your suppliers about costs. It's funny how some clients are raising prices to their customers and asking us not just to hold, but actually lower, our prices to them. (There seems to be more of that lately, but that's another story.) What I do mean is, stop after outlining a project to suppliers and ask them, "Now what could be done to cut the cost of this project?" I think you'll be surprised at the good ideas they have.

As I said, most good research companies make their living selling research, but they also take pride in doing it efficiently. It's curious, but I sometimes feel we're more anxious to save money for clients than they are. I'm not sure why that is, but I think it has something to do with leaving your backside partially exposed, which nobody is ever anxious to do. So challenge your suppliers to cut your research costs, and if you're serious about it, I'll bet they usually can.

These aren't perfect solutions. You always have to give up something to save money. But in most cases, what you're saving is much more than what you're losing. Unfortunately, few research users are close enough to the day-to-day mechanics of the business to know the kinds of savings that are possible. But the times may be right to start digging in and finding the soft spots.

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How to Write a Questionnaire

Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts.

—William Strunk, Jr.
The Elements of Style

Does the exact wording of a question really matter that much? Yes, it matters a great deal, probably more than you imagine. Studies have shown that exactly how a question is worded and asked can even reverse the results. For example, the New York Times–CBS News Poll asked this question: "Do you think there should be an amendment to the Constitution prohibiting abortions, or shouldn't there be such an amendment?" The responses were:

| Favor amendment | 29% |
| Uncertain       | 9   |
| Oppose amendment| 62  |

Later in the survey, the same people were asked a slightly reworded question, which produced a very different result: "Do you believe there should be an amendment to the Constitution protecting the life of the unborn child, or shouldn't there be such an amendment?"

| Favor amendment | 50% |
| Uncertain       | 11  |
| Oppose amendment| 39  |

The two wordings produced opposite indications of the direction of public
8. After you've finished writing the questionnaire, read it out loud so you can be sure you've included all the instructions for the interviewers. This will help you uncover any cumbersome or unclear wording. Let others read the questionnaire, too. They can bring a fresh perspective and spot things you can't. Finally, be personally involved with pretests and monitoring whenever possible. You're sure to learn something.

How to Pick the Right Kind of Question

Remember the parlor game (also a radio and TV show) called "Twenty Questions"? In this game, one team picked the name of a person, place, or thing, and another team had to guess the first team's choice by asking yes or no questions. More often than not the guessing team won—sometimes in many fewer than 20 questions.

In some ways, an interview is like a game of "Twenty Questions." As the researcher, you're trying to learn something from the respondent through a series of questions. And just as in the parlor game, the exact wording and sequence of the questions can be crucial to your being successful.

That's really what questionnaire writing is all about: putting the right questions together in the right order. Of course, you're not limited to 20 questions or yes/no answers. But if it's possible to guess almost anything with only 20 simple questions, it seems likely that many marketing research questionnaires are longer and more complicated than they need to be. Or maybe we're usually trying to find out too many things at once.

Questions are the tools of the survey researcher. And like any craftsman, a researcher ought to use his tools for the job they were designed to do. The tip-off to a questionnaire done by an inexperienced person is usually that the questions don't exactly fit. They aren't quite the right questions for obtaining the information that's being sought. That's where a knowledge of all the types of questions available comes in handy. The more choices you have, the better your chances of selecting the best question.

TYPES OF QUESTIONS

There are really only two types of questions: open-end and closed-end. You can let the respondent answer in his or her own words (open-end), or you can let the respondent select an answer from your words (closed-end).
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It’s a little more complicated than that, of course, because there are many variations on those two basic types. This chapter describes the kinds of questions most often used in survey research studies for business. If these questions were arranged into natural groupings, the categories would look like this:

I. Open-end questions
   A. Basic open-ends
   B. Follow-up questions
      1. Probing
      2. Clarifying

II. Closed-end questions
   A. Multiple-response questions
      1. Dichotomous
      2. Multiple response
   B. Scales
      1. Unipolar
      2. Bipolar
      3. Hedonic
      4. Buying intent
      5. Agree/disagree
   C. Ordering questions
      1. Preference
      2. Ranking
   D. Miscellaneous
      1. Semantic differential
      2. Constant sum

The following pages provide an overview of these types of questions.

Open-End Questions

Examples:
- "What did you like most about the product?"
- "Why do you say that?"

Uses:
- Collects information with a minimum of direction to the respondent.
- Useful where the range of possible responses is very broad and can’t be elicited with a closed-end question.
- Gets the respondent’s own words.

