

SAMPLE SURVEYS

Unit 2: Producing Data



To close out the unit on Producing Data, we briefly discuss some common issues with conducting surveys.

Sample surveys are specific types of observational studies in which individuals report variable values themselves, often by giving their opinion.

Surveys are commonly conducted in person, by mail or internet, or via telephone.

We have already mentioned – in the section on sampling – the problem with non-response in surveys.

Even if we manage to select a representative sample, we must try to increase the response rate to obtain an actual sample that is as close to our selected sample as possible.

Even with the issue of non-response, well designed and conducted surveys can help avoid the bias that is commonly a problem with flawed sampling plans such as convenience or volunteer samples.

Survey design also plays a key role in the success of a sample survey. And again, entire courses are taught which deal with designing and conducting surveys.

Let's talk about a few key issues of designing the survey itself.

Open vs. Closed Questions

What is your favorite color?

Which of these colors do you prefer?

Red

Orange

Yellow

Green

Blue

Purple

Open questions allow unlimited responses (although they may be limited by the space allowed).

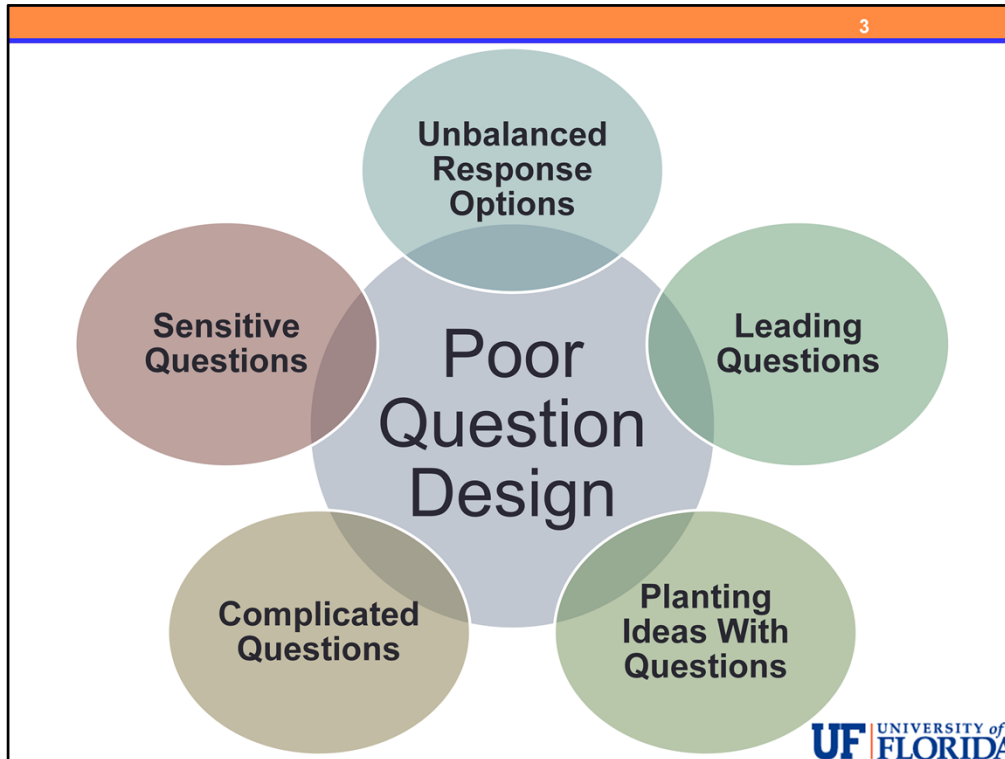
Closed questions provide only certain responses for the subject to select. Sometimes there will be an “other” with the space to explain if the researcher feels this is necessary – which results in a combination question with some of the advantages and disadvantages of both types.

Open questions allow for freedom and spontaneity of answers and give the researcher opportunities to probe. These types of questions can be useful for investigating awareness or ideas.

However, they are more time consuming and demanding of the interviewer, the subject, and the data analyst.

Closed questions require little time to create, answer, and analyze. They make comparisons easy and allow for testing of rather specific hypotheses.


The disadvantages of closed questions are the loss of spontaneous response and loss of detail. We must take care in our wording of questions. Questions should not introduce bias.



When designing survey questions, it is very important to work carefully on the wording and format of questions.


Questions which plant ideas or are sensitive, complicated, or leading can undermine the studies results by causing bias in respondents answers that cannot be corrected.

Another issue can be unbalanced response options in the rating categories where there is no neutral response. Besides the bias introduced automatically by such a question, this can also result in non-response on the question if subjects feel there is no answer that corresponds to their opinion.



SAMPLE SURVEYS

Unit 2: Producing Data



Here we have briefly discussed some of the main issues with survey design. If you plan to conduct surveys in the future, you will likely learn much more about these ideas in the coming years.