

## **Survey Design Tips**

### **Include an introductory page.**

- Explain why you are conducting the survey, if that won't affect your results.
  - If it will, be vague.
- Explain how long the survey will take to complete (e.g., "This survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.")
- Explain that your survey is confidential or anonymous, and explain what that means.
  - "This survey is anonymous; **no** personal information (e.g. name, birthdate) will be collected."
- Include your institution and contact information. You may want to set up a separate study email to avoid getting spam.
- Have a way to assure that participants consented to the study.
  - "By checking this box, you agree..."
  - "By clicking NEXT and proceeding with the survey, you agree..."

### **Make sure that your survey "flows" well.**

- Opening questions should be the easiest to answer.
- Make sure that your questions are relevant to what you said the survey was about.
- Keep your questions short and easy to read; avoid using jargon.
- Keep similar questions grouped together to avoid confusion.
- Include sensitive questions towards the end of the survey.
- Ask demographic questions (age, race, gender) at the end of the survey. This makes sure that these answers don't influence the answers to other questions.

### **Make sure your rating scales make sense.**

- Label all of your rating scale ticks.
- Use consistent scaling – if your first rating is negative for the first question, make the first rating negative all the time.
- In general, order your questions from negative to positive or from smallest/least frequent to largest/most frequent, left to right.
- Balance your rating scale – include equal numbers of negative and positive responses.
- Use words instead of numbers for rating scales that measure attitudes. You can (and will) always recode them into numbers later, but it's less confusing for the participant.

### **Ask frequency questions using numbers, not words.**

- E.g., don't use a multiple choice or rating scale that asks "never", "rarely", etc. Ask them to enter or select numbers.

### **Construct categorical questions carefully.**

- Use drop-down boxes to control people's responses when there are a lot of possible responses (e.g. age).
- Only ask "other" if you really want to allow people to select "other" and are interested in categories you may have missed. To get a list of categories you may have missed, include a text box with "other".
- Make sure that you don't allow participants to choose more than one category unless you really want them to be able to.
  - And if you do, think *really* hard about this. Do you *really* want them to be able to select more than one?
  - If you want to compare people across groups, then you probably don't.

### **Construct questions so that numerical responses are imported numerically.**

- Use drop-down boxes or multiple-choice radio buttons instead of text entry boxes.
- If you use text entry, constrain the maximum length. E.g., if you're asking age, constrain to two categories if you are using text entry boxes.

### **Construct questions carefully and clearly.**

- Avoid double-barreled questions.
  - E.g., "How satisfied are you with the location and hours of the library?"
- Avoid leading questions
  - "Most people, after watching this video, say that it makes them feel happier. How happy do you feel right now?"
    - You're influencing their answer with the first statement.
    - You're assuming that they feel happy.
- Don't use abbreviations, unless they are very widely known (e.g. HIV, AIDS).
  - E.g., "How do you feel about the ACA?"
  - Check to make sure that your abbreviation is *really* widely known before using it.
- Avoid framing questions in the negative.
  - "How frequently do you not attend class?"
- Avoid using double negatives
  - "Students should never not go to class."
- Avoid using the passive voice.
  - "How unhappy were you made to feel by this video?"

### **Have someone who wasn't involved in your survey design look at your survey.**

- Reword the question if:
  - They have to ask you what a question means
  - They look confused while reading a certain question
  - They give an unexpected response to a question
- Remember that you won't be sitting besides people as they take the survey, so it needs to be clear and unambiguous from the start!