

What is a Questionnaire?

Definition:

1. A questionnaire is a research instrument that consists of a set of questions or other types of prompts/responses that aims to collect information from a respondent. A research questionnaire is typically a mix of close-ended questions and open-ended questions.

2. A questionnaire is a list of questions or items used to gather data from respondents about their attitudes, experiences, or opinions. Questionnaires can be used to collect quantitative and/or qualitative information.

Open-ended, long-form questions offer the respondent the ability to elaborate on their thoughts. Research questionnaires were developed in 1838 by the Statistical Society of London.

The data collected from a data collection questionnaire can be both qualitative as well as quantitative in nature. A questionnaire may or may not be in the form of a survey, but a survey always consists of a questionnaire.

Characteristics of a good Questionnaire

A good Questionnaire has the following features.

Uniformity:

Questionnaires are very useful to collect information, personal opinions, facts, or attitudes from respondents. One of the most significant attributes of a research form is uniform design and standardization. Every respondent sees the same questions. This helps in data collection and statistical analysis of this data.

Exploratory:

It should be exploratory to collect qualitative data. There is no restriction on questions that can be in your questionnaire. Open-ended questions give you more insight and allow the respondents to explain their practices. A very structured question list could limit the data collection.

Question Sequence:

A proper series of questions should be followed to increase the rate of response to the questions. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a structured sequence of questions that contain questions in the sequence.

Easy to understand:

A good survey/Questionnaire is easy to understand. It should be designed in such a way so that everyone can read and understand the questions irrespective of their education level. This is an essential characteristic of a questionnaire.

Types & Definitions

Questionnaires can be either structured or free-flowing. Let's take a closer look at them.

Structured Questionnaires:

Structured Questionnaires collect quantitative data. The questionnaire is planned and designed to gather precise information. The structured questionnaires are well-planned and well-designed. The purpose of using a structured questionnaire is to obtain precise information on the subject.

Unstructured Questionnaires:

Unstructured questionnaires collect qualitative data. Unstructured questionnaires are used to collect qualitative data. Unstructured questionnaires consist of open-ended questions. The purpose of using open-ended questions is to obtain specific information from the respondent of the questionnaire.

Types of Questions in a Questionnaire

We can use multiple question types in a questionnaire. Using various question types can help increase responses to your research questionnaire as they try to keep participants more engaged.

Some of the widely used types of questions are:

Open-Ended Questions: Open-ended questions help collect qualitative data in a questionnaire where the respondent can answer in a free form with little to no restrictions.

Closed-ended Questions/ Dichotomous Questions: The dichotomous question is generally a "yes/no" close-ended question. This question is usually used in case of the need for necessary validation. It is the most natural form of a questionnaire.

Multiple-Choice Questions: Multiple-choice questions are a close-ended question type in which a respondent has to select one or many responses from a given list of options. The multiple-choice question consists of an incomplete stem (question), right answers, incorrect answers, close alternatives, and distractors.

Scaling Questions: These questions are based on the principles of the four measurement scales – nominal, ordinal, interval, and ratio.

These are the four scales used mainly for:

Nominal: They are used to categorize data into mutual categories or groups.

Ordinal: They are used to measure variables in a natural order, such as rating or ranking. They provide meaningful insights into attitudes, preferences.

Interval: They are used to measure variables with equal intervals between values. This type of



measurement is often used for temperature and time.

Ratio: It allows for comparisons and computations such as ratios, percentages, and averages.

Pictorial Questions: This question type is easy to use and encourages respondents to answer. It works similarly to a multiple-choice question. Respondents are asked a question, and the answer choices are images.

Types of Questionnaires on the basis of distribution

Online Questionnaire:

In this type, respondents are sent the questionnaire via email or other online mediums. This method is generally cost-effective and time-efficient. Respondents can also answer at leisure. Without the pressure to respond immediately, responses may be more accurate. The disadvantage is those respondents can easily ignore these questionnaires.

Telephone Questionnaire:

Researcher makes a phone call to a respondent to collect responses directly. Responses are quick once you have a respondent on the phone. However, a lot of times, the respondents hesitate to give out much information over the phone. It is also an expensive way of conducting research.

In-House Questionnaire:

This type is used by a researcher who visits the respondent's home or workplace. The advantage of this method is that the respondent is in a comfortable and natural environment, and in-depth data can be collected. The disadvantage, though, is that it is expensive and slow to conduct.

