

# RATING SCALES

We often ask participants to evaluate a session by selecting from among different choices, such as “excellent,” “good,” or “disappointing.” When we order these options to express differences of opinion, we are using a “scale.”

When developing a scale, think about the kind of information you need. Provide clear instructions and keep the order of choices (e.g., from low to high or negative to positive) the same throughout the form (except with semantic differentials). Also, consider your respondents’ age, literacy level, and cultural background.

An odd number of options allows people to select a middle option and an even number forces respondents to take sides. An even number is appropriate when you want to know what direction the people in the middle are leaning. Forcing people to choose a side may frustrate some respondents. As a general rule for creating scales, simpler is better. Ensure that the wording in the scale makes sense for the question.

The wording of your scale depends on what you want to know, the level of differentiation you desire, and your respondents. For example:

<input type="checkbox"/> poor	<input type="checkbox"/> poor
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> good
<input type="checkbox"/> average	<input type="checkbox"/> excellent
<input type="checkbox"/> good	
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	

Whether you use three, four, or five categories in your scale depends on the amount of differentiation that you want or that is inherent in the question. Category scales with more than six options are hard to create and even harder to read and understand.

A common mistake when creating a rating scale is including “no opinion” or “uncertain” as a middle response. These options are not actually a part of the scale. A middle category in a scale between “agree” and “disagree” would be “neither agree nor disagree.” Options such as: “no opinion,” “neutral,” “not applicable,” and “don’t know” are placed off the scale, in a separate space.

Make sure that the scale is balanced. When you give both positive and negative options, your scale should contain equal numbers of each. A poor set of responses would be: “decreased, stayed the same, increased a little, increased somewhat, increased a lot” (options include only one negative choice and three positive ones).

Finally, when using words in your scale, it is important that the words all refer to the same thing. For example:

What was your reaction to the session? (Please check your response.)

POOR	<input type="checkbox"/> not worth my time	BETTER	<input type="checkbox"/> not at all interested
	<input type="checkbox"/> slightly interested		<input type="checkbox"/> slightly interested
	<input type="checkbox"/> moderately interested		<input type="checkbox"/> moderately interested
	<input type="checkbox"/> very interested		<input type="checkbox"/> very interested

The choices in the left column include two concepts — “worth” and “interest level.” The right column includes only “interest level,” making better response options.



**Sample  
rating  
scales**

strongly disagree disagree neither agree nor disagree agree strongly agree	disagree neither agree nor disagree agree	completely disagree mostly disagree slightly disagree slightly agree mostly agree completely agree
very rarely rarely occasionally frequently very frequently	never seldom about half the time usually always	not at all little occasionally often all the time
not really somewhat quite a bit	never rarely sometimes often always	never seldom sometimes often
not much some a great deal	a little some a lot	not much little somewhat much a great deal
not important moderately important very important	unimportant of little importance important very important	unimportant of little importance moderately important important very important
poor fair average good excellent	very poor not good all right good excellent	extremely poor below average average above average excellent
too elementary okay too technical	too fast just right too slow	poor not good good excellent
did not understand understood a little understood most of it understood very well	no help at all slightly helpful fairly helpful very helpful	quite unsuccessful somewhat unsuccessful somewhat successful quite successful
definitely will not probably will not probably will definitely will	absolutely no mostly no neither yes nor no mostly yes absolutely yes	never true sometimes true often true
not at all very little somewhat to a great extent	not at all true slightly true true about half the time mostly true completely true	probably not maybe quite likely definitely
very dissatisfied somewhat dissatisfied neither satisfied nor dissatisfied somewhat satisfied very satisfied	not at all satisfied slightly satisfied somewhat satisfied very much satisfied	
didn't get what I wanted got a little of what I wanted got a lot of what I wanted got everything I wanted	very uncomfortable uncomfortable comfortable very comfortable	

