



# Guide To The Design Of Questionnaires

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*A general introduction to the  
design of questionnaires.*

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<b>AUTHOR</b>	University Computing Services The University of Leeds
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# TOP 2

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## Feedback

The Computing Service welcomes feedback on its documentation. If you notice any mistakes in this document, or if you wish to make any suggestions on how the document could be improved, please contact Nicholas Cook in the Computing Service. Electronic mail should be sent to the address [n.j.a.cook@uk.ac.leeds](mailto:n.j.a.cook@uk.ac.leeds)

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# 1 Introduction

## About This Document

Surveys of any kind are expensive and time-consuming to conduct. It is therefore important that the analysis of results is as extensive and well prepared as possible.

This document is designed for students and researchers intending to process a survey. The notes on construction of questions are written as an aid to logic and efficiency whether or not computer processing is required. The document provides a compilation of do's and don'ts of questionnaire design which if obeyed will make computational work routine and fast.

## Surveys

Too many researchers complete surveys before they have given any thought to the analysis of results. This can lead to inadequate inferences and if the work has not been previously prepared for a machine-readable format, a frustrating waste of time and resources.

The choice of computing software is also important. The Computing Service supports a range of general purpose statistical packages including SAS, Minitab and SPSS. We can advise on the best program for your application.

There are some basic points to remember:

- define your objectives  
decide your sample
- decide how to collect replies:  
by interview schedules  
by self administered or postal questionnaires
- run a pilot survey
- when writing questions:  
avoid open ended questions  
keep answers mutually exclusive  
consider ranked replies carefully  
be concise  
avoid double questions and double negatives  
ask for precise answers  
remember respondents are people too
- avoid complex branching  
allow for case identification  
number records, characters and columns

### **Define Your Objectives**

Start your survey by drawing up a set of objectives — all the information you might intend to extract from the replies. Bear these objectives in mind when designing your questions so that your questions are all relevant, concise and efficient. If you are not sure of some objectives do some preliminary research amongst your subjects, or in the relevant literature.

Most researchers make the mistake of asking too many questions. This often arises from an incomplete analysis of objectives. Your greatest enemy in survey analysis may well be poor response rate. Clear and concise questionnaires get the best response.

## 2 How to Collect Replies

Decide whether the survey is to be completed by the respondent directly or through an interviewer, and design the paperwork accordingly. If you are relying on the respondent to complete the questionnaire, begin with questions that will raise interest. Layout the questions and answer choices attractively and neatly. Be careful not to overfill the page. The respondent may give up if it is found too hard work to complete.

### Interview Schedules

This document gives advice on the construction of questionnaires for direct reply; the interviewed questionnaire may be dealt with slightly differently. A certain amount of precoding may be done and some notes on conversation for the interviewer may be added.

It is especially important to include detailed conversational text if the interview is by telephone.

### Self Administered Questionnaires

If you intend the respondent to complete the questionnaire themselves then you must make sure the questions are quite easy to answer and unambiguous. Ask friends who are not used to computer forms to complete trial copies. This will give you an idea of the sense made of the questions as well as the range of answers (see Section 3).

If you cannot expect the respondent to be guided by coding conventions you ought to consider yourself completing the formal coding of answers into numeric codes after the forms have been returned. However remember that this will involve your time and a possible increase in error due to transcription of results.

In the case of postal questionnaires it is frequently a good idea to get a 'foot in the door' by asking each subject to complete a very short pro-forma, confirming a few essential details, including name and address. You will get a higher response from this first approach. Then follow up with a full questionnaire to the respondents. Reply paid envelopes and follow up telephone calls also help to raise the response, of course.

The initial foot-in-the-door could be done by telephone.

### Layout and Typeface

If you have word-processing facilities make good use of italics and bold types. Use a good legible font, a serified font like Times is easier to read than one like Helvetica.

Think of using italics consistently to give instructions e.g. tick the relevant box. Consider using bold for the questions themselves or for headings.

