

Survey Writing: Tips and Examples

The best way to get the knack for writing good survey questions is to just try it! And then try answering the questions yourself, or ask a friend to respond. See if the questions:

(1) give you the information you were looking for, and (2) are so clear that they won't be misunderstood.

Having a specific goal in mind will guide your survey questions. What are you most curious about? Stay focused on your purpose! Here are some more tips:

- KISS: Keep it short and simple!
- Use clear, direct language.
- Decide what question format will give you the best information: yes or no answers, multiple choice, or a ranking or rating response, such as strongly agree, somewhat agree, don't know, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree.
- Make the first few questions interesting, and pretty easy. You don't want people to give up before getting started!
- Include all relevant choices in the list of possible answers and always include "don't know" as an answer choice.
- Avoid emotional words or phrasing that gives away an answer you might want. Be neutral. People often want to please the person asking the questions by giving her the answer they think she wants!
- At the end of the survey, ask basic information about age and gender. Keep the age groups simple: under 25, 25–50, over 50. Professional pollsters get much nosier than this, but Ambassadors don't need to!

Questions that can be improved	These questions will get you more information
1) Do you recycle cans and bottles?	1) In the past month, what materials have you recycled? (check all that apply) <input type="checkbox"/> bottles <input type="checkbox"/> cans <input type="checkbox"/> paper <input type="checkbox"/> plastic <input type="checkbox"/> other <input type="checkbox"/> none
2) Is global warming a serious problem?	2) Will global warming have a serious impact on the world in your lifetime? <input type="checkbox"/> very likely <input type="checkbox"/> somewhat likely <input type="checkbox"/> don't know <input type="checkbox"/> somewhat unlikely <input type="checkbox"/> very unlikely
3) Can poisons in the environment harm children?	3) Rank the following environmental health threats to children in order, with 1 being the most serious. ___ pesticides in food supply ___ contamination in water ___ poor air quality ___ lead poisoning ___ other (please specify) _____