

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THESE QUESTIONS?

Review these examples. Identify what is wrong with each question. Then, rephrase the question to improve it.

- When you go out to eat, which type of food do you most prefer?
American
Italian
Chinese
Other
- Did today's workshop provide you with information to review and if necessary improve your ability to evaluation your program?
 YES NO
- Are you married or single?
- How many times in the past month have you eaten dairy products? _____
- Do you agree or disagree with the county's new policy on alcohol sales?
 Agree Disagree
- Isn't the new CFY center an asset to the community?
 YES NO
- How did you first hear about the parenting education program?
From a friend or relative
From a neighbor
From my spouse
At work
From television, radio, or newspaper
- Your city or town _____
- How may hours did you contribute to community service last year? _____
- More Americans exercise regularly now than they did 10 years ago. Do you exercise regularly?
Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 A lot
- Are you better off now than you were four years ago?
- Do you believe that the government should stop wasting money on road construction?
- How satisfied are you with the local hospital services?
Delighted
Mostly satisfied
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied
Mostly dissatisfied
Terrible
- How often did you attend a University of Wisconsin sponsored workshop, program, or course in the past year?
Never
Rarely
Occasionally
Regularly
- To what extent do you agree with this statement: "Our community is a safe place to live"?
Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
No opinion
Strongly disagree
- What is your age?



WHAT'S WRONG WITH THESE QUESTIONS? (ANSWER KEY)

These questions (and suggested revisions) are for illustration to facilitate discussion only. They are written in the abstract, rather than for a particular population, purpose, and relative to placement within the questionnaire.

<p>Q1. When you go out to eat, which type of food do you most prefer?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A respondent that never goes out to eat cannot answer • Answer categories must be relevant for the respondent 	<p><u>A revision:</u> When you go out to eat, which type of food do you most prefer? (check one)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> American <input type="checkbox"/> Italian <input type="checkbox"/> Chinese <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> I do not go out to eat.
<p>Q2. Did today's workshop provide you with information to review and if necessary improve your ability to evaluation your program?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Double-barreled question: 2 questions in one • Misspelling – "evaluation" should be "evaluate" • The YES-NO format limits the answer 	<p><u>A revision:</u> To what extent did today's workshop provide useful information to help you improve your ability to evaluate your program? (check one)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat <input type="checkbox"/> Quite a bit <input type="checkbox"/> A great deal
<p>Q3. Are you married or single?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A respondent who is neither married nor single cannot respond 	<p><u>A revision:</u> What is your current marital status?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Single <input type="checkbox"/> Married <input type="checkbox"/> Separated <input type="checkbox"/> Divorced <input type="checkbox"/> Living with a significant other <input type="checkbox"/> Widowed
<p>Q4. How many times in the past month have you eaten dairy products?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A respondent may not know what "dairy products" are/include • Difficult to accurately recall and report; requires too much precision • Time period is unspecified: What is the "past month": September; or Sept 16 to Oct 16? 	
<p>Q5. Do you agree or disagree with the county's new policy on alcohol sales?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A respondent may not know what the new policy is; include a preface that describes the county policy • A respondent who neither agrees or disagrees but is neutral, cannot respond • A respondent who is undecided or has no opinion cannot respond. If an undecided option is included, separate it from the directional scale and place it in the last position. 	<p><u>A revision:</u> [Brief explanation of the county's new policy on alcohol sales] To what extent do you agree or disagree with the county's new policy on alcohol sales?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Neither agree or disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Undecided <p><u>Another revision:</u> To what extent do you agree or disagree with the county's new policy on alcohol sales?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat agree <input type="checkbox"/> Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/> No opinion
<p>Q6. Isn't the new CFY center an asset to the community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A respondent may not know what CFY means; avoid acronyms or abbreviations • Avoid negative wording; avoid contractions • This is a leading question; avoid bias 	<p><u>A revision:</u> Do you think the new Child Family Youth Center is an asset to the community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> Undecided <input type="checkbox"/> Do not know what the Child Family Youth Center is



