

# how to...

## ...design a good questionnaire

The key to effective questionnaire design is knowing exactly what you want to find out. Base your questionnaire design on your evaluation questions as described in Step 2 of the AHGTM evaluation guide. The **purpose** and **structure** of your questionnaire are important, as is the **wording** of the questions. This guide explains some of the basics.

### Purpose

- A questionnaire is only as good as the questions it contains.
- Ask yourself what you will do with the information each question yields. If you are unsure of the answer, consider removing the question. Prioritising items in this way will help ensure that you make the most of the questionnaire.

### Structure

- The questionnaire should always start with a brief sentence or two explaining the purpose of the questionnaire, and what the data will be used for.
- It should have a clear structure, and questions dealing with similar aspects of the programme should be grouped together.
- As a rule, questions should move from the general to the particular aspects of the programme.
- It is often a good idea to ask personal information such as the respondent's age and ethnicity at the end of the questionnaire as these types of questions can put people off at the start. However, this information is important and if the questionnaire is too long respondents may not have the time to complete it.
- Also, think about whether you will use closed form (multiple choice) or open form (where the respondent writes their response) items.
- Essentially, open-form items can tell you what the impacts of the programme are, while closed form items will tell you how big each impact is, or how many people experienced it.
- If badly designed, closed form items can skew data by not representing respondents' true range of opinions. This can also be frustrating for those completing the questionnaire.
- Closed form items should only be used when you have a clear idea of what the potential responses will be.
- Open form items, on the other hand, allow respondents complete freedom to report any opinions or impacts. However, analysis of data collected in this way is always limited, and it will take much longer to enter the data into a spreadsheet.

## Wording

Appropriate wording of questionnaire items is important in order to minimise bias in the questionnaire, i.e. leading people to answer one way or another. Some examples for considering wording are given below (taken from *Carrying out investigations in psychology* (Foster & Parker, 1995)):

- **Avoid jargon or technical terms unlikely to be familiar to your respondents**  
Poor item: Do you worry that you may have halitosis?  
Better item: Do you worry that you may have bad breath?
- **Avoid ambiguous questions and answers**  
Poor item: Do you frequently consult your doctor?  
Better item: How many times have you consulted your doctor in the last six months?  
*None; 1 or 2 times; 3-5 times; more than 5 times*
- **Avoid 'combination' questions**  
Do not include the word 'and' in case a respondent wants to respond 'yes' to one and 'no' to the other part of the question.  
Poor item: Do you believe in fairies and elves?  
Better item: Do you believe in fairies?  
Do you believe in elves?
- **Avoid double negatives**  
Double negatives in the question or in the question and answer combination are especially likely to confuse your respondents.  
Poor item: I do not trust politicians to tell the truth  
*Yes; No*  
Better item: Do you believe politicians usually tell the truth?  
*Yes; No; Don't know*  
Better still: In general, how often do you think that politicians tell the truth?  
*All the time; Three-quarters of the time; Half the time; One quarter of the time; None of the time*
- **Do not use leading questions that imply the response that is wanted**  
Poor item: Do you agree with most people that capital punishment should be restored?  
*Yes; No*  
Better Item: Do you believe that for some crimes capital punishment should be restored, should not be restored or do you have no opinion?  
*Should be restored; Should not be restored; No opinion*
- **Include a 'no opinion' option when asking about people's beliefs or attitudes**  
An example is given in rule 5 above
- **Avoid loaded questions that contain words which may bias the responses**  
Poor item: Do you agree that racist organisations such as the ABC should be banned?  
This is a poor item because it labels the target organisation as racist; the respondent might not have considered it as racist without this suggestion.
- **The way people are asked to show their response should be simple**  
Ask them to tick what does apply, rather than delete what does not. Ticking or circling is more definite than underlining. You can ask people to put a cross (X) against the alternative which applies, but this may cause problems if people think of X as indicating 'wrong'. A tick is less confusing.  
Poor item: Are you aged between 20 and 30? Delete whichever does not apply  
*Yes; No*  
Better item: Are you aged between 20 and 30 inclusive? Tick the appropriate answer  
*Yes ( ); No ( )*