

## Planning your Survey: A brief guide

In some disciplines it will make sense to use a standard survey that has been validated by others. In that case you will just need to consider how you will distribute your survey.

Otherwise you will need to design your own questionnaire and this document is designed to provide some general guidelines to help you. Always check with your supervisor before you start collecting responses.

A key thing to keep in mind is that your survey should help you to answer your research questions. Think carefully about how each question in your survey will help you to do this.

Also think about how you plan to analyse your data and ensure that you collect appropriate data.

## Questionnaire design

Before you distribute your survey widely try to pilot it with a few people who can give you some constructive criticism – this should help you check that your survey will provide the data you want.

Here are some points to keep in mind:

- Keep your survey as short as is practical – do not ask a question if you are not going to use the answers.
- Introduce your survey explaining why you are carrying it out and how long it is likely to take to complete. Any ethical considerations (e.g. confidentiality) should be made clear in the introduction.
- If you want to exclude some people from your research, make sure they have the option to stop early in the survey by including a filter question. (E.g. Are you a Middlesex student?)
- You will probably want to have some questions on the demographics of your sample (e.g. age, gender, nationality) but only ask about what you are actually interested in.
- If you want your survey to be anonymous make sure that your respondents will not feel that your questions will help you identify them.
- Avoid questions that are difficult to answer. Think about what it is reasonable to expect someone to remember or calculate.
- Avoid ambiguous questions. Make sure you are clear and that your respondents will have the same understanding of things as you do. Be aware of international/cultural differences in language and attitudes.
- Avoid asking sensitive questions unless they are pertinent to your research. (E.g. religion, sexual orientation.)
- Be careful with negatives. (E.g. Do you agree that the company should not...?)
- Avoid double-barrelled questions. (E.g. I agree that my team leader is approachable and efficient.)
- Avoid leading questions. (E.g. Do you agree that Middlesex is the best...?)
- Is a question open or closed? Closed questions (with options given) are easier to analyse but open questions might give deeper insights and will allow respondents to have their say, and you might be able to use quotes from them to illustrate your findings.

- Do you want to see what people remember without being prompted or give them choices? (E.g. What adverts have you seen in the last month? Which of these adverts have you seen?)
- If offering choices, do you need an 'other' option – even in yes/no questions? Be clear about whether you are expecting just one choice or whether more are permitted.
- If using Likert scales (strongly agree, agree etc.) decide how many options to give and how to word each choice. If using a scale be aware of differences in the interpretation of a score of 7/10.
- Be aware that the kind of data (categorical, ordinal or scale) you collect will affect how you can analyse it.
- Do you want to ask for exact numbers or provide bands? (E.g age, salary.) Both can be appropriate - how accurate do you need to be?
- Be clear about whether you are asking for an opinion or for factual information.

### Distributing your survey

Once you have decided on your questions think about how you will distribute the survey.

- Collecting the results in person will mean that you can explain your questions if necessary but the respondents cannot be completely anonymous.
- Online surveys can be anonymous and quick. If you are using an online survey tool then check its cost and how you will be able to extract the data afterwards.
- Think about how you will get people to complete the survey and what your sample will be.