



University of California, Merced

# Surveying Students at UC Merced

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# Good Practice for Writing Great Surveys



# Ask a specific question

For example, it may not be a good idea to ask for something like “Age.” Instead, a better question would be, “What is your current age?”

**Women PTSD Demographics Information**

\* Required

**Personal Code \***

Please enter your personal code that consisted of 5 letters then 2 numbers, Example 'Team65'  
Please retain this code for later use in the survey.

**With what race or ethnicities do you identify? \***

White, African American, American Indian, Asian, Etc..

**Would you mind telling me which age range you fall into? \***

- ☐ 18-30
- ☐ 31-40
- ☐ 41-50
- ☐ 51-60
- ☐ Over 60

# Do not overdo options

- It is best to simplify options because it is more difficult to explain the differences between more options (and difficult to make more adjectives to differentiate).
- See example on next slide, as “agree” is expanded on perhaps too much.
- There is a tendency in summaries to divide results into 2 halves anyway, so why waste respondents’ time?

# Do not overdo options (Example)



## Sample Questions

The following questionnaire was created using software developed by the Office of Information Technology at the University of Maryland. We give examples here of several of the question types available with simple tools. Many tools such as this allow creation of questions with simple HTML tags for formatting like **BOLD**, underline and *italic*.

1. Multiple-choice questions are:

- a. ☐ Always Useful
- b. ☐ Seldom Useful
- c. ☐ Depends on the situation

2. Multiple-select questions give respondents more flexibility in giving input of feedback.

- a. ☐ The respondent may want to choose this answer.
- b. ☐ And/or choose this answer.
- c. ☐ Or even this answer.

3. Likert scale questions can be highly effective, but come with their own caveats.

- ☐ Strongly Agree   ☐ Agree   ☒ Slightly Agree   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Slightly Disagree   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly Disagree

4. Short answers can be useful if you have a coding system to process the responses you will get or if you have a very small set of respondents. For larger samples with reasonably few possible responses however, they can create a data processing problem.

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5. True-false questions and yes-no questions are essentially the same thing but one wording or the other may be preferable.

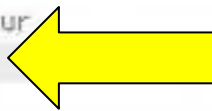


# Do not overlap options

What are the greatest obstacles to your attaining your financial goals  
(what's been holding you back from the success you desire)?

How much time are you willing to dedicate each week to change your financial future?

- ☐ Less than 1 hour
- ☐ 1 - 3 hours
- ☐ 3 - 6 hours
- ☐ 6 - 8 hours
- ☐ 8 - 12 hours
- ☐ More than 12 hours



How much money do you need monthly to be financially independent?

# Avoid double-barreled questions

● Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements  
One answer for each line.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
→ We understood your enquiry or problem	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
→ We gave you the feeling that we cared about you	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
→ We gave you the confidence that we could resolve the matter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
→ Our staff were clear and easy to understand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
→ Our staff were patient, helpful and efficient	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
→ We followed up our promises	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
→ We met the timescales we indicated to you	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

« »

65%

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# Know Your Respondents

- If possible, it is always good to interview a couple members of your survey population to gain insight on what responses may look like
- For example, the maximum household income reported on UCUES is \$200,000 plus, so adding extra options is superfluous (see next slide for example)



# Know Your Respondents

aders: We Need Your Help! ... x Saveur Reader Survey x Learn how to make a screenshot / tak... x +

mmunications.com/survey-info/sav612/

☆ ▾ ↻ how do yo

## SAVEUR

Which best describes the total combined income before taxes of all members of your household in 2011. (Please include all income for yourself and all persons living in your household from all sources. For example: w

<input type="radio"/> Under \$50,000	<input type="radio"/> \$500,000 to \$749,999
<input type="radio"/> \$50,000 to \$74,999	<input type="radio"/> \$750,000 to \$999,999
<input type="radio"/> \$75,000 to \$99,999	<input type="radio"/> \$1.0 million to \$1,499,999
<input type="radio"/> \$100,000 to \$149,999	<input type="radio"/> \$1.5 million to \$1,999,999
<input type="radio"/> \$150,000 to \$199,000	<input type="radio"/> \$2.0 million to \$2,499,999
<input type="radio"/> \$200,000 to \$299,999	<input type="radio"/> \$3.0 million to \$4,000,000
<input type="radio"/> \$300,000 to \$399,000	<input type="radio"/> Over \$4.0 million
<input type="radio"/> \$400,000 to \$499,000	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Prefer not to answer

Wow!

