your survey questionnaire?
- Generally, the shorter the better.
- More questions = longer survey =
 - Higher likelihood of non-response/poor-quality response
 - Usually will cost you more money, if you're working with a panel firm



How to structure a survey questionnaire? (1)

- Usually have demographic questions either at very start or end of survey
 - Sometimes a bit of both
- Then group other survey questions into sections
 - Either from more general to more specific questions
 - Or by different themes
 - Etc.
- Introduce each section with a few words, so the respondent can follow more easily and knows what's going on
 - For example: “The following questions are about democracy.” at the start of the democracy questions section

How to structure a survey questionnaire? (2)

- Sensitive/potentially triggering questions should not be at the beginning nor right at the end of your survey, but instead are usually placed about two thirds into the survey
 - If they come right at the beginning, they may discourage some individuals from answering the survey
 - If they come right at the end, they may be more likely to leave respondents with difficult memories and emotions from the survey
- Especially interesting or fun questions can be placed closer to the start of the survey, to further entice individuals to answer the survey
- Work on the flow of your questionnaire, so that your respondent can most easily complete it with minimal challenges and obstacles
 - Aim for user-friendliness, clarity and accessibility

How to format a survey questionnaire? (1)

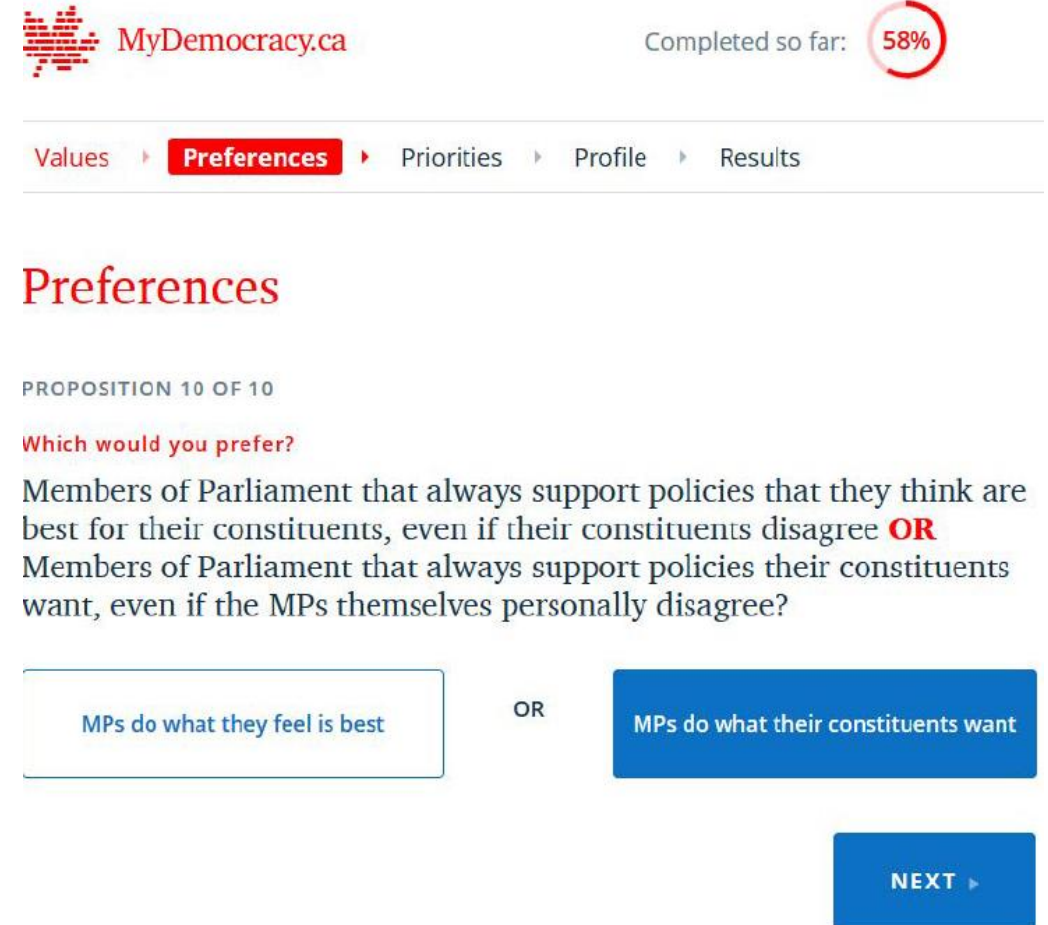
- Questionnaire design and formatting depend somewhat on survey mode
 - Interviewer-administered telephone or in-person survey
 - Further instructions for each survey question are kept as optional, and can be provided by the interviewer if needed
 - Social desirability bias a key factor
 - vs. self-administered mail back survey
 - What instructions are essential to provide for the respondent to answer the survey question
 - Also provide info about how a respondent should answer the question (by checking a box, circling an answer, etc.)...be clear and consistent
 - Drop down menus and filter conditions cannot be too long or complex
 - vs. self-administered web survey
 - Usually formatted for completion on a smartphone

How to format a survey questionnaire? (2)

- Questionnaire design and formatting depend somewhat on software used to program your survey (for self-administered web surveys)
 - Qualtrics (available for free to UWaterloo members)
 - Google Forms (pretty good free version)
 - Etc.
- Many like the inclusion of a completion bar that respondents can see either at the top or the bottom of each survey webpage

How to format a survey questionnaire? (3)

- Be careful about using special fonts, colours, highlighting, bolding, images, etc.
 - Unintendedly impacting/leading responses to the survey question?