Do not clutter the form up with unnecessary headings, numbers etc.

# 3 Run a Pilot Survey

Test the questionnaire on a small sample of your subjects first. If this is not possible at least test it on some colleagues or friends.

You will detect some flaws in your questioning.

You will find a range of possible answers you will get when asking open ended questions.

Having done your pilot survey, you can make amendments necessary to maximise your returns and minimise your error rate on answers.

You will be able to categorise any of your open ended questions to a reasonable degree.

You will also be able to perform the analysis on your pilot sample and hence test out all your computational procedures and produce some initial hypotheses.

# 4 Wording of Questions

## Avoid Open Ended Questions

Unless you want to treat each reply individually open ended questions should be avoided or categorised into discrete groups.

For example the question:

**What do you think are the reasons for football hooliganism?**

may elicit a whole range of replies of varying length and articulation. If you are interested in making very precise judgements of each individual respondent this may well be useful. If, however, you are concerned, as most surveys are, in summarising replies to produce a picture of your population, a better approach may be...

**Do you think football hooliganism is caused by:** *(tick if appropriate)*

Lack of discipline at home	<input type="checkbox"/>
Players behaviour on pitch	<input type="checkbox"/>
Family breakdown	<input type="checkbox"/>
Youth unemployment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Poor schooling	<input type="checkbox"/>
Violence on T.V.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Be sure to make your categories exhaustive if necessary by making fairly broad suggestions that will still satisfy your objectives.

If you still feel that your questions cannot be categorised until all the replies are returned leave a space in the margin to code a numeric response.

**e.g. What was the main problem you encountered with your wheelchair?**

|

## Keep Answers Mutually Exclusive

When designing questions which you intend to have a single answer make sure you will always have just one answer. For example, if you ask the question:

### How do you travel to college?

you may expect a different number of replies from each respondent. The student who lives locally may always walk, but another may take a bike or come by bus when it rains.

Phrasing the question:

### What is your most usual means of travelling to college?

will certainly help but may not include all the information needed. Another way would be:

### Which of the following means do you use to travel to college?

Bus	<input type="checkbox"/>
Car	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bike	<input type="checkbox"/>

Here the respondent is allowed to select a combination of answers to what is, in fact, a series of independent dichotomous yes/no questions.

**Never** be tempted to use the following structure:

### Select up to three of the options below and enter in the boxes opposite

Option A	Option B	Option C	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Option D	Option E	Option F	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Whilst this may be logically sound you will have problems when summarising these results. A very tedious and finally unsatisfactory search is required to determine how any given option performs.

## Ranked Replies

A useful way to ask for an ordering of a set of options may be to demand a numerical ordering from 1 to the maximum number you are interested in.

For example, to a question like:

**Place in order of importance to you the following features of a camping holiday**

*(Indicate by numbering from 1-4 in order of importance)*

Open air	<input type="text"/>
Mobility	<input type="text"/>
Cost	<input type="text"/>
People	<input type="text"/>
Atmosphere	<input type="text"/>

or even in a more complex and interesting way:

*(Circle the number under the initials which applies.*

*VI=Very important; I=Important; N=Neutral; U=Unimportant;*

*U=Unimportant VU=Very Unimportant).*

**Indicate your view of the following aspects of a camping holiday**

	VI	I	N	U	VU
Community life	1	2	3	4	5
Low cost	1	2	3	4	5
Outdoor life	1	2	3	4	5
Ability to move around	1	2	3	4	5

## Be Concise

Make questions brief and clear. Check for ambiguity and make sure that the answer may be competently answered.

## Avoid Double Questions

Sometimes questions hide a dual question, for example:

**Do you think the British should eat less and exercise more?**

instead ask:

	Yes	No
Do you think the British should eat less	1	2
Do you think the British should exercise more	1	2

Notice the same use of circled number responses for Yes/No questions.

## Avoid Questions Involving Negatives

Don't confuse the respondent by language like this:

*(Please circle relevant number)*

	Yes	No
<b>Are you against a ban on smoking</b>	1	2

confusion leads to errors!