<p>Q7. How did you first hear about the parenting education program?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The answer categories are not mutually exclusive: there is a mix of locations and people (e.g., one could have heard at work from a friend) • A respondent may not know which parenting education program is being referred to 	<p><u>A revision:</u> From which one of the following sources did you first hear about the NewStart Parenting Education Program sponsored by the Case County Extension Office?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Television <input type="checkbox"/> Radio <input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper <input type="checkbox"/> Poster <input type="checkbox"/> Another person
<p>Q8. Your city or town</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write questions as complete sentences 	<p><u>A revision:</u> In what city or town do you live? _____ City or town</p>
<p>Q9. How many hours did you contribute to community service last year?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misspelling: “may” should be “many” • Requires too much precision that is difficult to recall, exceeding the potential for a ready, accurate answer; switching from asking for a precise count to asking for an estimate helps • A respondent may have different understanding/meaning of “community service”; provide enough definition/clarification so that terms can be interpreted similarly 	<p><u>A revision:</u> In 2005, about how many hours did you contribute to community service (such as helping the elderly, environmental improvement, serving children and families, animal care)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 10 hours <input type="checkbox"/> 11-25 hours <input type="checkbox"/> 26-50 hours <input type="checkbox"/> 51-75 hours <input type="checkbox"/> 76-100 hours <input type="checkbox"/> More than 100 hours <p>Note: This level of recall and precision is prone to inaccuracy; consider another way to obtain the desired data.</p>
<p>Q10. More Americans exercise regularly now than they did 10 years ago. Do you exercise regularly?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leading question • “Regularly” is a vague quantifier; for some it may mean once a day whereas for others it may imply once per week or several times a month • Changing the answer categories to numerical amounts may eliminate varied interpretations • “Do you exercise regularly” suggests a YES-NO response, not a scale; inconsistent question and answer construction • Label each scale item. The practice of using numbers along a scale without descriptive labels removes any sense of meaning that a label gives to each point on a scale • Will people have a common understanding of “exercise”? 	<p><u>A revision:</u> About how often have you exercised during the month of June 2007?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all <input type="checkbox"/> A few times <input type="checkbox"/> About once a week <input type="checkbox"/> Two to four times a week <input type="checkbox"/> More than four times a week
<p>Q11. Are you better off now than you were four years ago?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respondent may have different interpretations of “better off”; be more specific — better off in terms of what? • Time frame is not specified; long recall period reduces potential for accuracy 	
<p>Q12. Do you believe that the government should stop wasting money on road construction?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leading, biased question 	



<p>Q13. How satisfied are you with the local hospital services?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State both sides of an attitude scale in the stem of the question • Keep the wording in the scale consistent 	<p><u>A revision:</u> To what extent are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the local hospital services?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Completely satisfied <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat satisfied <input type="checkbox"/> Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat dissatisfied <input type="checkbox"/> Completely dissatisfied
<p>Q14. How often did you attend a University of Wisconsin sponsored workshop, program, or course in the past year?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to answer; avoid questions that require specificity beyond what can be readily remembered • Unspecified time period • Respondent may not associate program attended with University of Wisconsin 	
<p>Q15. To what extent do you agree with this statement: “Our community is a safe place to live”?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State both sides of an attitude scale in the stem of the question • Ensure that responses are balanced, equal on both sides of neutral 	
<p>Q16. What is your age?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A respondent may be unwilling to reveal personal information; providing categories may be less objectionable 	<p><u>A revision:</u> Which of the following age categories describes you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> 35 or younger <input type="checkbox"/> 36-45 <input type="checkbox"/> 46-55 <input type="checkbox"/> 56-65 <input type="checkbox"/> 66 or older <p>Note: Make the age categories appropriate for the respondents and purpose of the question</p>

Helpful resource: Dillman, D. A. (2000). *Mail and internet surveys: The tailored design method* (2nd ed.) (Chapter 2). New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.



CHECKLIST: AVOIDING COMMON PROBLEMS IN QUESTION WORDING

	COMMON PROBLEM
	Vague questions
	No possibility to respond
	Ambiguous words or phrases
	Use of acronyms
	Specificity that exceeds potential to respond
	Leading questions
	Double-barreled questions
	Too many words, unnecessary words
	Vague quantifiers
	Incomplete questions (sentences)
	Unequal numbers of positive and negative options in scales
	Misplacement of undecided and neutral in scale
	Bias expressed
	Response options that are not mutually exclusive
	Inappropriate time frames
	Technical inaccuracy in questions
	Double negatives
	Mismatch between question and response

