

Chapter 9

The Logic and Psychology of Constructing Questionnaires

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Once individual questions have been created, much remains to be done before that list of questions can be considered a good questionnaire. Constructing a questionnaire requires that the designer find ways to relieve multiple tensions that if left unattended will produce poor results. Questions may need to be reordered so they make better sense to the respondent and reduce the likelihood of some sample members looking at the first items and deciding that the questionnaire does not apply to them. In addition slight modifications in the wording of individual questions may be needed to provide better connections across items so they become easier for the respondent to read. Also, whether one chooses to use the telephone, mail, web or another mode, will lead to some ways of asking and ordering questions being better than others. In this chapter we describe the process of turning individually crafted items into an engaging questionnaire that also reduces survey measurement and non-response error. In particular we discuss how and why the choice of survey mode (or modes) has become an increasingly important influence on the creation of useful questionnaires.

GLOSSARY OF KEY CONCEPTS

Aural Communication. The method of providing information to another person that depends upon speaking and listening, through which questions are communicated by entirely in telephone interviews and to a large extent in face-to-face interviews.

Mode-specific Questionnaire Design. Writing questions and implementing a questionnaire in the best way for a mode, regardless of what might be done in another mode. That is, the questionnaire is optimized for each mode separately in an effort to improve the performance of individual survey modes, even if that results in different question formats across modes.

Unified Mode Questionnaire Design. Designing questions and questionnaires to provide the same stimulus in all survey modes in order to reduce differences in the way respondents respond to the survey questions in the different modes.

Visual Communication. The method of providing information to another person that depends upon what one sees, which is the means by which questions are mostly communicated to respondents in mail and web surveys.