

Survey Design Basics

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Presentation outline

1. Planning your survey: purpose, audience, mode
2. Survey Forms/Instruments
3. Survey Questions
4. Tips for Successful Surveying

Planning your survey - Purpose

What are you trying to achieve?

- What information do you need to capture?
- How much detail?

- Individual attitudes, experiences, knowledge, opinions, est. behaviors
- Large group/difficult to reach (time, money, resources)

- Convenience vs. Goals
- Another way you could get information? Need your own survey?

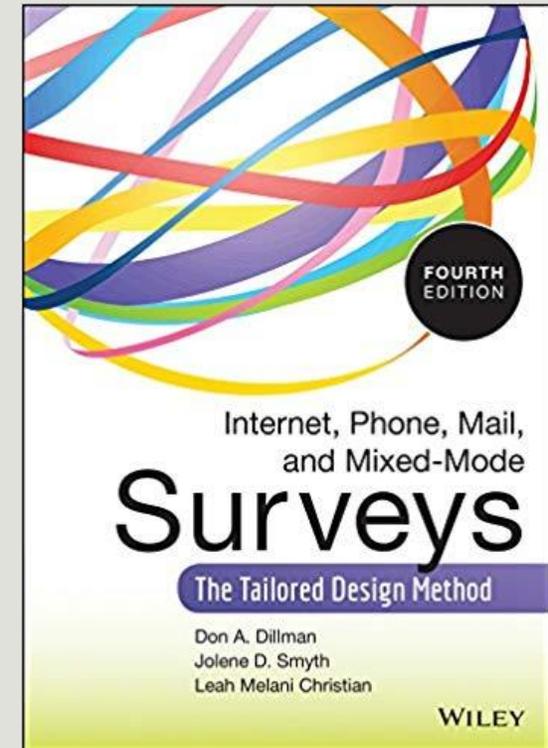
Planning your survey – Audience & Mode

Audience: Who are you hoping to hear from?

- Everyone or sample
- How to best contact/send reminders
- Do all get same questions?

Mode: How will respondents take your survey?

- In-person, phone, online
- Complexity of survey
- Sensitivity of questions
- Respondents need assistance? Translation?
- Tools available to you?



“Tailored Design Method”

Survey Forms/Instruments

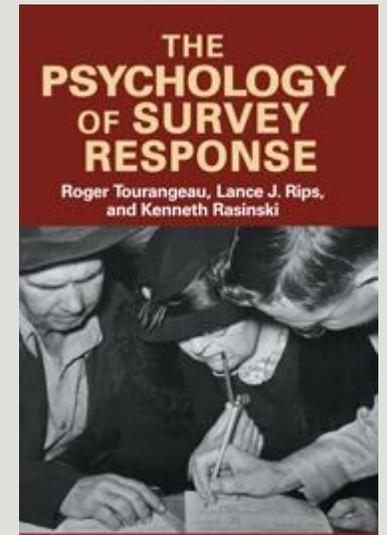
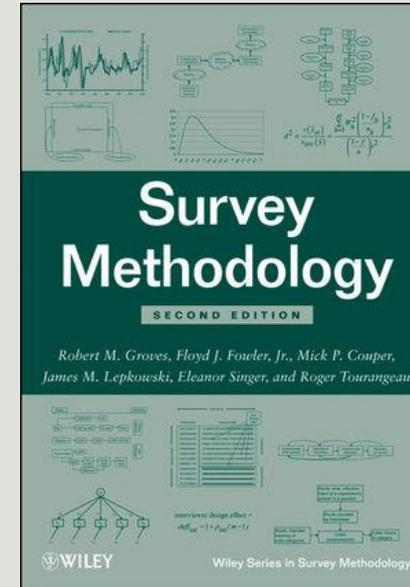
Design

- Avoid clutter
- Use soothing colors
- Include clear, simple instructions
- Consider progress bar

Content

- Keep it brief (as you can) – consider “branching”
- Organize questions in groups
- Take opportunities to thank respondents/encourage

How does the instrument feel?



