

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR PREPARING QUESTIONNAIRES AND SURVEYS

1. STUDY DESIGN

- State clearly and explicitly the specific goals of your study
- Become familiar with the characteristics of those to whom you will send questionnaires
- Anticipate reasons for non-responses
- Estimate the cost of your study and the time it will take to conduct

- Group questions together that have the same response options
- Place answer spaces on the right side of the page or at least in columns
- Check each returned questionnaire and clarify any ambiguous or hard to read responses, being careful not to change the meaning intended by respondent

- Make the questionnaire as "appealing to the eye" and easy to complete as possible
- Number the questionnaire items and page so the respondent will not become confused while completing the form
- Put an identifying mark on each page of the form in case they get separated
- Include brief but clear instructions for completing the form, and additional clarification and examples before sections that might be confusing
- Print all directions in bold face or italics (or box it)
- Group items into logically coherent sections

- Begin with a few interesting "non-threatening" questions
- Avoid putting important items at the end of a long questionnaire
- If questions appear on both sides of a page, put the word "over" on the bottom of the front side of page
- Try to make smooth transitions between sections
- Avoid using the word "questionnaire" or "checklist" on the form itself

2. QUESTION CONSTRUCTION

- Avoid the use of "could," "may," "should," and "might" in questions
- Each question should be so clearly worded that all respondent will interpret it the same way
- Base all questions on the goal of your questionnaire: What do you want to know?
- The most effective questions are worded as simply as possible

- Do not phrase questions in a way that suggests a response
- Avoid questions that presuppose a certain state of affairs or assumes a condition
- Be sure your respondent is capable of giving an accurate answer to your question
- Be sure your respondent can distinguish if you are asking for fact or opinion

- Ask for only one piece of information per question
- Be careful when using general adjectives and adverbs such as "several," "significant number of," "most," and "usually"
- Avoid using words that have double meanings
- Avoid using words that have possible emotional overtones

- Avoid using double negatives. Say what you mean directly and concisely
- Be careful with, and limit, the use of abbreviations
- Avoid using "if yes, then . . ." questions
- Avoid using hypothetical questions
- If you want general information from respondents, include an open-ended or essay question at the end on the form

3. RESPONSE OPTIONS

- Make certain one response category is listed for every conceivable answer
- Include a "don't know" response option any time you ask a question which people may be unable to answer
- Balance all scales used in the response option
- Make response options mutually exclusive and independent
- Arrange responses vertically rather than horizontally

CHECKLIST

Test each item in your questionnaire for the following:

- Does the question ask for only one piece of information?
- Does the question presuppose a certain state of affairs or assume too much?
- Does the question wording imply a desired answer?
- Are any of the question's words emotionally loaded, vaguely defined or overly general?
- Do any of the question's words have a double meaning that may cause misunderstanding?
- Does the question use abbreviations which may be unfamiliar to respondents?
- Are the response options mutually exclusive and sufficient to cover each conceivable answer?