



Writing Survey Questions

Writing a survey questionnaire is very important to gather the required information from the participants. This report briefly outlines general rules for writing survey questions.

Three types of Survey Questions

Open-ended Questions

The participant freely responds to the question rather than selecting one of the options.

For example:

How has drug use impacted your life?

Fill-in-the-blank questions

There are no choice options to these questions but the participant's response is shorter than open-ended questions.

For example:

Date of Birth:

Closed-ended Questions

Depending on the question, the respondent is asked to choose one or more options from the specified list

For example:

In the past 30 days, did you drink alcohol?

A. Yes

B. B. No

General considerations for writing survey questions-

- **Be clear, specific, and direct:** Define the behavior, timeframe, and event. For example- *Did you recently consume alcohol?* vs *Did you consume alcohol in the past 30 days?*
- **Avoid technical terms, jargon, slang, and abbreviations:** Use the language that the participants can understand.
- **Limit the question to one topic:** If a question has multiple items or concepts, the participant won't be able to respond accurately. For example- *Have you seriously considered attempting or made a plan to attempt suicide during the past 12 months?* vs *During the past 12 months, have you seriously considered attempting suicide? During the past 12 months, have you made a plan to attempt suicide?*
- **Group similar questions together and make sure these are grammatically correct:** You may consider categorizing demographics, risk factors, protective factors, etc.
- **Avoid leading questions:** Leading questions shape the participant's mind due to which their response can be biased. For example- *We know that tobacco is harmful to health. On a scale of 1 to 10, how harmful do you consider tobacco is to health.* This question will make the respondent believe that tobacco is dangerous and we will not be able to record if some participants believe otherwise. So, this question can be rephrased as- *On a scale of 1 to 10 how harmful do you think tobacco is to health.*
- **Avoid double negative response items:** Having two negative words in a question can be confusing. For example- *In your opinion, do you think that it is not uncommon for high school students to drink alcohol?* vs *In your opinion, do you think that it is common for high school students to drink alcohol?*



References:

1. North Carolina Center for Public Health Preparedness—The North Carolina Institute for Public Health
2. [Harvard University Program on Survey Research](#)
3. [UX Booth](#)