## Ask Precise Questions

Ask for precise answers if you think the information is available and there are no other constraints (e.g. too intrusive on privacy). For example:

**Give your age on 1st September 1988**  years

is more preferable to:

**Are you...**

Under 18	<input type="checkbox"/>
18-65	<input type="checkbox"/>
Over 65	<input type="checkbox"/>

In this example although age groups may be all that is required, asking for the exact age will also suffice and have the added advantages that:

- There is less room for error i.e. ticking wrong box.
- Exact ages may very simply be recoded, by a computer program, into groups.
- The researcher may alter these groups by keeping the exact ages. Not only may you inspect different age groups than at first envisaged, but you may back date your age groups.
- You can obtain continuous descriptive statistics e.g. mean and standard deviation.

Using a computer you can transform dates of birth into ages as long as you have the date on which the information was given. Hours, mins and secs are trivially transformed to, say, seconds by

$$((\text{hours} \times 60) + \text{mins}) \times 60 + \text{secs}$$

using the computer.

## Getting the Maximum Response

You cannot always expect the respondent to have the same concern for the greater good (which your questionnaire will undoubtedly serve!) as yourself.

There are two main considerations which must be made when asking a person to give up some time to help your research.

Firstly allow for privacy and do not ask questions which may offend. Apart from anything else your rate of return will suffer.

Secondly, especially if you need to ask some personally searching questions, it helps to explain as much as you feel able about your research to the respondent, both at the beginning and all through the questionnaire.

For example having asked most of your general questions you might at the end write:

**Finally could you give us a few bits of information about yourself so that we can put your other replies in greater context.**

**Age in years**

--	--

**Sex:**

Male


Female

and so on.

Enthusiasts must also remember that respondents do not want a pre-release copy of your thesis! Keep the flow of questions running through the questionnaire.

## Avoid Complex Branching

Although some questions are always consequent upon earlier answers, keep the number of branches to the simplest form.

If necessary use two or three versions of the questionnaire for respondents in different situations.

Using coloured paper helps to keep different revisions of a questionnaire distinct.

# 5 Designing for the Computer

The computer will normally save you time and always result in greater accuracy and lower probability of most kinds of errors (e.g. in transcription). If you have not used a computer before some extra time may be needed to complete your first project but you will then have gained an important new skill.

## Number Each Questionnaire

Each individual questionnaire must be numbered by you, either before it is completed or, to preserve anonymity, afterwards. This number must be transferred to all the computer records that will be produced from your questionnaire.

The correct way to ensure this is to draw a set of boxes on the top of the first page and on the questionnaire. There should be enough boxes to accommodate the largest number, using one digit per box. Letters can be used instead of numbers, if, for example, you want to use area codes as part of an identifier. The next section explains how to decide where your new records begin.

Numbering replies enables you to match records with completed questionnaire forms and thus eradicate coding errors and it also allows you to check on individuals later.

Numbering also allows you to sort the data and check the correct order of data records.

## Using Computer Files

When you have written out all your questions make a note of how many digits each answer will deliver.

For example:

Age		
-----	--	--

*two digits*

*(Please circle relevant number)*

Male    Female

**Sex**

1

2

*one digit*

**Weight**

--	--	--

Kg

*three digits*

If you are doubtful about the number of digits needed err on the high side. For example, the price of houses is normally in five digits but it is very likely that some will be in six, therefore use six — or even seven boxes, to record the answer.

£							
---	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

If you have more than about 80 digits for each questionnaire you are advised to split each questionnaire into more than one computer record.

Therefore, make each computer record contain about 80 characters or numbers. It doesn't matter how many records you use. You do not have to use up to 80 characters per record and do not be afraid to use several records per questionnaire.

Each time you begin a new record you must write in the questionnaire number and record number. The example below shows a list of several records from a survey. The questionnaire numbers are 017, 018 and 019 and each questionnaire has three records numbered from 1 to 3.