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Things to Remember:
- Very expensive to ask, code, tabulate, and analyze. Should usually be used sparingly, only where it serves a specific purpose.
- Be sure the questions include written instructions to the interviewer to "probe" and "clarify" the responses.
- Interviewers must record responses absolutely verbatim.
- Results depend heavily on quality of interviewing and coding.

Probing Questions

Examples:
- "What else?"
- "What other things?"
- "What else did you like about the product?"

Uses:
- A standard technique for getting a full, complete response to an open-end question. ("Clarifying" questions are another type of question used for the same purpose.)
- Should be used routinely by interviewers as a follow-up on open-end questions until the respondent has nothing more to add.

Things to Remember:
- Must be completely non-leading.
- Never ask about subjects not already volunteered by the respondent.
- For example, don’t probe with: "What did you think about the texture?" if the respondent has not mentioned texture.

Clarifying Questions

Examples:
- "In what way was it too oily?"
- "What exactly do you mean when you say the bottle was difficult to handle?"
- "Can you explain what you mean by that?"

Uses:
- This is a standard technique for getting a clearer explanation of a response to an open-end question. ("Probing" is another type of questioning used for the same purpose.)
- Should be used routinely by interviewers as a follow-up to any vague or general term used by the respondent.
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- "Was the product better than you expected, not as good as you expected, or about the same as you expected?"
  - BETTER THAN EXPECTED ( )
  - NOT AS GOOD AS EXPECTED ( )
  - ABOUT THE SAME AS EXPECTED ( )

Uses:
- Should generally be used instead of an open-end question wherever all the responses can be determined beforehand.
- Easier and less expensive than open-end questions to ask and tabulate.
- Assures that all respondents will answer on the same dimension. More directed than open-end questions.

Things to Remember:
- Be sure it is really a closed-end question. You must be able to anticipate and list all possible responses.
- Never prelist categories of answers to an open-end question and ask interviewers to "code" responses into the correct categories. Interviewers are trained to record verbatim answers, not to code.
- Can be followed with an open-end question (such as "why") to obtain more detailed information.

Unipolar Scales

Examples:
- Which statement best describes the color of the french fry? Was the color of the french fry:
  - EXCELLENT ( )
  - VERY GOOD ( )
  - GOOD ( )
  - FAIR ( )
  - POOR ( )
  - VERY POOR ( )
  - EXTREMELY POOR ( )
- How interesting did you find this advertisement? Was it:
  - EXTREMELY INTERESTING ( )
  - VERY INTERESTING ( )
  - QUITE INTERESTING ( )
  - SOMEWHAT INTERESTING ( )
  - SLIGHTLY INTERESTING ( )
  - NOT AT ALL INTERESTING ( )
Uses:

- Best for measuring product attributes where there is no opposite endpoint that's equally desirable or undesirable. (Where there are equal endpoints, use a bipolar scale.)
- All well-constructed scales share the quality of being adaptable to statistical tables. Numerical values can be assigned to each point and statistical routines run (means, standard deviations, analysis of variance, and so on). This is not possible, of course, with non-scale data, such as open-end questions.

Things to Remember:

- Try to include another product as a benchmark or reference point for interpreting results.
- Can be more difficult to interpret than a bipolar scale. In the example above, is "quite interesting" good or bad? It's difficult to tell without using another product for comparison.

Bipolar Scales

Examples:

- Which of the following statements best describes the color of the bacon?
  Was the color of the bacon:
  - Much too dark ( )
  - Somewhat too dark ( )
  - Just about right ( )
  - Somewhat too light ( )
  - Much too light ( )

- Which of the following statements best describes the spice level of the salami? Was the spice level of the salami:
  - Much too spicy ( )
  - Somewhat too spicy ( )
  - Slightly too spicy ( )
  - Just about right ( )
  - Slightly too bland ( )
  - Somewhat too bland ( )
  - Much too bland ( )

Uses:

- Usually the best way to evaluate attributes in product tests, because it gives some general direction for improvement.
- Easy and efficient to ask, answer, and tabulate.

Things to Remember:

- Often need a benchmark competitive product for comparison with test products.
- Usually better for comparing alternative products than for providing absolute measures.

Example:

- Considering everything about this product, which statement best describes how much you like or dislike this product overall?

