Neuendorf

Questionnaire Construction

1.   Types of Questionnaire Questions

OPTIONS:

A.   <u>The closed-ended question</u>: a type of direct question that greatly narrows the response possibilities. Example: "Do you agree or disagree that Mayor White should be impeached?" (implied YES/NO) or "On a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being not at all and 10 being completely, how satisfied are you with your new car?"

B.   <u>The yes/no question</u>: a specific type of closed-ended question that asks the respondent to reply only "yes" or "no," or perhaps "don't know." Example: "Do you think there are too few campus police?" or "Do you own a VCR?"

C.   <u>The open-ended question</u>: asks for a general response with much freedom being given the respondent. Example: "Tell me about your views on crime on campus." or "What is the main reason you took this class?"

D.   <u>The paraphrase question</u>: an interviewer repeats the respondent's last answer in his/her own words. This is usually done to get the respondent to expand further on their response to an open-ended question. Example: "You are saying that we have too many campus police, then?"

E.   <u>The nondirective probe question</u>: an interviewer attempts to follow up on vague or partial responses, to get the respondent to explain in more detail. It is "nondirective" in that the respondent can go in any direction. Example: "Tell me more." "Run that by me again." "Go on."

DON'TS:

F.   <u>The leading question</u>: a question that strongly encourages a specific type of response. It biases results, and often causes the respondent to be defensive. Example: "Most people agree there is not enough police protection on campus, how about you?" or "You don't believe that people should be arrested for marijuana use, do you?"

G.   <u>The double-barreled question</u>: asks more than one thing, making the results too "fuzzy" to be meaningful. Questions may even be triple-barreled, etc. Example: "How often do you drink beer or wine with dinner?" "Do you approve of the President's policies on economics and defense?" "Are the visual aids large enough and easy to read?"

H.   <u>The loaded question</u>: a question that not only strongly encourages a specific type of

response, but also has strong emotional overtones. Even more objectionable than the leading question in that it is more personal. It puts the respondent in a catch-22 situation. Example: "When was the last time you drank alcohol excessively before driving?" The most famous example: "Do you still beat your wife?"

2. Response scales/categories--four guidelines:

    A.   Achieve as high a level of measurement as possible without compromising validity.

    B.   Achieve as high a level of precision as possible without compromising validity (e.g., age measured in days is more precise than age measured in years, but very probably not as valid)

    e.g., A "0 to 100" scale is more precise than a "1 to 5" scale

    C.   Categories (reflecting attributes) should be exhaustive for any given variable--every respondent should be able to give an answer.

    D.   Categories should be mutually exclusive for any given variable--no respondent should have to give more than one answer (unless this is desired by the researcher).

    e.g., the following has problems with <u>all</u> of the above:

> What is your age? (CHECK ONE):
> ____0-10 YEARS
> ____10-20 YEARS
> ____20-40 YEARS
> ____40-60 YEARS

2. Question arrangement and ordering

    A.   Avoiding sensitization--early questions may affect or determine responses to later questions; essentially, a leading combination.

    e.g., "On a scale from 0 to 100. . . how violent is TV content?" followed later by "What is your biggest concern over TV content?" Generally, open-ended questions should precede related closed-ended questions.

    B.   Allow any personalization to build over the course of a questionnaire--offensive questions and certain demographics (relatively unchanging characteristics used to categorize persons) are viewed as personal, and should be placed late in the

questionnaire. It is best to build a kind of rapport with the respondent before broaching such subjects.

e.g., "How often have you had sexual intercourse during the past month?"
e.g., age, income, occupation are often considered personal.

C. Follow logic so as not to offend or confuse--use what we might call "face" logical flow. Have a number of other people read through the questionnaire carefully to avoid flaws. Remember that this applies notably to contingency questions, those with skips or other special routing (e.g., IF YES, GO TO QUESTION 32).

e.g., "Do you read a daily newspaper?" IF NO, followed by "How much education do you have?"

D. Use matrix questions when desired for expediency, but reverse word some questions to avoid response set--matrix questions all have the same response scale/categories.

e.g.:
For the following statements, use a 0-10 scale where 0=STRONGLY DISAGREE and 10=STRONGLY AGREE. You may use any number between 0 and 10.
1.   "I cry when watching something sad on TV."   ____
2.   "I'm always in the mood for a TV comedy."   ____
3.   "When I'm sad, I like to watch a happy movie
        or TV show to make me feel better."   ____
4.   "When I'm depressed, I like to wallow in my
        sadness by watching something sad."   ____
(etc.)

3. Instructions--either to the respondent directly in a self-administered questionnaire, or to an interviewer in a telephone or in-person interview situation.

A. Give no warning--do not over-explain the questionnaire that follows, and certainly never state the hypothesis (e.g., "We're doing a study to find out if depression leads individuals to seek unhappy entertainment content."). Over-explanation can be a kind of sensitization bias. Using phrases such as "we want your own opinions" and "there's no one right answer" can sometimes help.

B. Respondent instructions for self-administered questionnaires--always tell the respondent exactly what to do. If you want them to check one response, indicate CHECK ONE RESPONSE. If you are allowing them to indicate all answers that apply, say CIRCLE

ALL THAT APPLY. And so forth. . .

C.   Interviewer instructions--One model that seems to work well for interviews is to put all words to be read by the interviewer in upper and lower case, and all special instructions to the interviewer (including contingency skip instructions) that are <u>not</u> to be read aloud in ALL CAPS.

e.g.:

1.   Do you read a daily newspaper? (CIRCLE ONE NUMBER)
1 YES
2 NO--IF NO, SKIP TO 17.

2.   Do you read either the <u>Detroit News</u> or the <u>Detroit Free Press</u>?
(CIRCLE ONE)
1 YES
2 NO--IF NO, SKIP TO 17.
3 DK (DON'T KNOW)

3.   Which do you read more often, the <u>Detroit News</u> or the <u>Detroit Free Press</u>? (CIRCLE ONE)
1 NEWS
2 FREE PRESS
3 DK

4.   Coding
Coding is defined as the assignment of numerical values to responses, including nominal categories and open-ended responses. A <u>pre-coded</u> questionnaire has the numbers already specified whenever possible (as in the example directly above).