# Best Practices for Student Surveys

The role of surveys is essential for understanding students' needs and experiences and instrumental in identifying areas for development and improvement in educational programs. We've designed this resource to assist educators, administrators, and stakeholders in creating effective and inclusive surveys to understand the student experience.

## WHY THIS RESOURCE IS IMPORTANT

- **Informed Decision Making:** Provides accurate data to support decisions, improving student engagement and completion rates.

- **Focus on Students:** Ensures student perspectives are central, influencing the direction and quality of their educational experience.

- **Promoting Fairness and Inclusion:** Helps identify and remove biases, fostering an environment where every student has equal opportunities to succeed.

- **Encouraging Continuous Feedback:** Establishes a feedback loop for ongoing improvements, aligning educational practices with student needs and industry demands.

This guide aims to simplify the survey creation process while emphasizing the importance of ethical and effective communication with students. It's a step towards recognizing and supporting the diverse potential of every student in our educational system.

## YOU CARE. DOES YOUR SURVEY?

The "CARES" principle encapsulates the key elements of effective survey design and administration, making it easier to remember and apply.

| C | A | R | E | S |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **CONCISE** | **ACCESSIBLE** | **RELEVANT** | **ETHICAL** | **SIMPLE** |
| Keep the survey short and to the point to avoid respondent fatigue. | Ensure the survey is easy to access and complete for all students, including those with disabilities. | Make sure all questions are directly related to your hypotheses and objectives. | Respect the privacy and consent of the respondents, and handle sensitive data responsibly. | Use clear, straightforward language that is easily understood by all students. |

## Try This!

**CTE & STEM Student Survey Generator**
http://drmp.co/surveygenerator

# Four Focus Areas For Effective Surveys

Crafting surveys that effectively engage students is key to understanding and addressing inequities and exclusion in education. This resource delves into four critical areas for developing effective student surveys:

**1** **DESIGN**

We explore crafting survey questions and structures, offering tips for creating relevant, clear, and unbiased questions that align with your survey's core objectives.

**2** **DISTRIBUTION & ACCESSIBILITY**

This section covers making surveys accessible to a diverse student population and strategies for effective distribution to enhance response rates.

**3** **ETHICS & SENSITIVITY**

We focus on ethical considerations, emphasizing confidentiality, informed consent, and cultural sensitivity, especially for diverse or sensitive topics.

**4** **ANALYSIS & FEEDBACK**

The final area guides effective data analysis and feedback sharing, including data preparation techniques and communicating findings to stakeholders for continuous improvement.

## For a concise guide to essential survey design and administration, remember the CARES framework:

**CONCISE**

A **concise** survey respects the respondent's time and keeps their attention. It focuses on essential questions to avoid overwhelming participants.

**ACCESSIBLE**

**Accessibility** ensures that every student can easily understand and respond to the survey. This includes students with disabilities and those who may not have regular internet access. Every voice matters.

**RELEVANT**

Ensure that every question directly contributes to the survey's objectives. This **relevance** makes the survey more engaging and ensures that the data collected is useful.

**ETHICAL**

**Ethical** considerations include respecting respondent privacy, obtaining informed consent, and ensuring confidentiality. It's about treating respondents' information and responses with respect and integrity.

**SIMPLE**

**Simple** language makes the survey accessible to a wider audience, avoiding misunderstandings and ensuring that responses are based on clear comprehension of questions.

By integrating the CARES principles with the following four focus areas, educators and administrators can develop surveys that are methodologaically sound and engaging. This approach fosters valuable insights for improving participation rates and addressing key issues in education.

## DESIGN

| BEST PRACTICE | EXPLANATION | SUMMARY |
|---|---|---|
| **Clear Objectives** | Define the purpose of the survey clearly. Understand what information you want to gather and why it's important to your objective of improving participation, completion, or concentration of special populations in CTE. | *Purpose of the survey clearly defined.* |
| **Relevant Questions** | Ensure all questions are relevant to the survey's objectives and the hypotheses that you are trying to validate or disprove. Avoid including unnecessary questions that might make the survey lengthy and tedious. | *Questions align with objectives; no irrelevant content.* |
| **Simple Language** | Use language that is easy to understand. Avoid jargon, technical terms, or complex language that might confuse the respondents. You can use AI tools like chatGPT to help you simplify language. | *Language is easy to understand, free of jargon and complexity.* |
| **Brevity** | Keep the survey concise. Long surveys can lead to respondent fatigue, which can affect the quality of the responses. | *Survey is concise to avoid fatigue.* |
| **Avoid Leading Questions** | Frame questions in a way that doesn't lead the respondent to a particular answer. | *Questions are neutrally framed.* |
| **Avoid Compound Questions** | Avoid questions that include more than one topic and ask about two different issues while only allowing a single answer. | *Single-topic focus in questions.* |
| **Pilot Testing** | Conduct a pilot test of the survey with a small group of students to identify any issues with question clarity, survey length, or technical problems. | *Pilot test conducted to identify clarity and technical issues.* |

