

Introduction to Questionnaire Design

Spring 2009 Seminar Series

Survey Research Laboratory

University of Illinois

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Open vs. Closed Questions

- **Open-Ended Questions**
 - Suggest no alternatives
 - Probing
 - Extensive interviewer training
 - Elaborate coding schemes
 - Expensive and time-consuming
 - Free exchange of ideas without bias

Open vs. Closed Questions

- Closed-Ended Questions
 - Standardized questions and answers
 - Simple interviewer training
 - Easy to analyze
 - May make it too easy to answer without thinking
 - May limit spontaneity
 - Not best when
 - asking for frequency of sensitive behaviors
 - there are numerous possible responses
 - Role of initial question development and pretesting

Cognitive Steps in Answering Questions

1. Understand question.
2. Search memory for information.
3. Integrate information into summary judgment.
4. Translate judgment onto response alternatives.

“Optimizing”

Cognitive Steps

- Understand question.
 - Search memory for information.
 - Integrate information into summary judgment.
- Translate judgment onto response alternatives.

“Weak satisficing”

Cognitive Steps

- **Understand** question.
- Search memory for information.
- Integrate information into summary judgment.
- **Translate** judgment onto response alternatives.

“Strong satisficing”

Factors Influencing Satisficing

- Respondent motivation
- Respondent ability
- Task difficulty

Response Effects Explained by Satisficing

- Response order
- Acquiescence
- Non-differentiation
- Saying “don’t know”

Response order effects

- Primacy
- Recency

Response Effects Explained by Satisficing

- Response order
- **Acquiescence**
- Non-differentiation
- Saying “don’t know”

Acquiescence

Form A (agree I's version):
Individuals are more to blame than social conditions for crime and lawlessness in this country.

Form A (Agree I's)

Agree (I): **59.6%**

Disagree (SC): **40.4**
100
(473)

Form B (agree SCs version):
Social conditions are more to blame than individuals for crime and lawlessness in this country.

Form B (Agree SCs)

Agree (SC): **56.8%**

Disagree (I): **43.2**
100
(472)

Acquiescence

Abortion should be legal.

Strongly agree Agree Neither Disagree Strongly disagree

Do you favor or oppose legalized abortion?

Favor Oppose

Response Effects Explained by Satisficing

- Response order
- Acquiescence
- **Non-differentiation**
- Saying “don’t know”

Non-differentiation

How important is each of the following qualities for a child to have?

	Not important						Extremely important
Good manners	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Tries hard to succeed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Is honest	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Is neat and clean	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Has sound judgment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Response Effects Explained by Satisficing

- Response order
- Acquiescence
- Non-differentiation
- Saying “don’t know”

Other Issues

- Double-barreled questions

Question:

Compared to one year ago, are you paying more, less, or about the same for your auto and life insurance?

Better Question:

Compared to one year ago, are you now paying more, less, or about the same for...

- a. auto insurance?
- b. life insurance?

Other Issues

- Specify who, what, when, where and how

Question:

What is your total household income?

Better Question:

In 2002, what was your total household income, before taxes? Please count income from all members of your household, including wages from employment, disability, social security, and public aid

Other Issues

- Specify through cues

Question:

During the past 30 days, did you drink any beer?

Better Question:

People drink beer in many places – for example, at home, at restaurants, at bars, sporting events, at friends' homes, etc. During the past 30 days, did you drink any beer?

Other Issues

- **Use words with singular meanings**

Ambiguous:

How would you compare how close you are to family in your current neighborhood to how close you were in your old neighborhood?
Would you say your family is closer here, further here, or the same?

Clearer:

Compared to your last neighborhood, do you now live closer to your family, are you further from your family, or are you about the same distance?

Other Issues

- Response Options
 - Should be consistent with the question
 - Should typically be exhaustive, including every possible answer
 - Categories should typically be mutually exclusive (no overlap)

Other Issues

- Constructing Response Scales
 - Length of response scale
 - Using graphic images, such as thermometers and ladders, and card sorting for complex ratings

Other Issues

- Numbering vs. Labeling
 - Numbers alone
 - Partial labeling
 - Full labeling

Physical Format Checklist

- Number all questions sequentially
- Use large, clear type; don't crowd
- 'White space:' Place more blank space between questions than between subcomponents of questions
- List answer categories vertically instead of horizontally
- Avoid double/triple 'banking' of response choices

Physical Format Checklist (continued)

- Be consistent with direction of response categories
- Don't split questions across pages
 - If necessary (e.g., question requires 1.5 pages), restate question and response categories on next page
- Put special instructions on questionnaire as needed, next to question
- Distinguish directions from questions – be consistent

Key References To Get Started

Dillman, Don. *Mail and Internet Surveys: The Tailored Design Method*. New York: John, Wiley & Sons, Inc, 1999.

Bradburn, N, Sudman, S. and Wansink, B. *Asking Questions: The Definitive Guide to Questionnaire design – for Market Research, Political Polls, and Social and Health Questionnaires*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2004.

See also past issues of Public Opinion Quarterly

Other References

- Schuman, H., & Presser, S. (1981). Questions and answers in attitude surveys. New York: Academic Press.
- Krosnick, J.A. (1991). Response strategies for coping with the cognitive demands of attitude measures in surveys. *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 5*, 213-236.
- Krosnick, J.A., Holbrook, A. L., Berent, M. K., Carson, R. T., Hanemann, W. M., Kopp, R. J., Mitchell, R. C., et al. (2002). The impact of "No Opinion" response options on data quality: Non-attitude reduction or an invitation to satisfice? *Public Opinion Quarterly, 66*, 371–403.

