Using Surveys: An Overview

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Using Surveys

- Allow you to easily collect information from a group of people in a standardized manner.

- Surveys are useful for:
  - Larger samples
  - Original data
  - Measuring attitudes, perceptions, orientations, etc.
Four common methods

- Self-administered
  - Respondents complete a hard copy
- Face-to-face
  - Respondents are interviewed by someone
- Telephone
- Online
Survey Recommendations

- **Provide clear instructions:**
  - At start of survey
  - During use of scales and matrix questions
  - During use of contingency questions / conditional branching / skip-logic

- **Use clear and consistent formatting**
  - For answering questions
  - For scales

- **Check words, phrases, etc.**
  - Spelling
  - Acronyms and abbreviations
Common Errors

- Using Leading Words and Biased Terms
  - Refers to any part of the question that encourages a respondent to answer in a certain way
  - Subtle wording differences can produce large differences in results
    - “Could,” “should,” and “might,” seem similar, but have been shown to produce a 20% difference in agreement to a question
  - Strong words such as “force” and “prohibit” introduce a bias to the question
    - Do you think the government should force you to recycle?
  - Use of hypothetical situations can sometimes help to avoid issues
Failing to Give Mutually Exclusive Choices

- Multiple choice response options should be allow respondents to make clear choices
- Don’t create uncertainty for respondents
- Review your survey and identify ways respondents could get stuck with either too many or no correct answers.

1. What is your age?
   a) 20-30
   b) 30-40
   c) 40-50
   d) 50+
Common Errors

□ Not Asking Direct Questions
  □ Questions that are vague can limit the usefulness of your results
  □ Make sure respondents know what you’re asking
    □ Don’t ask:
      1. What suggestions do you have for improving gardening in Spokane County?
  □ When you want to know:
    1. Using the following list, please identify the gardening classes you are most likely to take if offered by Master Gardeners in the next six months?
Common Errors

- **Not Including a “Prefer Not to Answer” Option**
  - Sometimes respondents may not want or be able to provide the information requested.
  - These questions should be asked only when absolutely necessary.
  - Should always include an option to not answer (not applicable, prefer not to answer, etc.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions about:</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>Personal beliefs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Political beliefs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finances</td>
<td>Religious beliefs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family life</td>
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Common Errors

- Failing to Cover All Possible Answer Choices
  - Are all of the options covered?
    - If unsure, conduct a pretest using “Other (please specify)” as an option.
    - If more than 10% of respondents (in a pretest or otherwise) select “other,” likely missing an answer.
    - Review the “Other” answers provided and add the most frequently mentioned new options to the list
Common Errors

- Not Using Unbalanced Scales Carefully
  - Unbalanced scales may be appropriate for some situations and promote bias in others.
    1. What is your opinion of the recycling options in King County?
      a) Pretty good
      b) Great
      c) Fantastic
      d) The Best Ever

- Additionally, scale points should represent equi-distant points on a scale.
  - Research has shown the points on the strongly disagree–disagree–neutral–agree–strongly agree scale have the same equal conceptual distance from one point to the next
Common Errors

☐ Not Asking Only One Question at a Time
  ☐ Known as a double-barreled question
  ☐ When multiple questions are asked at one time
  ☐ Can cause issues for respondents
    1. What is the fastest and most economical Internet service for you?