## DESIGN *(continued)*

| BEST PRACTICE | EXPLANATION | SUMMARY |
|---|---|---|
| **Technical Reliability** | If using an online survey tool, ensure it is reliable and can handle the expected number of responses without issues. Examples of survey tools are Google Forms, Survey Monkey, Qualitrics, Typeform, etc. | *Reliable survey tools are used.* |
| **Use of Likert Scales** <br><br> (see examples on page 6) | Employ Likert scales for a nuanced view of opinions. These scales are typically a five-point range from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree and include a neutral midpoint (e.g., Neither Agree nor Disagree) for balanced responses. | *Appropriately designed Likert scales with neutral midpoint.* |
| **Consistency in Scales** | Maintain consistent scales throughout the survey. Ensure the directionality is uniform (negative on the left, positive on the right) for accurate measurement and comparison across statements. | *Uniform scale directionality maintained.* |
| **Positive Language** | Frame questions using positive language. Avoid negatives to ensure clarity and ease of understanding for respondents. | *Questions framed positively.* |
| **Varied Question Framing for Validation** | Validate responses by asking similar questions in different ways. Include both positive and negative statements to check the reliability of responses. | *Similar concepts asked in different ways.* |
| **Balanced Question Design** | Balance the visual, numeric, and conceptual midpoint of response options. Ensure each option occupies equal visual space for consistency. | *Balanced design of response options.* |
| **Strategic Question Placement** | Place the most important survey items at the beginning to capture attention and ensure key data is collected. | *Key items placed at the beginning of the survey.* |

# DISTRIBUTION & ACCESSIBILITY

| BEST PRACTICE | EXPLANATION | ASSESSMENT |
|---|---|---|
| **Multiple Formats** | Offer the survey in multiple formats if possible (e.g., online and paper-based) to accommodate different preferences and access issues. | *Survey available in various formats.* |
| **Accessibility** | Ensure the survey is accessible to all students, including those with disabilities. This might involve providing alternative formats or assistance. | *Survey accessible to all.* |
| **Timing and Scheduling** | Avoid busy periods like exams or holidays, and align the survey with the academic calendar. A typical duration for survey availability is 1-2 weeks. | *Survey timing avoids busy times.* |
| **Reminders and Follow-Up** | Send one or two reminders, spaced out and close to the survey's closing date, to increase response rates. | *Effective reminder strategy implemented.* |
| **Incentives** | Consider offering incentives such as a chance to win a prize, ensuring they are ethically appropriate and do not coerce participation. | *Ethical incentives for participation.* |
| **Personalized Correspondence** | Personalize all communications, including the survey itself. Using specific names (e.g., "Dear [Name]" instead of "Dear Student") can significantly improve response rates | *Communications personalized for higher engagement.* |

# ETHICS & SENSITIVITY

| BEST PRACTICE | EXPLANATION | ASSESSMENT |
|---|---|---|
| **Informed Consent** | Clearly explain the purpose of the survey, how you will use the data and any confidentiality measures. Obtain informed consent from participants and parents if necessary. | *Explain survey purpose and confidentiality; get consent.* |
| **Anonymous Responses** | Ensure anonymity if it's important for your survey. This encourages honesty, especially in feedback or opinion surveys. | *Anonymity maintained where necessary.* |
| **Ethical Considerations** | Follow ethical standards, particularly with sensitive topics or small demographic groups. Report responses responsibly, and seek ethics committee approval if needed. | *Adherence to ethical standards in sensitive situations.* |
| **Cultural Sensitivity** | Be aware of and sensitive to cultural differences that might affect how questions are interpreted and answered. Also ensure that you are not perpetuating stereotypes in your questioning, or employing biased language. | *Questions designed to be culturally sensitive.* |
| **Demographic Questions** | Place demographic questions at the end of your survey. This approach helps minimize stereotype threat, where respondents might feel judged based on group stereotypes. Demographic data is essential for detailed analysis, but consider respondent comfort. If anonymity is not a concern, use student ID numbers for cross-referencing demographics like gender and race. | *Demographic questions placed last to reduce stereotype threat.* |

