

Lecture Notes

Survey Questionnaire and Interviews

**Subject: Research Methodology
Postgraduate Program – Master and Doctoral Degrees**

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September 2023

Critique of the Attitudes About Cafeteria Food Questionnaire

Instructions:

Identify the shortcomings of every section of the survey below. Try not to miss anything.

Attitudes About Cafeteria Food Questionnaire

This is a survey assessing your opinions about the food in the cafeteria, in order to improve the quality of the service and the food. Please place a check next to the appropriate answer. Your honesty in answering the questions is appreciated. Your responses are confidential.

How often do you eat in the cafeteria? _____

Are you a male or female? _____
are you? _____

How old

Did you eat in the cafeteria yesterday?
No _____

Yes _____

Did you eat breakfast, lunch, or dinner? (Circle correct answer)

Which of the following did you eat?

_____ cereal _____ eggs _____ fruit
_____ vegetarian meal _____ hot meal _____
dessert

Do you like to eat ham and eggs for breakfast? _____

What is your opinion about the new policy concerning hot meals?

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Please rate the quality of food on a scale from 1 to 10 _____

What is your height? Under 5N ___ 5N- 5N/50 ___ 5N/50- 6N ___
over 6N ___

Some people feel that the quality of food is just one part of what is going on in the institution and is part of a larger problem about quality of life here. What is your opinion about the organization as a place to be?

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

A recent analysis by a nutritionist from the Department of Health concluded that the food served in the cafeteria is some of the healthiest she has seen in some time. Do you think she is wrong?

Yes No

Why do you think she is not wrong?

Any other comments?

Thank you for completing this survey. Please return it to Mail Slot 999.

The title: Attitudes About Cafeteria Food Questionnaire

- Why not shorten it to “Cafeteria Survey”

The introduction

- The phrase, “in order to improve the quality of service and the food,” could tip respondents you believe things need improving. They may give the answer they think you want.
- The instructions (i.e., place a check mark next to the appropriate answer) are incorrect for the fill in the blank questions. Later instructions say to circle the answer instead of using a check mark.
- You should not use confidentiality when you mean anonymity.

How often do you eat in the cafeteria? _____

- Avoid too many open ended questions, they are hard to score. You may get “every chance I get,” “whenever I’m in the mood,” and so on.
- Consider providing response options (e.g., daily, once a week, etc.)
- Can the length of the response line indirectly communicate the expected length of the answer?

Are you a male or female? _____ How old are you? _____

- Biographic questions bore respondents; perhaps they are better located at the end.
- Consider adding response options (e.g., [] Male [] Female)
- Age can be a sensitive topic for respondents. I suggest providing response options that contain age intervals (e.g., [] 30 to 40 years old). These questions are on the same line.
- Each question be on a separate line.

Did you eat in the cafeteria yesterday? Yes ____ No ____

- This may be overly specific. It might be more informative to learn how often they eat in the cafeteria. But this is asked above. So is this question needed?

Did you eat breakfast, lunch, or dinner? (Circle correct answer)

- This is the second part of a two-part question, without instructions to skip it if you hadn’t eaten yesterday.
- You should not have too many contingency or branching (i.e., multiple part) questions can create confusion and missed answers. Branching questions are needlessly complex; they can usually be condensed into one question and should be whenever possible.
- The response options are not exhaustive (maybe they just snacked, maybe they ate a home-prepared meal).
- Frequent changes in response format can distract respondents. The survey has asked respondents to write their response, then to check mark their response, and now its asking them to circle their response.
- The question doesn’t pertain to the topic of the survey—quality of service or food.

Which of the following did you eat?

- cereal eggs fruit
 vegetarian meal hot meal dessert

- The response options are not mutually exclusive. A meal could be both hot and vegetarian.
- Instructions on how to answer are needed so the respondent knows whether to check one or all that apply.
- The response options are not exhaustive. Could add “other” as an option.
- The question doesn’t pertain to the topic of the survey—quality of service and food.

Do you like to eat ham and eggs for breakfast? _____

- This is a double barrel question. They may like ham not eggs but can’t tell you.
- The question has no yes and no response options like a previous yes – no question did.
- This question would be better as a Likert-type so you could learn how much they like this food.
- The question doesn’t pertain to the topic of the survey—quality of service and food.

What is your opinion about the new policy concerning hot meals?

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

- There is no instruction to circle the correct answer.
- Likert-type items do not ask a question. They make a statement (e.g., the new policy is unfair) to which the respondent can either agree or disagree.
- The respondent may not know what the new policy is.
- There should be an odd number of response options to allow for a neutral response.

