

Top Tips for Designing Surveys for Improvement

Surveys are a great way to get data. But they are only effective if you design them correctly. So, how do you design a survey that will collect the right data, ask good questions, and is easy to complete? Here are some top tips for designing an effective survey that will get the information that you need:

1. Be Crystal Clear on Your Aim

Before writing a single question, know *exactly* what information you need and why. What decision will this survey inform? It is helpful if you start brainstorming the answers you want to know before building your survey. Once you know the answers you want, you can turn them into survey questions.

2. Keep your survey short! The shorter, the better

Respect respondents' time. Shorter surveys have higher completion rates. If there are too many questions or questions are too long, people may get bored and abandon the survey or simply input random responses just to get to the end. Only ask for demographic information when it is necessary, and not "just because."

3. Use plain English

Ensure that your language is clear, concise and easily understood. Avoid jargon, acronyms, technical terms, or overly complex language. Assume your audience has varying levels of understanding. Use everyday words. This in turn can affect the quality and reliability of your survey responses.

4. One Question, One Idea

Don't 'double-barrel'. Survey questions should focus on one topic or issue at a time. For example, "Was the nurse polite and helpful?" should be two separate questions. Make sure you haven't got any double-barrelled questions!

5. Start your survey with easier questions

The order of the questions matters. Start your survey with easier questions such as multiple-choice questions. Put sensitive and open-ended questions towards the end and make them optional so that you don't scare people off or make them feel uncomfortable!

6. Use the right question types

In surveys, there are two types of questions: **closed** and **open-ended**. The type of question you use will depend on the data that you need.

- A **closed** question is one that has a set number of answer options to choose from (e.g. drop down, ranking, tick boxes, scoring, multiple choice, and ratings).
- An **open-ended** question gives your respondent the write their answer in a free text box. This allows them to share feedback, examples and ideas that you might not otherwise capture. It is a good idea to have an open-ended question at the end of your survey.

7. Avoid leading or loaded questions

The way that a survey question is asked can have a huge impact on the results. Leading and loaded questions are questions that push respondents towards an answer that is different to what they would otherwise have given. Don't subtly push respondents towards a particular answer.

8. Be neutral in your answer choices

Survey questions that use a rating scale should have a midpoint answer and have an equal balance of positive and negative choices. This will give you more accurate data and eliminate false positives. In other types of closed questions, make sure your answer options cover all possibilities, using "other" or "none" as necessary.

9. Pilot Test Your Survey

Get colleagues, or a small group of your target audience to complete the survey. This helps catch ambiguities, technical glitches, or confusing questions *before* launch.

10. Think About Analysis

Before you even distribute the survey, consider how you'll analyse the data. Will the questions give you the type of data you need (e.g., quantitative for trends, qualitative for rich insights)?

11. Ensure Anonymity/Confidentiality

Clearly state how responses will be used and if they are anonymous or confidential to build trust and encourage honest answers. Adhere to GDPR principles.

12. Choose the Right Distribution Method

Will it be online, paper, or face-to-face? Will you share a QR code or a link and how will you share it? For example will it be in a newsletter, email, on a poster, at events etc? Consider your audience's access and preferences. What is the deadline for completion and when will you send reminders. Try to avoid sending your survey when participants are already receiving other surveys, to prevent survey overload!