017	1	001102001223012230000000011000101
017	2	000000000101111110002020202
017	3	10110001110101098. 4067001000034567
018	1	0100011200102201112302201000221111
018	2	001111000010111000002002000
018	3	11100010010000199. 5077001000033547
019	1	0010001000102001200201203000003021
019	2	0011111010101010100202000000
019	3	10101000100100097. 3075001000054 27

Now that you have all the columns represented on the questionnaire indicate the record numbering at convenient places along the questionnaire. Not every column need be numbered, but a periodic check for the data entry operator is essential.

For data entry operators the optimum number of characters to type on a record is about 60. So if you have, say, 128 characters to be typed arrange this in two 64 column records rather than 80 and 48 columns.

# Appendix 1 Examples for Questionnaire Design

## Type A Numerical Responses

In this example numbers are entered in boxes opposite the questions. Some of the numbers are fixed length and are accommodated one per box (e.g. ages of crew); others which are of variable length are entered together in one box. The data preparation operator will know that all numbers are right-justified in the columns provided.

In the example the time over a course is measured; columns 19 and 20 are used to record the number of minutes taken which may be in one or two digits. If the time is measured as less than 10 mins the minutes will automatically be typed in column 20.

One place of decimals has been allowed for 'wind speed'; the decimal point is entered explicitly and takes up the third out of the four columns used.

### Quantitative Responses

1-3

**Boat number**

**Weight, to nearest kilogram, of...**

Bow		Kg
No 3		Kg
No2		Kg
Stroke		Kg
Cox		Kg

**Time over course**  mins  secs

**Wind speed**  kph

**Time over course**

Bow	No3	No2	Stroke

34

## Type B Ticks in Brackets

In this example the respondent is only expected to tick replies. Although this enables a faster completion and higher likelihood of return, the ticks have to be transformed into a digital response, which is then coded in the boxes opposite. This operation may be helped by numbering the different responses.

Note that you have to code this yourself after receipt.

### Where did you spend your August bank holiday?

*(please tick correct answer)*

- At home ( )
- East Midlands/East Coast ( )
- Elsewhere in Britain ( )
- Ireland (including N.I.) ( )
- elsewhere ( )  51

### If you went away, did you stay

- In a hotel ( )
- At the home of relatives or friends ( )
- Camping or Youth Hostelling ( )
- In a holiday flat/cottage/boat ( )
- At a Holiday camp ( )  52

## Type C Circled Numbers

By allowing the respondent to ring digits opposite answers, a post coding operation is avoided. However, extra care must be taken to ensure that one and only one number is ringed for each recorded answer.

**Please circle the number opposite the reply that most exactly applies to you.**

Are you...	Single	1	
	Married	2	
	Divorced/Separated	3	
	Widowed	4	(27)

**What was the highest academic qualification you gained whilst at school or college?**

No formal qualification	1	
GCSEs, O levels or CSEs	2	
Some further qualification (e.g. A level, ONC, etc.)	3	(28)

**Indicate your view of the following aspect of housing in relation to your own needs.**

*(Please circle the number under one of the five categories which applies VI - very important, IM - important, NO - no strong view, HA-handicap, GH - great handicap)*

	VI	IM	NO	HA	GH	
Personal responsibility for repairs	1	2	3	4	5	
High financial investment	1	2	3	4	5	
Private garden	1	2	3	4	5	
Within a close community	1	2	3	4	5	(29-32)

## Type D The Open-ended Question

Remember these questions can often be avoided by using a pilot survey.

**What is your main objection to playing rugby?**

51-54	

## Type E Ticks or No Ticks

In this example it is made clear to the data preparation operator that each ticked box represents a column typed as '1' and each clear box a blank column. Such a technique is useful when dealing with many YES/NO answers as above.

**Which of the following modes of transport do you use when travelling to work?**

*(tick relevant boxes)*

Private car	<input type="checkbox"/>
Motor bike	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bicycle	<input type="checkbox"/>
Foot	<input type="checkbox"/>
Train	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bus	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Note** For the sake of clarity try to standardise on no more than two or three of the above types in any given questionnaire.