Please rate the quality of food on a scale from 1 to 10 _____

- Shifting from a four-step scale to a 10 step scale can confuse respondents.
- The survey gives no instructions about whether 10 is high, nor what the various steps along the scale mean (what does 5 out of 10 indicate?)
- The word food is rather general. Perhaps naming specific types of foods in separate questions would be better.

What is your height? Under 5N__ 5N- 5N/50__ 5N/50- 6N__ over 6N__

- The response options are not mutually exclusive (5N/50 appears twice).
- N and O could confuse some respondents (the very young, people on the metric system)
- Placing the response line after the answer can confuse respondents when previous questions placed the response line before the answer.
- Biographical questions should be grouped together.

Some people feel that the quality of food is just one part of what is going on in the institution and is part of a larger problem about quality of life here. What is your opinion about the organization as a place to be?

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

- The question is overly long and complex.
- The question is leading. In quoting some people as proof there may be a problem, the respondent is tipping her hand that she also thinks there are problems.
- Likert-type items do not ask a question; they make a statement to which the respondent can either agree or disagree.
- There should be an odd number of response options to allow for a neutral response.
- The question strays from the topic of the survey—quality of service and food.

A recent analysis by a nutritionist from the Department of Health concluded that the food served in the cafeteria is some of the healthiest she has seen in some time. Do you think she is wrong? Yes No

- Survey questions should ask respondents for information they are in a position to know first hand. This question is more appropriate for a group of nutritionists.
- The question has no line for the respondent's check mark and shifts to response options that need to be circled without instructing the respondent to circle the answer.
- Yes-No response options do not reflect the intensity of responses. The question should be recast as a Likert-type item, especially since the previous question was Likert-type.

Why do you think she is not wrong?

- The question is the second half of a two-part question without instructions to skip it if you answered no to the first part.
- Two-part questions can usually be condensed into one question and this is a prime candidate.
- The question contains two negatives (e.g., not and wrong). The question is confusing.
- Avoid too many open ended questions; they are difficult to score.
- Insufficient space was provided for a response.

Any other comments?

- Researchers vary in their use of this question. Some reason that it gives respondents a chance to expand an earlier answer or to say something the researcher hadn't thought to ask about. Others reason that the question is unnecessary because an effective researcher provides exhaustive response options to capture all possible responses and meticulously asks all of the questions dictated by the research plan.

Thank you for completing this survey. Please return it to Mail Slot 999.

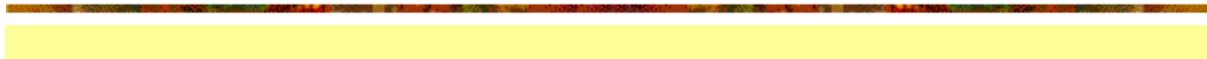
- No due date is given for return of the survey, which can lower the response rate.

The survey has a crowded appearance. Adding white space to the survey's left/ right and top/ bottom margins would make it look less daunting. White space between questions also should be increased. To counter the added length this creates, the researcher to remove questions that are not specifically and compellingly related to the research purpose. Candidates for removal include: "do you like ham & eggs?" "what is your height?" "what is your opinion about the organization as a place to be?" and "do you think the nutritionist is wrong?" These questions don't directly pertain to the quality of services and food in the cafeteria.

Questions that focus on a similar topic should be grouped together (text, p. 91). If feasible, place easy-interesting questions first, sensitive questions if any in the middle, and biographical questions last.

Ethically, researchers should state that respondents have the right to not complete the survey and the right to discontinue working on the survey at any time. It's unclear from the survey if the researcher communicated this to the respondents.

Most researchers number the survey questions, and some even number the response options to increase the speed and accuracy of scoring the surveys. The text suggests that numbering survey questions also helps respondents know where to go next and not skip any questions.



Conducting an Interview

Some things to consider

1. Did you question the participant in-depth?
 - a. Did you use prompts?
 - b. Did you ask for more details on what the participant meant?
2. Do you think the participant provided honest thoughts?
 - a. Did you develop a good rapport with the participant?
 - b. Did the participant appear comfortable with the questions?
3. Were you a good listener?
 - a. What did you forget to ask or do?
 - b. Did you keep the interview on track?
4. Did you participate in the conversation?
 - a. Did you remain neutral about your own thoughts/opinions?
 - b. Did you allow two-way communication (not just than just ask questions and accept answers)?
5. Was your language clear and friendly?
 - a. Was your voice clear and audible?
 - b. What did your body language say?

Do an interview based on the interview exercise document provided.

- Transcript the interview (verbatim)
- Write a memo about the interview process. For example: the date, time and location of the interview, duration of the interview, the environment, and your emotion or feelings.