Mail Questionnaire:

This method involves a researcher sending a physical data collection questionnaire request to a respondent that can be filled in and sent back. The advantage of this method is that respondents can complete this on their own time to answer truthfully and entirely. The disadvantage is that this method is expensive and time-consuming.

Steps Involved in Questionnaire Design

1. Identify the scope of your research:

Think about what your questionnaire is going to include before you start designing the look of it. The clarity of the topic is of utmost importance as this is the primary step in creating the questionnaire. Once you are clear on the purpose of the questionnaire, you can begin the design process.

2. Keep it simple:

The words or phrases you use while writing the questionnaire must be easy to understand. If the questions are unclear, the respondents may simply choose any answer and skew the data you collect.



3. Ask only one question at a time:

At times, a researcher may be tempted to add two similar questions. This might seem like an excellent way to consolidate answers to related issues, but it can confuse your respondents or lead to inaccurate data. If any of your questions contain the word “and,” take another look. This question likely has two parts, which can affect the quality of your data.

4. Be flexible with your options:

While designing, the survey creator needs to be flexible in terms of “option choice” for the respondents. Sometimes the respondents may not necessarily want to choose from the answer options provided by the survey creator. An “other” option often helps keep respondents engaged in the survey.

5. The open-ended or closed-ended question is a tough choice:

The survey creator might end up in a situation where they need to make distinct choices between open or close-ended questions. The question type should be carefully chosen as it defines the tone and importance of asking the question in the first place.

If the questionnaire requires the respondents to elaborate on their thoughts, an open-ended question is the best choice. If the surveyor wants a specific response, then close-ended questions should be their primary choice. The key to asking closed-ended questions is to generate data that is easy to analyze and spot trends.

6. It is essential to know your audience:

A researcher should know their target audience. For example, if the target audience speaks mostly Spanish, sending the questionnaire in any other language would lower the response rate and accuracy of data. Use simple language and terminology that your respondents will understand.

7. Choosing the right tool is essential:

Always save personal questions for last. Sensitive questions may cause respondents to drop off before completing. If these questions are at the end, the respondent has had time to become more comfortable with the interview and are more likely to answer personal or demographic questions.

Advantages of a Questionnaire

A questionnaire is one of the most frequently used research methods by researchers. A questionnaire can be used to obtain information on heavy subjects as well as simple subjects. There are several advantages to using questionnaires to gather information.

1. The first advantage of using questionnaires for conducting research is that it takes **less time to collect** information from a large group of respondents. A researcher is not required to be present all the time to get the responses of the respondents. A researcher can email or send questionnaires to the respondents and get their answers quickly.
2. The questionnaire is an **inexpensive method** of researching as a researcher; you are



required to prepare the right set of questions and send them to the respondents to obtain their responses.

3. In addition to this, if you use questionnaire software to conduct research, then you can efficiently distribute your questionnaire and can get a response in one place. Nowadays, this software offers various features that make the data collection process easy and simplified.
4. The responses obtained from the respondents **are not biased**, as there are no chances that respondents get influenced by each other's answers. Moreover, you ask the same type of questions to all of the respondents, which makes your analysis process easy.
5. You can customize your questionnaire to reflect the voice of your brand, which helps you in building the image of your brand.
6. The data collected using questionnaires are easy to compare with the data collected through the previous method. In this way, you can learn about the shift that took place in the choice of your target audience.
7. Questionnaire is the best method to get responses from people who are not comfortable in revealing their identity.
8. People are comfortable answering through a written questionnaire because it consumes less time rather than being in a face to face interview.

Differences between a Questionnaire and a Survey

	Questionnaire	Survey
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Meaning	A questionnaire can is a research instrument that consists of a set of questions to collect information from a respondent.	A survey is a research method used for collecting data from a pre-defined group of respondents to gain information and insights on various topics of interest.
What is it?	The instrument of data collection	Process of collecting and analyzing that data
Characteristic	Subset of survey	Consists of questionnaire and survey design, logic and data collection
Time and Cost	Fast and cost-effective	Much slower and expensive
Use	Conducted on the target audience	Distributed or conducted on respondents
Questions	Close-ended and very rarely open-ended	Close-ended and open-ended
Answers	Objective	Subjective or objective