## ANALYSIS & FEEDBACK

| BEST PRACTICE | EXPLANATION | ASSESSMENT |
|---|---|---|
| **Data Analysis Plan** | Develop a straightforward plan for data analysis to address your research questions. Use AI tools for analyzing open ended responses. | *Clear plan for analyzing survey data.* |
| **Data Preparation** | Download the data from the survey software and set up a structured spreadsheet. This step is crucial as most survey tools may not offer comprehensive analysis features, especially for disaggregated data. | *Data downloaded and organized in a structured spreadsheet.* |
| **Seek Assistance for Data Analysis** | Seek assistance with data analysis if it's unfamiliar or challenging. Guidance in setting up and using spreadsheets is vital for effective analysis. Don't hesitate to ask for help to ensure confident and accurate data interpretation. | *Assistance sought for data analysis if needed.* |
| **Feedback and Follow-up** | Provide feedback to respondents about the survey results if appropriate. This can increase engagement in future surveys. | *Plan for providing feedback to respondents.* |

## LIKERT SCALE EXAMPLES

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **SATISFACTION** | Very Dissatisfied | Dissatisfied | Neutral | Satisfied | Very Satisfied | *How satisfied are you with your current course curriculum?* |
| **AGREEMENT** | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | *I feel that the course materials are relevant to my career goals.* |
| **FREQUENCY** | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Always | *How often do you feel challenged by the assignments in this class?* |
| **QUALITY** | Very Poor | Poor | Average | Good | Excellent | *How would you rate the quality of the teaching in this course?* |
| **LIKELIHOOD** | Very Unlikely | Unlikely | Neutral | Likely | Very Likely | *How likely are you to recommend this course to a friend or colleague?* |

# Advanced Survey Development Skills

Developing surveys is a skill that improves with practice, so be patient with yourself. Remember, most action research surveys aim for effectiveness rather than meeting the rigorous standards of a full-scale doctoral program. As you progress, there are advanced skills you can learn to enhance your survey's accuracy, reliability, and validity. If you want to upgrade your survey skills, the following list highlights key areas for further development. These advanced skills will equip you to design sophisticated and reliable surveys capable of providing high-quality data for informed decision-making, policy development, and research.

## Questionnaire Design Expertise:
– Crafting questions that accurately measure the constructs of interest.
– Using advanced question types like matrix questions, slider scales, or rank ordering.
– Designing adaptive or branching questions based on previous responses.

## Understanding and Minimizing Bias:
– Recognizing and reducing different types of biases (response bias, sampling bias, etc.).
– Utilizing neutral wording and avoiding leading questions.

## Sampling and Population Knowledge:
– Proficiency in determining the appropriate sample size.
– Understanding different sampling methods (random, stratified, convenience sampling).
– Ensuring the sample is representative of the target population.

## Data Analysis and Interpretation Skills:
– Advanced statistical analysis techniques (like regression analysis, factor analysis).
– Interpreting data accurately and drawing valid conclusions.
– Proficiency with statistical software tools.

## Survey Testing and Validation:
– Conducting pilot tests to refine questions and format.
– Validating the survey instrument to ensure it measures what it intends to.
– Performing reliability tests (like test-retest reliability, Cronbach's alpha).

## Ethical Considerations and Compliance:
– Ensuring surveys adhere to ethical standards and privacy laws.
– Obtaining informed consent and ensuring respondent confidentiality.
– Compliance with relevant data protection regulations (like GDPR).

## Multimodal Survey Deployment:
– Designing and deploying surveys across multiple platforms (online, paper-based, mobile).
– Ensuring consistency and comparability of data across different modes.

## Cultural Competency and Inclusivity:
– Designing surveys that are culturally sensitive and inclusive.
– Adapting surveys for different languages and cultural contexts.

## Utilizing Technology and Software Proficiency:
– Leveraging advanced survey software features.
– Integrating surveys with other data systems and tools.

## Longitudinal Survey Design:
– Designing surveys for repeated administration over time.
– Understanding and managing panel attrition and cohort effects.

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