

Tips & Advice

- Step 1: Establish goals
- Step 2: Develop questions and responses
- Step 3: Pilot test questions
- Step 4: Re-evaluate each question

General Tips

- A. Identify what you want to learn.
- B. Remove “wouldn’t it be nice to know” questions. Only include questions that directly shed light on what you want to learn.
- C. Know how you will use and present the information.
- D. Remove questions that a respondent may not be willing or able to answer.
- E. Keep it short and specific

Wording Questions

- F. Use clear wording without abbreviations or jargon.
- G. One issue, skill, ability per question. Split “double-barreled” questions into two questions
 - **Problematic:** I am confident in my ability to write a cover letter and resume.
 - **Better:** I am confident in my ability to write a cover letter.
 - **Better:** I am confident in my ability to write a resume.
- H. Avoid double negatives
 - **Problematic:** I am not incompetent when I am part of a multi-disciplinary team.
a) Strongly Disagree b) Disagree) c) Neutral d) Agree e) Strong Agree
 - **Better:** I am competent when I am part of a multi-disciplinary team.
a) Strongly Disagree b) Disagree) c) Neutral d) Agree e) Strong Agree
- I. Avoid leading questions
 - **Problematic:** Would you be willing to attend a weekend job fair if it increases your chances of getting a job interview?
 - **Better:** Would you attend a weekend job fair if it were available?
 - **Problematic:** To what extent do you agree that opportunities for community service are important to you?
 - **Better:** To what extent do you agree or disagree that opportunities for community service are important to you?
- J. Make questions as specific and concrete as possible
 - **Problematic:** I am confident in my ability to communicate effectively.
 - **Better:** I am confident in my ability to present my research findings at a conference.

Wording Responses

Response alternatives should be exhaustive and mutually exclusive	
Problematic: How many conferences did you attend this semester? a) 1 b)2 b) 3 c) 3 or more	Better: How many conferences did you attend this semester? a) 0 b) 1 b) 2 c) 3 or more
Use balanced scales (i.e., equal number of positive and negative response options)	
Problematic: How would you rate on-campus apartment housing? Satisfactory Good Excellent	Better: How would you rate on-campus apartment housing? a) Poor b) Fair c) Good d) Excellent
Match response options with question	
Problematic: I would recommend this workshop to my friends. a) Outstanding b) About Average c) Average	Better: I would recommend this workshop to my friends. a) Yes b) No c) Unsure
Be careful where you place “No Opinion” or “Unsure” usual they should be placed at the end of a scale. User “Neither Agree nor Disagree” instead of “neutral”	
Problematic: To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: “Our campus is a safe place to work”? a) Strongly Disagree b) Disagree c) Unsure/No Opinion d) Agree e) Strongly Agree	Better: To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: “Our campus is a safe place to work”? a) Strongly Disagree b) Disagree c) Agree d) Strongly Agree e) Unsure

Useful Answer Categories

If you want to know how often something occurs, ask for the exact number of times or ask, “how often...” and choose from the following categories:

Never	Almost Never	Never
Rarely	Occasionally	Almost Never
Occasionally	Sometimes	Sometimes
Regularly	Often	Fairly Often
Don't Know	Don't Know	Very Often

Never	Hardly Ever	Not At All
Rarely	Rarely	Occasionally
Sometimes	Sometimes	Frequently
Most of the Time	Often	
Always	Very Often	

If you want to find out the degree of people’s feelings, their attitude, or belief, ask “to what extent...” and choose from the following categories:

Not Very Effective	Not Very Prepared	Very Dissatisfied
Somewhat Effective	Somewhat Prepared	Dissatisfied
Moderately Effective	Moderately Prepared	Neutral
Very Effective	Well Prepared	Satisfied
Not Sure	Uncertain	Very Satisfied

Strongly Disagree	Very Poor	Needs Work
Disagree	Poor	Good
Neither Agree or Disagree	Fair	Excellent
Agree	Good	
Strongly Agree	Very Good	

If you want to find out people’s intentions or aspirations ask, “do you expect to...” and ask them to choose from the following categories:

Definitely No	No Chance	
No	Very Little Chance	
Uncertain	Unsure	
Yes	Some Chance	
Definitely Yes	Very Good Chance	

Sources:

Kiernan, Nancy Ellen (2004). *Useful Categories: Tipsheet #44*, University Park, PA: Penn State Cooperative Extension. Available at <http://extension.psu.edu/Evaluation/pdf/TS44.pdf>

Henning, Gavin. *Ordered Response Options*. Dartmouth College. Available at http://www.dartmouth.edu/~oir/docs/Ordered_Response_Options.doc