

Creating Surveys

The Goal

Get the maximum amount of information
out of every question.

Categories

- Why use categories?
- Make categories complete
- Don't overlap categories
- Don't make everything a category

Why use categories?

Free-form text is not always the best way to get information.

What is your religion?

Why use categories?

What is your religion?

- Catholic?
 - catholic
 - Catholicism
 - Roman Catholic
 - CATHOLICISM, SOMETIMES
 - Catechism
 - I do not really practice, but I fall in Roman Catholic.
-
- buddism
 - im Buddhist
 - buddisum
 - Buddhist

Make Categories Complete



What is your highest level of education?

- High School
- B.A.
- M.A.

Make Categories Complete



What is your highest level of education?

- No High School diploma / GED
- High School or GED
- A.A. or A.S.
- B.A. or B.S.
- M.A. or M.S.
- Ph.D or other postgraduate

Don't overlap categories



How many times do you eat chocolate per week?

- 0-4
- 4-8
- 8-12
- 12 or more

Don't overlap categories



How many times do you eat chocolate per week?

- 0-4
- 5-8
- 9-12
- 13 or more

Don't make everything a category



How old are you?

- < 18
- 18-20
- 21-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 51-60
- > 60

Don't make everything a category



How old are you?

Interesting comment about gender as a category:

Items to avoid

- Impossible questions
- Statements of fact
- Double negatives
- Emotional items
- Leading questions
- Technical terms (jargon)
- Double-barreled items

Impossible questions



How many times did you sneeze last month?

Impossible questions



How many allergy attacks did you have last month?

Statements of fact



Tree branches overhanging power lines are a hazard.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Statements of fact



Individual homeowners should be responsible for making sure their tree branches don't overhang power lines.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Double negatives



Drunk drivers should not be able to avoid having no bad points on their driving record.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Double negatives



Drunk drivers should always get bad points on their driving record.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Emotional items



Scum-sucking liberals are destroying this great nation.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Emotional items



Liberal policies are bad for this country.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Leading questions



Don't you think student fees should be abolished?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Leading questions



Should student fees be abolished?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Technical terms (jargon)



Actors with high Q scores deserve larger emoluments.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Technical terms (jargon)



Actors who have more appeal as celebrities deserve larger salaries.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Double-barreled items



Drunk drivers should pay large fines and be put in jail.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Double-barreled items



Drunk drivers should pay large fines.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Drunk drivers should be put in jail.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Yes/No items



Have you ever been to Egypt?

- Yes
- No

Yes/No items



Would you like to go to Egypt?

- Yes
- No

Yes/No items



Would you like to go to Egypt?

- Absolutely yes
- Yes
- Yes, a little
- No, not much
- No
- Absolutely not

Yes/No items



Do you eat vegetables with your dinner?

- Yes
- No

Yes/No items



How often do you eat vegetables with your dinner?

- Always
- Most of the time
- Some of the time
- Not very often
- Rarely
- Never

Likert items

- Pronounced Likert
- Odd or Even?
- Balancing Items

Odd or Even?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

The “neutral” problem



The “neutral” problem

Give more options for an even number of choices:

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Slightly agree
- Slightly disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

The “neutral” problem

Are you *really* neutral?

Or do you just not have enough information to make a judgment?

Here's how I write my surveys and teach research classes. So far it works fine.

I believe that you either have an opinion or you don't. If you don't, I give you an option of "no basis for judgment." I never gave a neutral option simply because when people check that, it normally means that they don't have enough information to make the judgment.

When analyzing the data,..."no basis for judgment" will be included in the percentage calculation to see how many people have no idea about the statement, but the mean will reflect the average of those who have opinions.

David Cheng

<http://www.ocair.org/files/KnowledgeBase/Statistics/TheOptionOfNeutral.asp>

Balance your items



I think that the sound level at discos, dances, rock concerts, and sporting events, in general, is too loud

I think it is necessary to use earplugs when I am at a disco, rock concert, dance, or sporting event.

I am prepared to give up activities where the sound level is too loud.

I think it should be calm and quiet in the classroom.

Balance your items



I think that the sound level at discos, dances, rock concerts, and sporting events, in general, is too loud

I think it is unnecessary to use earplugs when I am at a disco, rock concert, dance, or sporting event.

I am willing to attend activities where the sound level is very loud.

I think it should be calm and quiet in the classroom.

Summary

- Use free-form text sparingly, if at all.
- Use complete, non-overlapping categories.
- Don't overuse categories.
- Questions must be possible to answer.
- Avoid "statements of fact."
- Don't use emotionally charged language.
- Don't ask leading questions.
- Use plain language.
- Only one question per question (no double-barreled questions).

Summary

- Use Yes/No questions when those are really the only two choices.
- Otherwise, use a Likert scale.
- Avoid the neutral point, or allow “no basis for judgment.”
- Balance your items.