

How to write a questionnaire

Questionnaires are really useful things if you want to find out what people think about something, that is. Although even if you don't, they're pretty useful for swatting flies.

If you're going to put a questionnaire together, here are some things to bear in mind.

First off, what do you want to use it for?

Always ask yourself what information you're after and how it's going to help your project.

Next, this might sound a bit obvious, but in a questionnaire, the questions are rather important.

Ask a closed question if you want a simple closed answer, like yes or no, true or false, or just a number.

A closed question, like "Do you believe in ghosts?" or "On a scale of 1 to 5, how serious an issue do you consider dog poo on the streets to be?" gets you definite answers that can be analysed easily, such as "26% of people surveyed believed in ghosts."

But if you want more in-depth answers, ask an open question like, "How do you feel about the new statue in the town square?"

An open question lets someone respond in any way they choose.

Whatever type of questions they are, make sure they are well phrased and clear. Appreciate that people are giving you their time so don't waste it.

And remember to avoid leading questions. If your survey is about how cyclists and motorists get on in your area, and you ask, "Do you agree that cyclists are total maniacs who cause loads of accidents?" it might lead the person being interviewed to answer in a certain way.

Leading questions aren't just a bad way to communicate, they also ruin your research because they don't give people a chance to tell you what they really think.

Neutral questions like, "What are the main problems on the roads between cyclists and motorists?" or "What do you think causes these problems?" give people space to voice their personal opinions.

One tricky issue is whether or not you offer incentives for taking the questionnaire. It can be a great way to engage more people, but you might be

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attracting them for the wrong reasons, which might make your data less reliable.

Your questions also need to be suitable for whatever group they're aimed at, there's no point asking babies what might persuade them to exercise more.

And, before you hit the streets or the web with your questionnaire, test it out on your friends. If there's anything you need to change, it's best to find out sooner rather than later.

That's it really. But could I just ask, on a scale of 1 to 3, how would you rate this video?