

## General design issues

- Initial planning of the survey design and survey questions is **extremely important** in conducting survey research.
- Once surveying has begun, it is difficult or impossible to adjust the basic research questions under consideration or the tool used to address them since the survey must remain stable in order to standardize the data set.

## Four key issues

### 1. Respondent attitude:

- It is important to try to put yourself into your target population's shoes: think about how you might react when approached by a survey-taker while out shopping or when receiving a phone call while you are sitting down to dinner.
- Think about how easy it is to throw away a response survey that you've received in the mail.
- When developing your instrument, it is important to choose the method you think will work for your research, but also one in which you have confidence.
- Ask yourself what kind of survey you, as a respondent, would be most apt to answer.**

### 2. Nature of the questions:

- Consider the relationship between the type of survey that you use and the questions that you ask: for example, certain types of questions are easier or more difficult to answer over the telephone than in writing or in person.
- Think of the problems you would have in attempting to record a scale response, as in closed-ended questions, over the telephone, especially if a scale of more than five points is used.
- Responses to open-ended questions would also be difficult to record and report in telephone interviews.

### 3. Costs:

- Expense issues also enter into your decision making when planning a survey.
- The population under consideration, the geographic distribution of this sample population, and the type of questionnaire used all affect costs.

### 4. Ability of instrument to meet needs of research question:

- There needs to be a logical link between your survey delivery format and your research questions.
- If it is important to get a large number of responses from a broad sample of the population, you obviously will not choose to do a drop-off written survey or an in-person oral survey.
- Because of the size of the needed sample, you will need to choose a survey format that meets this need, such as a phone or mail survey.
- If you are interested in getting thorough information that might need a large amount of interaction between the interviewer and respondent, you will probably pick in-person oral survey with a smaller sample of respondents.
- Your questions, then, will need to reflect both your research goals and your choice of medium.

## Questions and types of questions

- Developing well-crafted questionnaires is more difficult than it might seem.
- Researchers should carefully consider the type, content, wording, and order of the questions that they include.
- There are two basic types of questions:
  - Closed-Ended questions
  - Open-Ended questions

### Closed-Ended questions

- Closed-ended questions limit respondents' answers to the survey: the participants are allowed to choose from either a pre-existing set of *dichotomous* answers, such as yes/no, true/false, or multiple choice with an option for "other" to be filled in, or ranking scale response options.

#### 1. Yes/No (or True/False) questions

*Is there a difference between San Carlos and Bylas dialect?*

Yes  No

*Can you speak the O'odham/Peeposh language*

Yes  No

#### 2. Multiple Choice

Only one response can be selected

*Do you understand Akimel O'odham/Peeposh when reading it?*

- I understand it completely
- I understand it sometimes
- I cannot understand it at all
- I would be willing to learn

#### 3. Multiple Select

*When someone speaks to you in Cheyenne do you understand?*

- Only in sentences
- One word sentences
- Commands/directions
- Stories
- Songs
- All of above

#### 4. Likert scales

- One of the most common of the closed-ended questions is the *rating scale*, also called the *Likert scale* question.
- This kind of question asks the respondents to look at a statement (such as "The most important language education issue facing our community in the year 2016 is that all third graders should be able to speak simple sentence in the language") and then "rank" this statement according to the degree to which they agree ("I strongly agree, I somewhat agree, I have no opinion, I somewhat disagree, I strongly disagree").
- Likert Scales often uses an odd number of points on a scale so the survey-taker has a 'middle' option:

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

- Always think about what each point of the scales means!**

#### 5. Ranking scales

- Ranking scales ask respondents to **rank a set of ideas or things**, etc.: for example, a researcher can provide respondents with a list of general language skills and ask them rank them in order of priority: *speaking, reading, writing, listening, etc.*
- These are more difficult to use than rating scales as they take more time, and they cannot easily be used for phone surveys since they often require visual aids.
- Since ranking scales are more difficult **they may actually increase appropriate effort from respondents**.

#### 6. Split or unfolding questions:

- These types of questions begin by asking respondents a general question, and then follow up with clarifying questions.

