

Survey Design Tips

Consider the following points when designing your survey:



1. What are you going to ask?

Before deciding what you are going to ask you will need to work out what you want to know. This will help you develop the most useful questions. For example, if you want to know what percentage of people at your school want to address electronic waste, simply ask; “Do you want something done about electronic waste?” and getting a YES/NO answer will help you tally up all the people who do or don’t want something done.

However, if you want to know what other ideas they have for electronic waste, you might need to ask your question in a different way. You could ask, “What would you like to see happen to electronic waste generated at school?” and then give a range of options that people could choose from, such as a) Recycling, b) Selling, c) I don’t know. Alternatively, you could just let people give their own answers without giving them any options to choose from.

2. How many questions are you going to ask?

You should consider:

- Many people are very busy and don’t have time for a lot of questions.
- Keep the questions brief and clear and short.
- Understand why you are asking the questions: if they ask you something in return you need to be able to answer.
- When writing questions, consider:
 - The question content, the scope and the purpose (why you are asking this question?).
 - The format for the response (is it a scale, ranking, extended response, multiple choice, etc.?)
 - The wording of the question so that you can obtain the information you want (open and closed questions).
 - Placement or order of the questions.

Types of Questions:

- Open-ended questions encourage interviewees to respond to a question broadly, in some detail and in their own terms. These can be time consuming to develop and analyse, but allow for the greatest variety of responses.
- Closed questions give interviewees a limited number of possible responses that might be provided to them or require just a yes or no answer. Avoid these in interviews unless they are followed with a request for an explanation.

3. How many people will you try and talk to?

You should decide on a number before you head out, however, between five and twenty people should be fine for a survey, less for an interview, depending on your method. If you're asking people to answer YES/NO questions, then the more people the better. But if you're asking them to talk about their opinions, then aim for fewer people.

4. Who are you going to survey?

You should consider:

- Some people might want to remain anonymous.
- If you want to ask more lengthy questions, you will be asking for more time from people.
- People you already know will probably be more willing to help you out.

5. How are you going to record this information?

- Will you get people to write down their answers? OR,
- Will you get people to fill out a survey form? OR,
- Will you write down what they are saying? OR,
- Will you record them by video or audio? (You will need to ask their permission before you do.)

Other Tips:

- Start an interview with a brief introduction about the purposes and goals.
- General questions should be placed earlier in the survey, while more sensitive questions should be near the end.
- Avoid overly technical terms or jargon and vague imprecise terms.
- Consider WHO you are talking to and ensure you thank them for their time and assistance with your research.