Survey Questions – Simple Rules

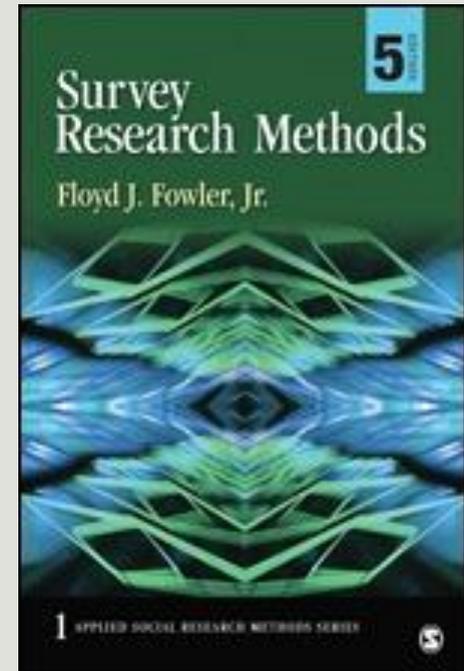
Process of creating questions can be complex:

Concept → Measure → Question

Fowler's Characteristics of Good Questions:

Questions need to...

1. Be consistently understood.
2. Be consistently administered or communicated to respondents.
3. Be clear and consistent about what constitutes an adequate answer.
4. Contain the information respondents need to answer accurately (unless testing for knowledge).
5. Encourage respondents to provide the answers.



Questions need to be...

1. Consistently Understood

Ask people about first-hand experience.

Use simple language and provide definitions for uncommon words.

If you reference a policy or issue, provide a brief description.

Avoid:

- Hypothetical questions – “If ____ happens, how will you act?”
- Questions of causality – “Why did/didn’t you do _____?”
- Asking about solutions to complex problems – “What is the best policy for preventing climate change?”

Questions need to be...

2. Consistently Administered

Fixed formats (e.g., online) provide each respondent the same experience: the same questions and the same directions, in the same format.

Shorter questions are better.

Minimize open response questions.

Response options should be concise, but cover full range. Avoid large scales – odd/even.

Questions need to be...

3. Clear and consistent about what constitutes an adequate answer

Specify an unambiguous time period if necessary.

Avoid double-barreled questions – ask one question at a time!

- For example, “Do you find presenting cases and listening to others present cases useful?”

Your question should actually end with a question, and include the response alternatives.

If more than one response is possible, let them know.

- Also, how many responses you’d like, and how to choose.

Questions need to...

4. Contain the information respondents need to answer accurately

Do not suggest relationships that might not be apparent to respondents.

Avoid “biased” language

- “Don’t you agree that...”
- If you are referencing a debate, describe both sides accurately, or avoid describing at all.

Avoid “negative” language

- “Do you agree or disagree that the federal government should not legalize marijuana?”

5. Encourage respondents to provide the answers.

Communications about (including the Introduction to) the survey will include a statement encouraging respondents to take the survey.

- Express gratitude
- Stress anonymity (or confidentiality) – work to ensure these whenever possible.
- Tell respondents how important their answers are for the project...try to bring implications of your evaluation in (i.e., why does it matter?).

Writing questions well also encourages participation!

Tips for Ensuring Successful Survey

Prioritize the information you absolutely need to achieve your goals (e.g., “Need/Want/Curious”).

Avoid “busy” instruments” – use calm colors with good contrast and easy-to-read fonts.

Avoid redundant questions. Consolidate/streamline response options where possible (matrix!).

Focus on simple questions with clear instructions, and responses that match your question.

Build in time for review and testing.

- *Cognitive process* checks for complex questions
- Time yourself/others – include time estimates for respondents

Give respondents enough time to take survey. Consider reminders (but avoid spam).

Be clear about purpose of survey and use of data. Thank respondents for contributions.