The screenshot shows the MyDemocracy.ca website interface. At the top right, it indicates 'Completed so far: 58%' with a circular progress indicator. A navigation bar contains 'Values', 'Preferences' (highlighted in red), 'Priorities', 'Profile', and 'Results'. The main heading is 'Preferences'. Below it, it says 'PROPOSITION 10 OF 10' and 'Which would you prefer?'. The question text is: 'Members of Parliament that always support policies that they think are best for their constituents, even if their constituents disagree **OR** Members of Parliament that always support policies their constituents want, even if the MPs themselves personally disagree?'. There are two buttons: 'MPs do what they feel is best' (light blue) and 'MPs do what their constituents want' (dark blue). A 'NEXT >' button is at the bottom right.

How to format a survey questionnaire? (4)

- Be careful about using grids for answers
 - Can lead to straightlining
 - Instead, present each survey question (and its answer options) one at a time to the respondent if possible

The following questions are about citizenship.

There are different opinions as to what it takes to be a good citizen. As far as you are concerned personally on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 is not at all important and 7 is very important, how important is it:

| | Not at all important | | | | | | Very Important | Can't Choose |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 16) Never to try to evade taxes. | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> 6 | <input type="checkbox"/> 7 | <input type="checkbox"/> -8 |
| 17) Always to obey laws and regulations. | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> 6 | <input type="checkbox"/> 7 | <input type="checkbox"/> -8 |
| 18) To keep watch on the actions of government. | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> 6 | <input type="checkbox"/> 7 | <input type="checkbox"/> -8 |
| 19) To help people in Canada who are worse off than yourself. | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> 6 | <input type="checkbox"/> 7 | <input type="checkbox"/> -8 |
| 20) To be willing to serve in the military at a time of need. | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> 6 | <input type="checkbox"/> 7 | <input type="checkbox"/> -8 |

How to format a survey questionnaire? (5)

- Regardless of how a survey questionnaire is formatted, respondents should...
 - Always be able to see the survey question and its answer options on the same page
 - Usually always get the survey questions in the same order
 - Unless you have a specific reason to randomize/modify the order of some or all of the survey questions between (groups of) respondents
 - Usually to eliminate the impact of question ordering on responses (by randomizing question order)
 - Or to test the impact of question ordering on responses (by modifying question order for certain groups of respondents)

How to format a survey questionnaire? (6)

- Regardless of how a survey questionnaire is formatted, respondents should...
 - Always be provided with the information and consent letter at the start of the survey (ethics requirement for those affiliated with Canadian universities and conducting surveys)
 - A thank you/closing letter at the end of the survey

Pre-testing a survey questionnaire (1)

- Essential
- Ways to pre-test:
 - Review of your survey questionnaire by other experts
 - Cognitive interviews with your target population
 - Can include behaviour coding
 - Can include vignettes
 - Can include experiments: testing different versions of a survey question
 - Can include respondent debriefings

Pre-testing a survey questionnaire (2)

- Ways to pre-test (continued):
 - Quantitative pre-testing
 - Soft launch with smaller number of respondents (not full-sized sample)
 - Can test for:
 - Non-response
 - Response latency
 - Speed of completion

CONCLUSION

Steps Involved in Running a Survey

1

- Figure out what you want to measure, including who your study population is, based on your research question

2

- Build your questionnaire

3

- Pre-test your questionnaire

4

- Get ethics approval, if needed

Steps Involved in Running a Survey

5

- Administer the survey/data collection

6

- Entering/cleaning the data/coding the responses

7

- Analyzing the data

8

- Presenting your key findings

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Statistical Consulting and
Survey Research Unit

SCSRU services:



Survey research consultations



Questionnaire design



Data collection



Data analysis and weighting

Survey modes:



Telephone



Web



Mail



Face-to-face

More Winter 2024 SCSRU workshops at UWaterloo!

- An Introduction to Linear Regression
Wednesday, March 13, 2024, 9:30 AM - 11:30 AM EST
- Survey Programming in Qualtrics
Wednesday, March 27, 2024, 9:30 AM - 4:00 PM EST
- Register to attend for free: <https://uwaterloo.ca/statistical-consulting-survey-research-unit/events>

Some additional reading resources for survey methodology (1)

- Bell, Edward, Alan Bryman and Steven Kleinknecht. 2022. *Social Research Methods*. Sixth Canadian Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Blair, Jonny, Czaja, Ronald, & Edward Blair. (2005). *Designing Surveys: A Guide to Decisions and Procedures*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
- Converse, J.M. & Presser, S. (1986). *Survey Questions: Handcrafting the standardized questionnaire*. Quantitative Applications in the Social Sciences #63. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Dillman, D.A. (2004). *Mail and internet surveys: The tailored design method*. New York, NY: John Wiley and Sons.
- Gideon, Lior. (ed.) 2012. *Handbook of survey methodology for the social sciences*. New York: Springer.

Some additional reading resources for survey methodology (2)

- Green, M.C., J.A. Krosnick and A.L. Holbrook. 2001. “The Survey Response Process in Telephone and Face-to-Face Surveys: Differences in Respondent Satisficing and Social Desirability Response Bias.” Available at <http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/kenwald/pos6757/spring02/tch62.pdf>
- Groves et al. 2004. *Survey methodology*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Kalton, Graham. 1983. *Introduction to Survey Sampling*. Sage Publications.
- Presser, S., Couper, M. P., Lessler, J. T., Martin, E., Rothgeb, J. M., and Singer, E. 2004. “Methods for Testing and Evaluating Survey Questions.” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 68(1): 109-130.
- Wolf, Christof, Dominique Joye, Tom W Smith, and Yang-chih Fu. 2016. *The SAGE Handbook of Survey Methodology*. Sage Publishing.

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Thank you!