*You ranked 'speaking' as a priority language skill. Please use the box below to tell us why.*

### Open-Ended Questions:

- Open-ended questions do not give respondents answers to choose from, but rather are phrased so that the respondents are encouraged to explain their answers and reactions to the question with a sentence, a paragraph, or even a page or more, depending on the survey.
- If you wish to find information on the same topic as asked above (the future of language education), but would like to find out what respondents would come up with on their own, you might choose an open-ended question like "What do you think is the most important language educational issue facing our community in the year 2016?" rather than the Likert scale question.
- Or, if you would like to focus on reading as the topic, but would still not like to limit the participants' responses, you might pose the question this way: "Do you think that the most important issue facing education is literacy? Explain your answer below."

**Note:** You do not have to use close-ended or open-ended questions exclusively. Many surveys use a combination of closed and open questions; often surveys use close-ended questions in the beginning of their survey, then allow for more expansive answers once the respondent has some background on the issue and is "warmed-up."

## Wording

- The quality of the answers can only be as good as the quality of your question
- To write effective questions, researchers need to keep in mind these four important techniques: **directness, simplicity, specificity, and discreteness**.
  - Questions should be written in a straightforward, direct language that is not caught up in complex rhetoric or sentence structure, or using slang or lingo.
  - Questions should be kept short and simple. Respondents should not be expected to learn new, complex information in order to answer questions.
  - Specific questions are for the most part better than general ones: research shows that the more general a question is the wider the range of interpretation among respondents. To keep specific questions brief, researchers can sometimes use longer introductions that make the context, background, and purpose of the survey clear so that this information is not necessary to include in the actual questions.
  - Avoid questions that are overly personal or direct, especially when dealing with sensitive issues.

## Content

- Does your choice of open or close-ended questions lead to the types of answers you would like to get from your respondents?
- Is every question in your survey essential to your intent? Superfluous questions that have already been addressed or are not relevant to your study will waste the time of both the respondents and the researcher.
- Does one topic need more than one question?
- Do you give enough prior information/context for each set of questions? Sometimes lead-in questions are useful to help the respondent become familiar and comfortable with the topic.
- Are the questions both general enough (they are both standardized and relevant to your entire sample), and specific enough (avoid vague generalizations and ambiguousness)?
- Is each question as succinct as it can be without leaving out essential information?
- Finally, and most importantly, try to put yourself in your respondents' shoes. Write a survey that you would be willing to answer yourself, and be polite, courteous, and sensitive. Thank the responder for participating both at the beginning and the end of the survey.

## Order of questions

- Although there are no general rules for ordering survey questions, there are still a few suggestions researchers can follow when setting up a questionnaire.
- Pretesting can help determine if the ordering of questions is effective; consider asking yourself the following questions:
  - Which topics should start the survey off, and which should wait until the end of the survey?
  - What kind of preparation do my respondents need for each question?
  - Do the questions move logically from one to the next, and do the topics lead up to each other?
- The following general guidelines for ordering survey questions can address these questions:
  - Use warm-up questions. Easier questions will ease the respondent into the survey and will set the tone and the topic of the survey.
  - Sensitive questions should not appear at the beginning of the survey. Try to put the responder at ease before addressing uncomfortable issues. You may also prepare the reader for these sensitive questions with some sort of written preface.
  - Consider transition questions that make logical links.
  - Try not to mix topics. Questions can easily be placed into "sets" of questions.
  - Try not to put the most important questions last. Respondents may become bored or tired before they get to the end of the survey.
  - Be careful with contingency questions ("If you answered yes to the previous question . . . etc.").
  - If you are using a combination of open and close-ended questions, try not to start your survey with open-ended questions. Respondents will be more likely to answer the survey if they are allowed the ease of closed-questions first.

## 'Pretesting' the survey

- To determine the effectiveness of your survey questionnaire, it is necessary to pretest it before actually using it: *pretesting* can help you determine the strengths and weaknesses of your survey concerning question format, wording and order.
- There are two types of survey pretests: *participating* and *undeclared*.
  - Participating: you tell the survey-takers that this is a pretest survey; you can then get feedback
  - Undeclared: you **don't** tell the survey-takers that this is a pretest: you can then observe the responses as they might happen in the 'real world'
- Make the adjustments to your survey based on the pretest observations.
- Pretesting is an effective way to test the reliability and validity of the questions and responses .