

WRITING QUESTIONS FOR SURVEYS

Summer 2020

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COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Introduce a structural analysis of parts of a survey question
- Introduce cognitive interviewing as a method for testing survey questions
- Describe guidelines for diagnosing problems in survey questions and writing new survey questions
- Focus on the structure and wording of survey questions, whether for interviewer-administered or self-administered instruments
- Provide an opportunity to apply the guidelines and principles during in-class exercises
- Focus on improving individual questions and sets of questions.
- Summarize research that underlies key decisions in writing survey questions.

DESCRIPTION

This workshop distills research about survey questions to principles that can be applied to write survey questions that are clear and obtain reliable answers. The workshop provides students with tools to use in diagnosing problems in survey questions and in writing their own survey questions. Sessions combine lecture with group exercises and discussion. The lecture provides guidelines for writing and revising survey questions and illustrates how to revise troubled questions. Assignments require that students analyze problematic questions, revise them, and administer them to fellow students. Sessions consider both questions about events and behaviors and questions about subjective phenomena (such as attitudes, evaluations, and internal states).

WHO SHOULD ATTEND

Individuals who will be writing or reviewing survey questions or survey instruments or analyzing survey data. This course gives practical guidance to those who have written survey questions but who are not familiar with research on question design, those who are just beginning to design survey instruments, and those who use survey data but do not themselves design survey instruments.

THE INSTRUCTOR

Nora Cate Schaeffer is Sewell Bascom Professor of Sociology and Interim Associate Vice Chancellor for Research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She serves as Faculty Director of the University of Wisconsin Survey Center, and is President of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (2019-2020). She has over thirty years of experience in survey methodology and questionnaire design and has taught Questionnaire Design at the University of Michigan's Summer Institute in Survey Research for many years. Her research has been published in *American Sociological Review*, *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *Sociological Methods and Research*, and *Sociological Methodology*. She is co-editor (with Douglas W. Maynard, Hanneke Houtkoop-Steenstra, and Johannes van der Zouwen) of *Standardization and Tacit Knowledge: Interaction and Practice in the Survey Interview*. She was named a fellow of the American Statistical Association in 2010 and elected Vice President of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) in 2018.