

Principles Designing Web Questionnaires

1. Introduce the Web questionnaire with a welcome screen that is motivational, emphasizes the ease of responding, and instructs respondents about how to proceed to the next page.
2. Provide a PIN number for limiting access only to those in the sample.
3. Begin the Web questionnaire with a question that is fully visible on the first screen of the questionnaire, and will be easily comprehended and answered by all respondents.
4. Present each question in a conventional format similar to that normally used on paper self-administered questionnaires.
5. Restrain the use of color so that figure/ground consistency and readability are maintained, navigational flow is unimpeded, and measurement properties of questions are maintained.
6. Avoid differences in the visual appearance of questions that result from different screen configurations, operating systems, browsers, partial screen displays, and wrap around text.
7. Provide specific instructions on how to take each necessary computer action for responding to the questionnaire and give other necessary instructions at the point where they are needed.
8. Use drop-down boxes sparingly, consider the mode implication, and identify each with a "click here" instruction.
9. Do not require respondents to provide an answer to each question before being allowed to answer any subsequent ones.
10. Provide skip directions in a way that encourages marking of answers and being able to click to the next applicable question.
11. Construct Web questionnaires so they scroll from question to question unless order effects are a concern, or when telephone and Web survey results are being combined.
12. When the number of answer choices exceeds the number that can be displayed in a single column on one screen, consider double-banking with an appropriate grouping device to link them together.
13. Use graphical symbols or words that convey a sense of where the respondent is in the completion process, but avoid those that require significant increases in computer resources.
14. Exercise restraint in the use of question structures that have known measurement problems on paper questionnaires, such as check all that apply and open ended questions.

Derived from: Dillman, D.A. (2007) Mail and Internet Surveys: The Tailored Design Method, New Jersey: Wiley.

Step 1: Define desired navigation path

Define a desired navigation path for reading all information presented on each page of the question.

- Write each question in a way that minimizes the need to reread portions in order to comprehend the response task.
- Place the instructions exactly where that information is needed and not at the beginning of the questionnaire.
- Place items with the same response categories into an item-in-a-series format, but do it carefully.
- Ask one question at a time.
- Minimize the use of matrices.

Step 2 Create Visual Navigation Guides

Create visual navigation guides and use them in a consistent way to get respondents to follow the prescribed navigational path and correctly interpret the written information.

- Increase the size of written elements to attract attention.
- Increase the brightness or color (shading) of visual elements to attract attention and establish appropriate groupings.
- Use spacing to identify appropriate groupings of visual elements.
- Use similarity to identify appropriate groupings of visual elements.
- Maintain a consistent figure/group format to make the response task easier.
- Maintain simplicity, regularity, and symmetry to make the response task easier.
- Begin asking question in the upper left quadrant; place any information not needed by the respondent in the lower right quadrant.
- Use the largest or brightest symbols to identify the starting point on each page.
- Identify the beginning of each succeeding question in a consistent way.
- Number questions consecutively and simply from beginning to end.
- Use a consistent figure/background format to encourage the readings of all words.
- Limit the use of reverse print to section headings or question numbers.
- Place more blank space between questions than between subcomponents of questions.
- Use dark print for questions and light print for answer choices.
- Place special instructions inside of question numbers and not as freestanding entities.
- Optional or occasionally needed instruction should be separated from the question statement by font or symbol variations.
- Do not place instructions in a separate instruction book or in a separate section of the questionnaire.



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Step 2 Create Visual Navigation Guides (cont)

- Use of lightly shaded colors as background fields on which to write all questions provides an effective navigational guide to respondents.
- When shaded background fields are used, identification of all answer spaces in white helps to reduce non-response.
- List answer categories vertically instead of horizontally.
- Place answer spaces consistently to either the left or right of category labels.
- Use numbers or simple answer boxes for recording of answers.
- Vertical alignment of question subcomponents among consecutive questions eases the response task.
- Avoid double or triple banking of answer choices.
- Maintain spaces between answer choices that are consistent with measurement intent.
- Maintain consistency throughout a questionnaire in the direction scales are displayed.
- Use shorter lines to prevent words from being skipped.

Step 3 Develop Visual Navigation Guides

Develop additional visual navigational guides, the aim of which is to interrupt established navigation behavior and redirect respondents.

- Major visual changes are essential for gaining compliance with skip patterns.
- Words and phrases that introduce important, but easy to miss, change in respondent expectation should be visually emphasized consistently, but sparingly.
- Major visual changes are essential for gaining compliance with skip patterns.



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