# Appendix 2 Examples of Questionnaires

A number of typical questionnaires are included in this Appendix, including:

- Job Survey Questionnaire
- Personality Assessment Questionnaire
- Questionnaire on Study On Modern Methods Of Documentation And Library Work
- Interviewed Questionnaire

Note that all of these questionnaires were produced using the Word For Windows word processing package.

# Job Survey

Case number 

--	--	--	--

 (4)

This questionnaire is designed to find out a few things about yourself and your job. Please answer the questions truthfully. There are no right or wrong answers.

**1. To which of the following racial or ethnic groups do you belong?**

*(Please fill in the relevant box or circle a number)*

White 1

Asian 2

West Indian 3

African 4

Other 5

**2. Are you male or female?**

Male 1

Female 2

**3. What is your current annual income in £'s before tax and other deductions?**

£ 

--	--	--	--

**4. What is your date of birth?**

dd mm yy  

--	--	--

**5. What year did you join this firm?**

1	9	
---	---	--

**6. Did you attend the firm's meeting this month?**

Yes 1

No 2 (20)

# Personality Assessment

Case number    (3)

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>				<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
I constantly worry about what other people think of me.	1	2	3	4	5
I often feel pressured, by peers, into doing things I do not want to do.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel there is a constant pressure on me to be popular.	1	2	3	4	5
I am not frightened of acting independently from the crowd.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel threatened in a large group.	1	2	3	4	5
I worry about being different from everyone else.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel pressured, by others to chat up members of the opposite sex.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel I am easily influenced by the behaviour of my friends.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel pressurised into consuming alcohol.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel free to be myself whilst socialising with a group.	1	2	3	4	5
My work is disrupted due to the influence of friends.	1	2	3	4	5
I am influenced by the views and attitudes held by my friends.	1	2	3	4	5
I have a fear of being seen as different from the crowd.	1	2	3	4	5
I am never pushed into doing something I do not want to do.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel I must put on an act when I am amongst a group.	1	2	3	4	5

(18)

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>			<b>Strongly Disagree</b>		
Work is constantly on my mind.	1	2	3	4	5	(19)
I often think about impending exams/deadlines.	1	2	3	4	5	
During my leisure time I totally forget about my work.	1	2	3	4	5	
I become so anxious about my work, I am unable to concentrate.	1	2	3	4	5	
After finishing a piece of work I can push it to the back of my mind.	1	2	3	4	5	
I worry about work even when I have not actually got any to do.	1	2	3	4	5	
I often think about my work even whilst relaxing with friends.	1	2	3	4	5	
I feel guilty when I am not working.	1	2	3	4	5	
Thinking about work keeps me awake at night.	1	2	3	4	5	
When I receive a piece of work, I cannot totally relax until it is completed.	1	2	3	4	5	
I never feel satisfied with my work.	1	2	3	4	5	
I do not let work interfere with my social life.	1	2	3	4	5	
I feel that work is a major anxiety in my life.	1	2	3	4	5	
I often worry that I am not doing enough work.	1	2	3	4	5	
I am more anxious about work this year than I have been in previous years.	1	2	3	4	5	

*Note to Researcher: We can use the computer to reverse the polarity of any of the above questions. i.e. 1 2 3 4 5 becomes 5 4 3 2 1.*

# Study on Modern Methods of Documentation and Library Work

Case number 

		1

<sup>(4)</sup>

**When did you last use the documentation centre/library?**

*Circle the appropriate number*

- yesterday                    1
- last week                    2
- last month                   3
- last year                     4
- never                         5

**Did you use one or more of these?**

*Tick one or more boxes*

- newspapers
  - books
  - periodicals
  - law reports
  - official publication
  - other reports
  - other (*please specify*)
- 
- none of these

