

SurvMeth 988.206 Writing Questions for Surveys

Summer Institute
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M-T 9-12, 1-4
Online

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This short course distills research about survey questions to principles that can be applied to write survey questions that are clear and obtain reliable answers. 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. Sessions consider both questions about events and behaviors and questions about subjective phenomena (such as attitudes, evaluations, and internal states).

OTHER RELEVANT CLASSES: This Course complements SURVMETH988.223, Introduction to Questionnaire Design; 988.222 Intermediate Questionnaire Design

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.

READINGS BEFORE CLASS:

Reading these two articles before the class will help you get the most from this short course.

*Schaeffer, Nora Cate and Stanley Presser. 2003. "The Science of Asking Questions." *Annual Review of Sociology* 29:65-88. Download from:
<http://arjournals.annualreviews.org/eprint/rU4UOoizjRXROhijkRIS/full/10.1146/annurev.soc.29.110702.110112>

*Schaeffer, Nora Cate and Jennifer Dykema. 2020. "Advances in the Science of Asking Questions." *Annual Review of Sociology*. 46. Download from:
<https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev-soc-121919-054544>

COURSE CREDIT: 1 credit is available for students who have paid tuition. If you are taking the course for credit, contact the instructor in advance. Those taking the course for credit are required to do the readings, and they will be given an assignment due 1 week after the end of the course.

READINGS: Students are asked to do the readings. Completing the readings will greatly enhance what you learn from the course.

OTHER EXERCISES: Exercises and discussion in class complement the lecture. There may one assignment to be completed before the class and one to be completed on Monday night.

COURSE WEBSITE:

The course website will be on CANVAS which can be accessed through (<https://umich.instructure.com/courses/362266/>), once the website is opened. Most readings will be available there.

INSTRUCTOR: Schaeffer is Sewell Bascom Professor of Sociology, Interim Associate Vice Chancellor for Research in the Social Sciences, and Faculty Director of the UW Survey Center at the University of Wisconsin. She served as President of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) from 2019-2020. Her website is here: <https://sociology.wisc.edu/staff/schaeffer-nora-cate-2/>

Readings

Most readings are available in Canvas. A few must be obtained using a web link because of restrictions from the publisher.

Some useful resources for instrument design can be found here:

https://sociology.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/466/2019/12/QuexResourcesForStudents_V21.pdf

Key Classic and Current Sources for Later Exploration

Couper, Mick P. 2008. *Designing Effective Web Surveys*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dillman, Don A., Jolene D. Smyth and Leah Melani Christian. 2014. *Internet, Phone, Mail, and Mixed-Mode Surveys: The Tailored Design Method, Fourth Edition*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Fowler, Floyd J. 1996. *Improving Survey Questions: Design and Evaluation*. Sage.

Madans, Jennifer, Kristen Miller, Aaron Maitland and Gordon Willis, eds. 2011. *Question Evaluation Methods: Contributing to the Science of Data Quality*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Presser, Stanley, Jennifer Rothgeb, Mick Couper, Judith Lessler, Elizabeth Martin, Jean Martin, and Eleanor Singer, editors. 2004. *Questionnaire Evaluation and Testing*. New York: Wiley. [Note that volume from a 2016 conference on this topic will be out in 2017 or 2018.]

Sudman, Seymour, Norman M. Bradburn, and Norbert Schwarz. 1996. *Thinking about Answers*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Tourangeau, Roger, Lance J. Rips, and Kenneth Rasinski. 2000. *The Psychology of Survey Response*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Tourangeau, Roger, Frederick G. Conrad and Mick P. Couper. 2013. *The Science of Web Surveys*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Willis, Gordon. 2005. *Cognitive Interviewing: A Tool for Improving Questionnaire Design*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Willis, Gordon. 2015. *Analysis of the Cognitive Interview in Questionnaire Design (Understanding Qualitative Research)*. New York: Oxford.

Course Outline

***Priority readings are marked with * -- I know that you don't have time for everything in a week – but try to read these articles!**

Day 1 - morning

Lecture: Fundamentals

Readings: Overview, Read Schaeffer & Presser 2003 and Schaeffer & Dykema 2020 if you did not read in advance

*Fowler Jr., Floyd J. and Carol Cosenza. 2008. "Writing Effective Questions." Pp. 136-60 in *International Handbook of Survey Methodology*, edited by Edith D. de Leeuw, Joop J. Hox, and Don A. Dillman. Lawrence Erlbaum.

*Willis, Gordon B., Patricia Royston, and Deborah Bercini. 1991. "The Use of Verbal Report Methods in the Development and Testing of Survey Questionnaires." *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 5:251-67.

Day 1 - afternoon

Lecture: Fundamentals, continued. Begin General Guidelines.

Readings: Overview (continued), Questions about Events and Behaviors

Schaeffer, Nora Cate. 2000. "Asking Questions about Threatening Topics: A Selective Overview." Pp. 105-22 in *The Science of Self-Report: Implications for Research and Practice*, edited by Arthur A. Stone, Jaylan S. Turkkkan, Christine A. Bachrach, Jared B. Jobe, Howard S. Kurtzman, and Virginia S. Cain. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.

*Schaeffer, Nora Cate and Jennifer Dykema. 2011. Questions for Surveys: Current Trends and Future Directions. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 75, no. 5, pp. 909-961.
Download from: <http://poq.oxfordjournals.org/content/75/5/909.full.pdf+html>

*Tourangeau, Roger. 2000. "Remembering What Happened: Memory Errors and Survey Reports." Pp. 29-48 in *The Science of Self-Report: Implications for Research and Practice*, edited by Arthur A. Stone, Jaylan S. Turkkkan, Christine A. Bachrach, Jared B. Jobe, Howard S. Kurtzman, and Virginia S. Cain. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Day 2 - morning

Lecture: Finish General Guidelines. Begin Events and Behaviors.

Readings: Overview (continued – spreading these out!)

Krosnick, Jon A. and Stanley Presser. 2010. "Question and Questionnaire Design." Pp. 263-313 in *Handbook of Survey Research, Second Edition*, edited by P. V. Marsden and J. D. Wright. Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Redline, Cleo. 2013. "Clarifying Categorical Concepts in a Web Survey." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 77(S1):89-105. doi: 10.1093/poq/nfs067.

*Schaeffer, Nora Cate and Jennifer Dykema. 2011. Questions for Surveys: Current Trends and Future Directions. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 75, no. 5, pp. 909-961.
Download from: <http://poq.oxfordjournals.org/content/75/5/909.full.pdf+html>

Day 2 - afternoon

Lecture: *Events and Behaviors, Questions about Subjective Things*

Readings: *Questions about Subjective Things*

- *Alwin, Duane F., Erin M Baumgartner, Brett A Beattie, Number of Response Categories and Reliability in Attitude Measurement. 2018. *Journal of Survey Statistics and Methodology*, 6(2): 212–239, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jssam/smx025>.
- Dashen, Monica and Scott Fricker. 2001. "Understanding the Cognitive Processes of Open-Ended Categorical Questions and Their Effects on Data Quality." *Journal of Official Statistics* 17(4):457-77.
- *Saris, Willem E., Melanie Revilla, Jon A. Krosnick, and Eric M. Shaeffer. 2010. "Comparing Questions With Agree/Disagree Response Options to Questions With Item-Specific Response Options." *Survey Research Methods* 4(1):61-79.
- Saris, Willem and Irmtraud Gallhofer. 2007. "Estimation of the Effects of Measurement Characteristics on the Quality of Survey Questions." *Survey Research Methods* (1):29-43.