○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○

Back Next

# Label each option

Could you please rate your satisfaction with the following aspects of our service by placing a cross at the point of the line that most corresponds to your response. Please record any comments or explanation in the space below:

1. The helpfulness of our staff

← Extermely Satisfied 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Neutral Extremely Dissatisfied →

2. The length of time it took you to access our services

← Extermely Satisfied 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Neutral Extremely Dissatisfied →

# Be sensitive to language, as it can impact response rates

7. Provide a question for a survey that does not take into account cultural sensitivity.

Pick your favourite color:

- Hitler orange
- Stalin red
- Kim-Jung Il yellow
- Christmas blue
- My-beliefs-are-better-than-yours green
- Racist black
- white.

No

### 13. What is your sexual orientation?

- ☐ Bisexual
- ☐ Gay/Lesbian
- ☐ Heterosexual
- ☐ Questioning/Unsure
- ☐ Self-identified Queer
- ☐ Decline to state
- ☐ Other

# Be sensitive about language

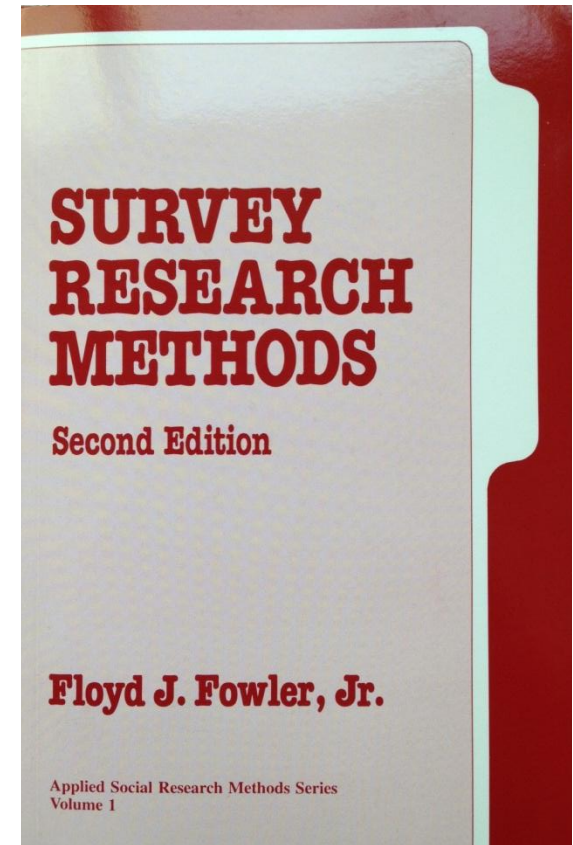
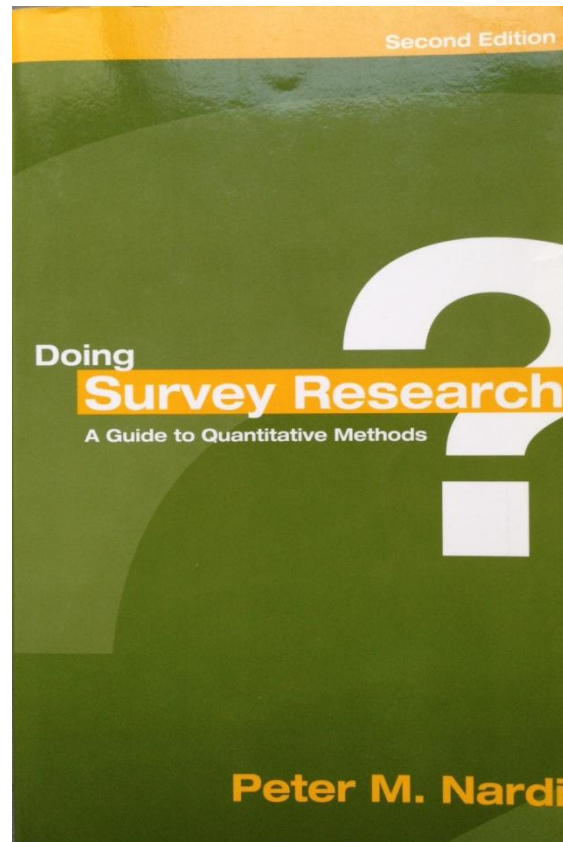
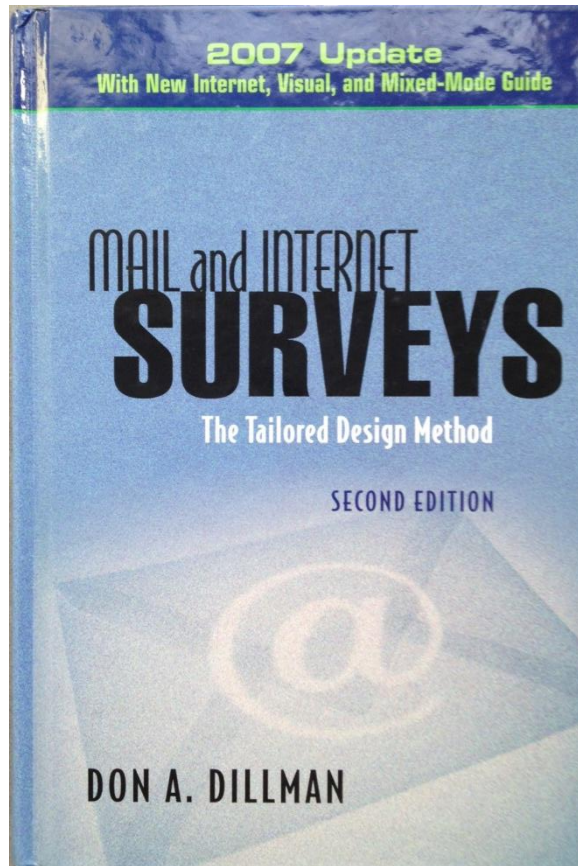
- Proposed changes to include this set of response choices (as of 2012): lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, heterosexual/straight, questioning, asexual, decline to state, same gender loving, two-Spirit, nonmonosexual, and pansexual/omnisexual
- See next slide for explanation

