

Questionnaire Design Guidelines for Establishment Surveys

Rebecca L. Morrison, U.S. Census Bureau
Don A. Dillman, Washington State University
Leah M. Christian, Pew Research Center

Wording Guidelines

- 1: Phrase data requests as questions or imperative statements, not sentence fragments or keywords.
- 2: Ask additional, simple questions, rather than fewer, more complicated ones.

Visual Design Guidelines

Establish a clear navigational path.

- 3: Use a consistent page or screen layout.
- 4: Align questions and answer spaces / response options.
- 5: Clearly identify the start of each section and question.
- 6: When the navigational flow needs to be interrupted, use strong visual features.

Eliminate visual clutter from the questionnaire.

- 7: Use blank space to separate questions and make it easier to navigate within questionnaires.
- 8: Avoid unnecessary lines that break up or separate items that need to appear as groups.
- 9: Use visual cues to achieve grouping between questions and answer spaces.
- 10: Avoid including images or other graphics that are not necessary.

Use visual design to help respondents process instructions.

- 11: Incorporate instructions into the question where they are needed. Avoid placing instructions in a separate sheet or booklet.
- 12: Consider reformulating important instructions as questions.
- 13: Consider converting narrative paragraphs into a bulleted list.

Be consistent in how answer spaces and/or response options are displayed.

- 14: Use white spaces against a colored background to emphasize answer spaces.
- 15: Use similar answer spaces for the same task.

Reduce the use of matrices; when they are needed, simplify their visual presentation.

- 16: Limit the use of matrices. Consider the potential respondent's level of familiarity with tables when deciding whether or not to use them.
- 17: Use lines and spacing to help respondents process information vertically and horizontally as needed to complete the matrix.

- 18: Use font variations consistently and for a single purpose within a questionnaire.

Rebecca L. Morrison
U.S. Census Bureau
301.763.7595
Rebecca.L.Morrison@census.gov