

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF SURVEY QUESTION DEVELOPMENT

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Good survey questions are essential to collecting good data. The basic principles below are intended to guide the review or creation of high-quality survey questions. Examples of ordinal response scales are included on page 2 of this handout.

- 1** Language is simple and direct; questions are free from jargon, acronyms, and ambiguous terms.
- 2** Each question asks about only one thing at a time.
- 3** No more than one negative term is used in a question, including its response options.
- 4** Response options are exhaustive; all reasonable answers to a question are included, with an *other* option if needed.
- 5** Response options are mutually exclusive; possible answers do not overlap.
- 6** Response options match question stem; all possible answers make sense with prompt.
- 7** Terms used in a response scale are consistent and balanced; they represent either a continuum of the same concept (unipolar) or of opposite concepts (bipolar).
- 8** *Don't know* and *not applicable* are included only when they are reasonable responses.
- 9** Questions can be readily answered by respondents.
- 10** All questions are appropriate for all respondents; branching is used when one or more questions are pertinent to only certain types of respondents.
- 11** All questions support the survey's purpose, which is aligned with a larger research or evaluation question.
- 12** Entire questionnaire is as concise as possible; extraneous or duplicate information is omitted from questions, instructions, and communications.



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Ordinal scales – measurement scales for data that have a logical order, but no standard distance between categories – are frequently used in surveys to measure the extent of an attitude, belief, knowledge, or behavior. Below are some examples of scales in varying lengths.

AGREEMENT	<input type="radio"/> Strongly Agree <input type="radio"/> Agree <input type="radio"/> Disagree <input type="radio"/> Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/> Completely Agree <input type="radio"/> Mostly Agree <input type="radio"/> Slightly Agree <input type="radio"/> Slightly Disagree <input type="radio"/> Mostly Disagree <input type="radio"/> Completely Disagree	<input type="radio"/> Completely True <input type="radio"/> Somewhat True <input type="radio"/> Slightly True <input type="radio"/> Neither True nor False <input type="radio"/> Slightly False <input type="radio"/> Somewhat False <input type="radio"/> Completely False
FREQUENCY	<input type="radio"/> Always <input type="radio"/> Very Often <input type="radio"/> Sometimes <input type="radio"/> Rarely <input type="radio"/> Never	<input type="radio"/> A Great Deal <input type="radio"/> Quite a Bit <input type="radio"/> Somewhat <input type="radio"/> Very Little <input type="radio"/> Not at All	<input type="radio"/> Always <input type="radio"/> Very Frequently <input type="radio"/> Occasionally <input type="radio"/> Rarely <input type="radio"/> Very Rarely <input type="radio"/> Never
IMPORTANCE	<input type="radio"/> Highly Important <input type="radio"/> Important <input type="radio"/> Slightly Important <input type="radio"/> Not Important	<input type="radio"/> Extremely Important <input type="radio"/> Important <input type="radio"/> Moderately Important <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Important <input type="radio"/> Not Very Important	<input type="radio"/> Very Important <input type="radio"/> Important <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Important <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Unimportant <input type="radio"/> Unimportant <input type="radio"/> Very Unimportant
QUALITY	<input type="radio"/> Excellent <input type="radio"/> Good <input type="radio"/> Fair <input type="radio"/> Poor	<input type="radio"/> One of the Best <input type="radio"/> Better than Most <input type="radio"/> Better than Some <input type="radio"/> Not as Good as Most	<input type="radio"/> Very Good <input type="radio"/> Good <input type="radio"/> Acceptable <input type="radio"/> Poor <input type="radio"/> Very Poor
SATISFACTION	<input type="radio"/> Satisfied <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Satisfied <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Dissatisfied <input type="radio"/> Dissatisfied	<input type="radio"/> Extremely Satisfied <input type="radio"/> Very Satisfied <input type="radio"/> Moderately Satisfied <input type="radio"/> Slightly Satisfied <input type="radio"/> Not at all Satisfied	<input type="radio"/> Very Satisfied <input type="radio"/> Satisfied <input type="radio"/> Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied <input type="radio"/> Dissatisfied <input type="radio"/> Very Dissatisfied
EXTENT	<input type="radio"/> To a Large Extent <input type="radio"/> To a Moderate Extent <input type="radio"/> To a Small Extent <input type="radio"/> Not at all	<input type="radio"/> Significantly <input type="radio"/> Moderately <input type="radio"/> Slightly <input type="radio"/> Not at all	<input type="radio"/> To an Extremely Large Extent <input type="radio"/> To a Very Large Extent <input type="radio"/> To a Moderate Extent <input type="radio"/> To a Small Extent <input type="radio"/> To a Very Small extent <input type="radio"/> To an Extremely Small Extent
OTHER	<input type="radio"/> Very Likely <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Likely <input type="radio"/> Not Likely	<input type="radio"/> Far Exceeds <input type="radio"/> Exceeds <input type="radio"/> Meets <input type="radio"/> Meets Some <input type="radio"/> Does not Meet	<input type="radio"/> Extremely Helpful <input type="radio"/> Very Helpful <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Helpful <input type="radio"/> Not so Helpful <input type="radio"/> Not at all Helpful