

Surveys! Do Think Twice

MiALA Assessment Pop-Up Conference

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“Oh. We’ll just do a survey.”

A black and white photograph of a wooden street sign. The sign is rectangular with a white center and a dark border, mounted on two wooden posts. It is surrounded by dense, leafy plants. The text "EASY STREET" is written in a bold, sans-serif font on the white background of the sign.

EASY STREET

Mmmm...maybe notsomuch.

Mmmm...maybe notso much.

“[Quantitative] data hides the error-prone human because humans are invisible in a spreadsheet or database. But even though they’re hidden, the humans are there: from the collection of the data itself and the design of that collection, to the assumptions brought to the interpretation of the data and the analysis of it.”

James Boardwell, *Small is beautiful. User research and sample sizes*



Survey Considerations

- Can you capture a representative sample?
- Do you need to find out the who, what, and/or when?
Or do you need the how and why?
- Do you want to learn about past experiences or expectations?
- Is what people say enough or do you need to know for certain what they do?

To survey, or not to survey?

Learning about student employees' experiences working in the library.

To survey, or not to survey?

Finding out how faculty talk about the library in their courses and why they do or don't promote it to their students.

To survey, or not to survey?

Asking for feedback on the Ask a Librarian service immediately after an interaction.

What to ask

Thinking through what to ask

“Will the people I’m surveying be willing and able to provide a **truthful answer** to my question?”

Erika Hall, *On Surveys*

Thinking through what to ask

Am I prepared to respond or do something after hearing the answers to this question?

Thinking through what to ask

Why am I asking this question?

Use a Question Protocol

For every question you plan to include, ask yourself...

- **Who** within the organization will use the answers
- **What** will those people use them for
- Whether an answer will be **required or optional**
 - Remember that people get incredibly frustrated if they feel like have to lie just to get through a form

-Sara Wachter-Boettcher, *Compassionate Content & UX*
Workshop at edUi Conference 2017

It's OK to explain why you're asking something

Do you need to ask for contact information when things would otherwise be anonymous?

Are you asking something that could be sensitive or personal?

Explain why.

How to ask it



Mainstream Media Accountability Survey


1. Do you believe that the mainstream media has reported unfairly on our movement?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ No opinion

Oh yes.
That's leading.



1. Do you believe that the mainstream media has reported unfairly on our movement?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ No opinion

1. Do you believe that the mainstream media has reported unfairly on our movement?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ No opinion



Binary choices.
You're either in, out or have no opinion.

2. Do you trust MSNBC to report fairly on Trump's presidency?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ No opinion

3. Do you trust CNN to report fairly on Trump's presidency?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ No opinion

4. Do you trust Fox News to report fairly on Trump's presidency?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ No opinion

2. Do you trust MSNBC to report fairly on Trump's presidency?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ No opinion

3. Do you trust CNN to report fairly on Trump's presidency?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ No opinion

4. Do you trust Fox News to report fairly on Trump's presidency?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ No opinion



ASSUMPTIONS!

13. Do you believe that political correctness has created biased news coverage on both illegal immigration and radical Islamic terrorism?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ No opinion

☐ Other, please specify:

13. Do you believe that political correctness has created biased news coverage on both illegal immigration and radical Islamic terrorism?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ No opinion
- ☐ Other, please specify:



Double-barreled.

14. Do you believe that contrary to what the media says, raising taxes does not create jobs?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ No opinion

☐ Other, please specify:

14. Do you believe that contrary to what the media says, raising taxes does not create jobs?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ No opinion
- ☐ Other, please specify:



Biased much?

Things to watch out for when writing survey questions

- Keep language of questions as neutral as possible.
Don't lead!
- Check your assumptions.
- Beware of the double-barrel.
- Eliminate bias (positive and negative) from your questions.
- Avoid using absolutes (always, never, etc.).
- Know your audience and use clear language.
- Be cautious of binary response options.

What types of questions to use

Closed (quantitative) vs. open (qualitative) questions

Things to consider

- How long it will take participants to complete the survey.
- Your capacity for analysis.

But I want more context!

If you want to ask those open questions...

- Can you ask it in a way that fits with everything we've already talked about? Is it a question a survey can answer?
- Is the question specific enough to analyze effectively?
- Are you prepared to do follow-up research with more intensive methods?

Types of open questions

- Short answer field
- Paragraph answer field

What types of closed questions (a selection)

- Multiple choice - single select/radio buttons
- Multiple choice - single select/drop-down
- Multiple choice - multi-select/checkboxes
- Rank order
- Linear scale
- Side-by-side/matrix
- Pick, group and rank
- Formatted fields: date, time, etc.

Resources

[Small is beautiful. User research and sample sizes](#) by James Boardwell

[The Essential Guide to Writing Effective Survey Questions](#) by Jennifer Leigh Brown

[On Surveys](#) by Erika Hall

Design for Real Life by Eric Meyer and Sara Wachter-Boettcher

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Thanks so much.



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