

Web Survey Suggestions

Identify primary goal of the survey and most important objectives.

Open access vs. controlled access survey.

- Open access allows anyone in the world to complete the survey and is generally not recommended. Sometimes it is the only realistic option depending on the sample. If a respondent exits the survey mid-stream and wants to complete it later, they generally need to start over.
- Controlled access is the recommended but more complicated procedure, requiring a unique access code for each respondent in the sample. Respondents who exit mid-stream can re-enter later and pick up where they left off. Reminders can be emailed only to those who haven't completed the survey yet.

Identify and obtain sample.

- Identify information available in the sample that doesn't need to be included in the survey, or that should be verified by the survey.
- Check sample for errors (e.g., duplicates, incomplete information).
- Assign Case IDs.

Develop survey questions.

- Simple and straightforward. Must be understood the same way by most people. No jargon.
- Appropriate for the sample population. Remember who is in your sample.
- Complete sentences are best.
- Avoid confounded (double-barrel, where 2+ issues are included in one question) or double negatives.
- Response options should be exclusive, not overlap, and should match the question.
- Keep questions neutral. Don't ask leading questions. Response options should be balanced, not stacked one direction or another.
- Keep the survey as short as possible. Eliminate questions that are lower priority or already available in the sample.
- Use mostly closed-ended questions with answer options. There are a variety of good types of questions.
 - Yes/No
 - Select one answer
 - Check all that apply
 - Likert rating scales from 1-5 (with each number labeled, or just end-points labeled)
 - Agree/disagree
 - Simple numeric entry
 - Response options listed with "Other – please specify" at the end.
- Limit open text questions as much as possible. They are more burdensome to answer and much more difficult to analyze.
- Consider question formats (e.g., grids or individual items), layout options, and question order.
- Pre-test questions thoroughly (on paper) before programming.

Program survey.

- Clear readable font and layout.
- Should be usable for both desktop and mobile devices.
- Balance between scrolling and single-item screens. Too much scrolling is not good.

- Decide whether to require responses (in which case “don’t know” or “prefer not to answer” options should be included) or to not require responses. We typically do not require responses to most questions.
- Some online features just cause problems and are not worth using (e.g., sliding scales, interactive options). Just because you can use them doesn’t mean you should.
- Test all routing options and device usability.

Consider sending an advance paper letter or postcard (before the survey is fielded) to alert the sample population. Adds credibility and increases chances of the email invitation being opened.

Obtain IRB approval if needed.

Write email invitation and 1 or 2 reminders with appropriate subject line.

- Include any recommended IRB components. Include who is doing the survey and why (purpose). Include that it is voluntary.
- Keep it brief and straightforward.
- Include a customized link to the survey.
- Include a phone or email to contact with questions.
- Signature line information.

Field survey.

- Load sample, including sample variables you want in the final data set.
- Load invitation and reminders with scheduled delivery dates.
- Respond to questions from respondents.
- Close survey when field period ends.

Data Output.

- Output both completed surveys and partial surveys.
- Check completed (“submitted”) surveys because some will not really be completed. Remove those not worth keeping.
- Identify partials worth keeping and add to the data file of good completed surveys.
- Revise variable names as needed. Eliminate unnecessary variables.
- Run data frequencies and check for problems or re-coding. (Text in “Other-specify” items often needs to be re-coded.)