  - Like it extremely ( )
  - Like it strongly ( )
  - Like it very well ( )
  - Like it fairly well ( )
  - Like it moderately ( )
  - Like it mildly ( )
  - Neither like nor dislike it ( )
  - Dislike it moderately ( )
  - Dislike it intensely ( )

Use:

- Good way to measure overall "liking" for a product—especially its physical attributes.
- Six positive points usually provide sensitivity to differences, even among similar products.

Things to Remember:

- Does not necessarily reflect buying intent. For example, a premium product may have a high hedonic score but, because of its price, generate lower buying intent.
- On a food product, hedonic and overall-taste scales usually mirror each other.

Buying-Intent Scales

Example:

- Which of these statements best describes how interested you would be in buying this product?

  - I definitely would buy it ( )
  - I probably would buy it ( )
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I MIGHT OR MIGHT NOT BUY IT ( )
I PROBABLY WOULD NOT BUY IT ( )
I DEFINITELY WOULD NOT BUY IT ( )

Uses:

□ Since sales are usually the end measure of a product’s success, this type of question comes closest to evaluating sales potential in a survey setting.

Things to Remember:

□ Respondents need to be given enough information (price, color, size, and so on) about a product to form an intelligent opinion about buying.
□ Does not perfectly reflect sales. Responses must be discounted somewhat; not all respondents who say “definitely buy” will actually buy.

Agree/Disagree Scales

Example:

□ For each statement, please indicate whether you:

Agree strongly ( )
Agree somewhat ( )
Agree slightly ( )
Neither agree nor disagree ( )
Disagree slightly ( )
Disagree somewhat ( )
Disagree strongly ( )

Use:

□ A common way to measure attitudes: get degree of agreement or disagreement with a series of statements.

Things to Remember:

□ Interpretation can be difficult. For example, disagreement with a negative statement doesn’t necessarily mean agreement with the opposite positive statement.
□ Listed responses may not accurately reflect respondents’ answers.
□ Statement wording is very critical.

Preference Questions

Examples:

□ “Overall, which of the two products you used do you prefer, Product 72 or Product 74—or do you like them both equally?”

□ “Which flavor do you prefer, mint or regular—or do you like them both equally?”
□ “Which of these colors do you like best for a paper towel in your kitchen?”

Uses:

□ A logical way to collect information in most product tests.
□ Tends to direct respondent toward choosing one as better, regardless of magnitude of difference. Small, but perceptible, product differences can result in lopsided preferences.

Things to Remember:

□ It’s usually best to offer a “no preference” choice, since there’s nearly always a group that can’t differentiate or doesn’t care.
□ Preference data can be very volatile, since small perceived differences can result in large swings in preference.
□ If there are more than two items to choose among, ranking may be more useful information than preference.

Ranking Questions

Examples:

□ “Please rank these characteristics from most important to least important to you, with 1 being the most important and 7 being the least important.”

Uses:

□ An easy way to collect information on any group of items (brands, characteristics, and so on).
□ Relatively simple to ask and tabulate.

Things to Remember:

□ Does not reflect intervals between items ranked. (First may be far superior to second; second and third may be nearly equal to one another.)
□ Assumes respondent is aware and knowledgeable enough to rank all the items.
□ Can become tedious for the respondent, especially if done repeatedly and/or on a large number of items.
□ To prevent misunderstanding, tell respondents whether “1” represents their first choice or last.
Semantic-Differential Questions

Examples:
- Please place an X in the box that best represents your opinion of the First National Bank:
  - Friendly [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Unfriendly
  - Old-Fashioned [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Modern Use.

- Used mostly for collecting attitude information, especially “image profiles” of products, brands, or companies.

Things to Remember:
- Contain few verbal “clues”: points between ends are not labeled or numbered. This is theoretically desirable, but it can be unclear or confusing to some respondents if not clearly explained.
- Some scales have no clearly “preferred” end point, so analysis can be difficult. In the example above, which is better for a bank, being “old-fashioned” or being “modern”?
- Precise wording of end points is critical. They should be opposites.

Constant-Sum Questions

Example:
- “Please divide these eleven chips among these six brands of cake mix, according to your preference for the brands.”

Uses:
- Provides a quantified measure of “preference” among several brands.
- A useful way to quantify attitude shift on a “before/after” basis, such as in advertising testing.

Things to Remember:
- It can be difficult to clearly describe the task to respondents.
- Be careful to specify whether you want respondents to allocate on basis of preference, expected next X purchases, or some other basis.
- Tabulation and analysis can be complex.

