

SIX RULES FOR WRITING SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Adapt the phrasing of questions to the educational level of respondents but don't be insulting or patronizing.

2. Avoid double negatives in a question ... it confuses people.

For example: Do you oppose denying students access to their files?

Better: Do you oppose giving students access to their files? OR Do you support giving students access to their files?

3. Avoid marathon questions ... you lose people.

For example: What do you think we should do about cheating on campus – should we abolish take-home exams, even if it means that students only get tested on writing that they have rushed through, as in in-class exams, or should we allow take-home exams even if this means a number of students will cheat?

If you believe a question deserves a little background, then write a very brief explanation, followed by a short question.

4. Don't ask double-barreled questions ... ask only one question per question. Otherwise, respondents won't know which question to answer.

For example: Do you favor or oppose giving medical care to small babies & the elderly?

Better: Do you favor or oppose giving medical care to small babies?
Do you favor or oppose giving medical care to the elderly?

5. Never ask leading or loaded questions. Avoid wording questions in ways that will lead respondents to answer one way over another in spite of their true opinions.

For example: Do you agree with the Democrats that we ought to keep religion and the state separate?

As soon as a respondent sees the word *Democrats* it will influence his answer one way or another.

6. Don't ask questions your respondents cannot answer.

Unanswerable questions range from ones that ask for inaccessible information (How many ice cubes did you use last year?) to illogical questions (Have you stopped beating your wife?).