**For the purposes of your work were these:**

*Circle the appropriate number*

- very important                    1
- fairly important                   2
- not very important                3
- of no direct importance           4

**Were any of the above published?**

*Tick one or more boxes as appropriate*

- 1976 - 1980
- 1966 - 1975
- 1956 - 1965
- 1946 - 1955
- 1945 or earlier  <sup>(19)</sup>

**Did you consult the catalogue?**

*Tick one or more boxes*

author	<input type="checkbox"/>	(20)
title	<input type="checkbox"/>	
subject	<input type="checkbox"/>	
shelf index	<input type="checkbox"/>	
none of these	<input type="checkbox"/>	

**Did you consult the staff?**

*Circle the appropriate*

Yes	1
No	2

**Did you ask for material from the stack (i.e. not available directly in the reading rooms)?**

*Tick any of the appropriate boxes*

newspaper(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>
book(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>
periodical(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>
law report(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>
official publication(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>
report(s) (other than law)	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Did you use:**

*Tick appropriate boxes*

reference book(s) (e.g. dictionary, encyclopaedia)	<input type="checkbox"/>
bibliography(ies)	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Please state how often you use the following:**

*Please circle the numbers as appropriate*

	<b>Very often</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Occasionally</b>	<b>Never</b>	
Newspapers	1	2	3	4	
Books	1	2	3	4	
Periodicals	1	2	3	4	
Law reports	1	2	3	4	
Official publications	1	2	3	4	
Other reports	1	2	3	4	(39)

*Continued to several more pages/...*

# Interviewed Questionnaire

Sheet No

--	--	--	--

For Office Use Only

(13) ↓

Screening sheet for an individual with **both** Poor Vision and Hearing Difficulties

PLEASE COMPLETE ALL SECTIONS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE FORM

Your Name	
Address	

**First 3 Letters of Your Surname**

--	--	--

(16)

**Date of Birth**

dd		mm		yy	

**Age**

--	--

 years

**Gender (tick)**

Male	
Female	

**Ethnic Group**

White	
Asian	
Black Caribbean	
Black African	

Black other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Name of School \_\_\_\_\_

(If under nineteen years of age)

**Do You Live Alone? (tick)**

Yes	
No	

**Do You Live Permanently in Residential Care?**

(e.g. residential home, nursing home, group home, etc.)

Yes	
No	

**Learning Difficulties** Do you have learning difficulties ?

(previously known as mental handicap)

Yes	
No	

(41)

**Visual Difficulties** (TICK 1 BOX ONLY)

(Please tick one of the following boxes to indicate if you ...)

(col 42)

For example: unable to see well enough to recognise a friend who is an arm's length away.

**Have severe visual difficulties** (or are registered blind)

For example: unable to see well enough to recognise a friend across a room.

**Have moderate visual difficulties** (or are registered partially sighted)

For example: some individuals who have severe learning difficulties or who have experienced strokes etc.

**Uncertain but "Act as if" having visual difficulties**

**Hearing Difficulties** (TICK 1 BOX ONLY)

(Please tick one of the following boxes to indicate if you ...)

For example: have difficulty hearing someone talking in a loud voice in a quiet room, even if wearing a hearing aid.

**Have profound/severe hearing difficulties** (or are registered deaf with/without speech)

For example: with or without aids, have difficulty hearing someone talking in a normal voice in a quiet room.

**Have moderate hearing difficulties** (or are registered hard of hearing)

For example: some individuals who have severe learning difficulties or who have experienced strokes etc.

**Uncertain but "Act as if" having hearing difficulties**

**Hearing Aid**

Do you wear a hearing aid?

Yes   
No

**Speech Difficulties**

Do you have speech difficulties or no speech?

Yes   
No

**Communication**

Do you communicate by sign language ?  
or the use of hands e.g. BSL, Makaton,

Yes   
No

If yes, please specify \_\_\_\_\_



**Time of Onset**

Were you born with visual difficulties?

Yes   
No

Were you born with hearing difficulties?

Yes   
No