TIPS ON QUESTIONNAIRE WRITING

1. Avoid harsh, extreme end points on scales. Most people are reluctant to select harshly worded scale points, especially end points. This means the number of points on your scale is effectively reduced.

2. Use exhibit cards. Especially on closed-end questions with more than four or five alternatives, it becomes difficult for respondents to retain all the answers in their heads. Listing the answers so that the respondent can look at them makes the interview more comfortable and improves the quality of the information obtained.

3. Rotate the order in which multiple responses are read to respondents if there’s no logical order. In a long list of items—brands, for example—there tends to be a bias toward the first and last items. So rotate the point at which the interviewer starts reading the list to eliminate such a bias.

4. Be aware of question order. Each question influences all the ones that follow. For example, you should generally ask about:
  - Appearance before taste. It’s difficult to evaluate the appearance after you’ve already eaten all the test product.
  - Overall evaluations before specific attributes.
  - Buying intent before specific attributes.
  - Open-end “like” and “dislike” questions before scale questions or questions about product attributes.

5. Keep self-administered questionnaires absolutely as simple as possible. Try to avoid complicated question patterns, especially skips. It’s also wise to assume respondents will read through the whole questionnaire before completing any of it. This makes unaided awareness questions, followed by an aided brand list, virtually impossible to ask on a self-administered questionnaire. In some cases, it may be possible to control jumping ahead by separating the questions into two completely different questionnaires.

QUESTIONNAIRE FORMAT GUIDELINES

The wording of questions in a questionnaire is the most important concern, but it’s also important to lay out the questions in such a way that the interviewer can easily understand and handle them. Here are some tips on questionnaire format:

1. Include all parts of a question on one page whenever possible.

2. Don’t split an answer list, with part on one page and part on another. The same applies to open-end questions. Don’t put the question on one page and the space for the answer on the next.

3. Type all interviewer instructions on the questionnaire in capital letters. Anything not in capital letters should be read to the respondent. Always put a “READ LIST” or “DO NOT READ LIST” on every closed-end question.

4. If a “skip” instruction involves skipping to a different page, have the questionnaire laid out so that the interviewer begins at the top of the new page. If it’s a skip that will be used a lot, it helps to print the key page on a different color. That way your instruction can say: “Skip to Q.10 ON BLUE PAGE.”
5. Another way to make the interviewer’s job easier is to put a box around answers that will be referred to later in the questionnaire. For example, if you have a question that will be answered only by people who got a free sample, set up the sample question like this:

Did you receive a free sample of Gobbledy Gook in the mail?

YES 1

NO 2

Then later on, when your instructions say: “REFER TO Q.3. IF RESPONDENT ANSWERED YES, CONTINUE. IF NOT, SKIP TO Q. 19,” the interviewer can quickly see where he or she is supposed to look.

6. Don’t be afraid to use double-spacing or at least a space and a half when setting up questionnaires. By squeezing questions together you increase the chance of confusing the interviewer, and that creates errors.

7. Keep the materials an interviewer has to handle in a personal interview to a minimum. For instance, use exhibit cards only when needed. You usually don’t need an exhibit card for short scales with only four or five choices. The interviewer can easily read the choices to the respondent. Exceptions to this are the buying-intent scale (it’s usually a critical part of the study, and you want no chance of misunderstanding) and income questions.

8. Always have a space for the interviewer’s name, the date of the interview, and the main city and state on the front of the questionnaire. If you’re interviewing at more than one location in a city, have a way to identify which location the questionnaire came from.

9. Have a study title and date on each questionnaire. Make the title as specific as possible to avoid confusion with other similar projects. Also include the type of study: telephone, mall intercept, door-to-door, and so on. Here’s an example:

PERSONAL PRODUCTS
TELEPHONE TRACKING STUDY
APRIL 1981

10. Be sure the project number appears on every separate document for the study (questionnaires, contact sheets, instructions, and so forth). This provides a clear reference point if materials get separated.

11. Use different-colored questionnaires to identify different parts of a study. This will make the instructions easy to follow, as in this example:

A. IF RESPONDENT HAS USED HI-C DRINK, GO TO PINK QUESTIONNAIRE.

B. IF RESPONDENT HAS HEARD OF, BUT NOT USED HI-C, GO TO YELLOW QUESTIONNAIRE.

C. IF RESPONDENT HAS NOT HEARD OF HI-C, GO TO WHITE DEMOGRAPHIC SECTION.