

Survey Activity

1. Do you think persons should be able to smoke cigarettes anywhere they please, regardless of how they affect the health of others?

Loaded Question

2. The Surgeon General states that cigarette smoking is harmful to one's health. Do you encourage your children to smoke cigarettes?

Loaded Question

3. Do you think rude people should be able to smoke their cigarettes while attending a baseball game?

Use of inflammatory words

4. Approximately how many PCP's are inhaled from smoking one cigarette?

Avoid technical terms

5. Do you agree with the Surgeon General's latest report on cigarette smoking?

Do not assume knowledge or behavior

6. Do you disagree that cigarette smoking is disagreeable?

Avoid double negatives

7. Do you think smoking cigarettes is bad for your health and well-being?

Avoid the double-barreled question

8. Should the national health care bill include a \$1.00 tax increase on a pack of cigarettes?

never sometimes often always

Response categories should match the question

9. How much do you spend on cigarettes each week?

Do Not Smoke less than \$10 \$10 to \$15 \$15 or more

Response categories must be mutually exclusive

10. Is cigarette smoking in public places ever acceptable?

Avoid determinism

11. Do you think arbitration in MLB exacerbates the current epoch of turmoil between the union and the owners?
Using big words, technical terms, and/or abbreviations can confuse and discourage respondents.

12. Given the current trend of more hits, more home runs, longer games in general, and more injuries in baseball today, do you think that steroid use should continue to be banned even though it is not enforced?
Long questions can be vague and confusing

13. Do you watch baseball regularly?
*Vague questions are difficult to answer (what is the meaning of "regularly"?,
watch baseball in what form?)*

14. Are the Cubs and Braves good baseball teams?
Double-barreled question

15. Even though steroid use makes baseball more exciting, it is still banned. Do you think that it should continue to be banned?
Leading question

16. Young children are killing themselves by trying chewing tobacco after they see professional baseball players do it. Should chewing tobacco be banned in all levels of baseball?
*Emotional language causes people to respond to an emotionally-charged question
differently than they would to a neutral one.*

17. I can always talk to my supervisor about work-related problems.
Terms such as "always" and "never" will bias the response in the opposite direction.

18. Training and career planning are available to me.
Double-barrel

19. Communication at work is good.
*Question is too broad. If score is less than 100% positive, researcher still does not know what aspect of
communication needs improvement.*

Examples of Common Wording Problems When Writing Questionnaires:

1. Avoid the loaded question:

Do you think persons should be able to smoke cigarettes anywhere they please, regardless of how they affect the health of others?

The Surgeon General states that cigarette smoking is harmful to one's health. Do you encourage your children to smoke cigarettes?

Note: Sometimes the researcher might deliberately want to use biased wording to help balance a controversial topic: Do you support cigarette advertising in foreign countries to promote job creation in the U.S.?

2. Avoid the use of inflammatory words:

Do you think rude people should be able to smoke their cigarettes while attending a baseball game?

3. Avoid technical terms:

Approximately how many PCP's are inhaled from smoking one cigarette?

4. Do not assume knowledge or behavior:

Do you agree with the Surgeon General's latest report on cigarette smoking?

5. Avoid double negatives:

Do you disagree that cigarette smoking is disagreeable?

6. Avoid the double-barreled question:

Do you think smoking cigarettes is bad for your health and well-being?

7. Response categories should match the question:

Should the national health care bill include a \$1.00 tax increase on a pack of cigarettes?

1. never
2. sometimes
3. often
4. always

8. Response categories must be mutually exclusive:

How much do you spend on cigarettes each week?

1. Do Not Smoke
2. less than \$10
3. \$10 to \$15
4. \$15 or more

9. Avoid determinism:

Is cigarette smoking in public places ever acceptable?

10. Split complex questions into parts:

Wrong: What percentage of your weekly income do you spend on cigarettes?

Right: What was your total income before taxes in 2004?

Approximately how much money do you spend on cigarettes each week?

11. Provide clear instructions on responses:

Please rate your opinion of smoking cigarettes on a scale from 1 to 10

Examples of bad questions and how to fix them:

Bad question: "Do you think arbitration in MLB exacerbates the current epoch of turmoil between the union and the owners?"

Problem: Using big words, technical terms, and/or abbreviations can confuse and discourage respondents.

Better question: "Do you think the baseball players' right to have a judge determine salary hurts the already stressed relationship between the players and owners?"

Bad question: "Given the current trend of more hits, more home runs, longer games in general, and more injuries in baseball today, do you think that steroid use should continue to be banned even though it is not enforced?"

Problem: Long questions can be vague and confusing.

Better question: Steroid use has both positive and negative effects on baseball. Do you think that steroid use should be banned?"

Bad question: "Do you watch baseball regularly?"

Problem: Vague questions are difficult to answer (what is the meaning of "regularly"?, watch baseball it what form?)

Better question: "How often do you watch baseball on TV?"

Bad question: "Are the Cubs and Braves good baseball teams?"

Problem: Double-barreled questions ask two separate things (perhaps the Cubs are bad and the Braves are good)

Better question: "Are the Cubs a good baseball team?"

Bad question: "Even though steroid use makes baseball more exciting, it is still banned. Do you think that it should continue to be banned?"

Problem: Leading questions set the respondent to answer one way (rather than what they really think).

Better question: "Should steroid use be banned?"

Bad question: "Barry Bonds agrees with most other professional players when he says that the umpires need to speed up games. Do you think that umpires should take this initiative?"

Problem: Prestige bias skews the data because people have the tendency to agree with people who have prestigious jobs or titles.

Better question: "Do you think that umpires should take the initiative to shorten baseball games?"

Bad question: "Young children are killing themselves by trying chewing tobacco after they see professional baseball players do it. Should chewing tobacco be banned in all levels of baseball?"

Problem: Emotional language causes people to respond to an emotionally-charged question differently than they would to a neutral one.

Better question: "Based on its effect on younger players, should chewing tobacco be banned in all levels of baseball?"

Survey Question Miswording

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Example: "I can always talk to my supervisor about work-related problems."

Problem: Terms such as "always" and "never" will bias the response in the opposite direction.

Result: Data will be skewed.

Example: "Training and career planning are available to me."

Problem: Double-barrel: training and career planning. Respondents may need to agree with one and not the other. Researcher cannot make assumptions about which part of the question respondents were rating.

Result: Data is useless.

Example: "Communication at work is good."

Problem: Question is too broad. If score is less than 100% positive, researcher still does not know what aspect of communication needs improvement.

Result: Data is of little or no usefulness.

Example: "The pace at our Company is hectic."

Problem: The question is negative, and broadcasts a bad message about the Company.

Result: Data will be skewed, and the climate may be negatively impacted.