# Be sensitive about language (continued)

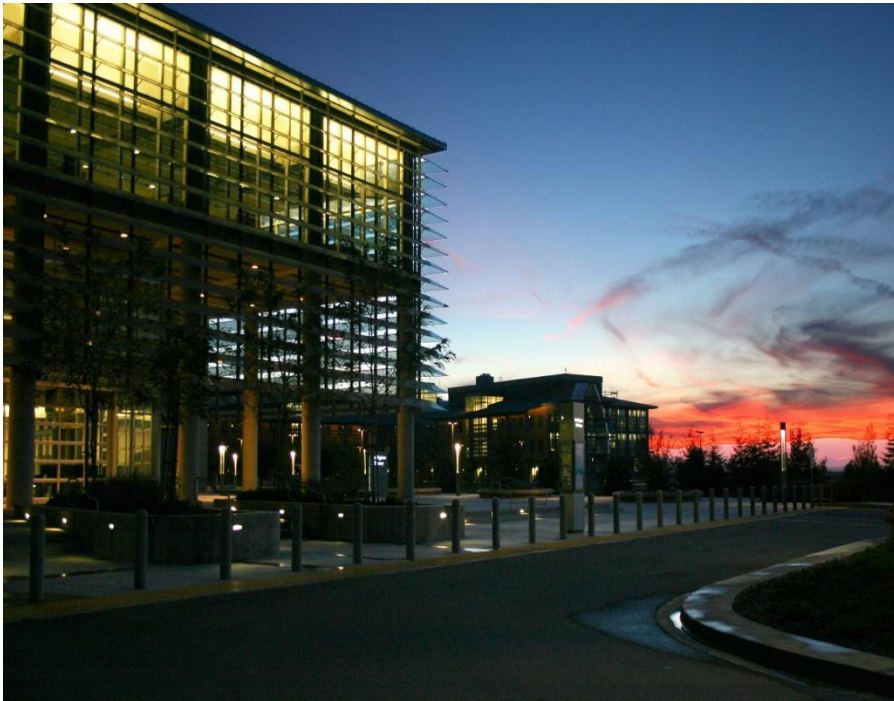
- The argument is that it is frustrating/hurtful for someone not to see the orientation they associate with listed on the question. There needs to be a balance between an overwhelming number of options with the feelings of respondents.



# Recommended resources



# A Well-built, Sustainable Survey Process



- For more information about how to design a survey, please visit our [resources page](#).
- If you have any questions, contact your school or unit [assessment specialist](#).