Questionnaires

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Learning objectives

In this lecture, students will be introduced to:

- the types of questionnaires
- the types of questions that can be used in a questionnaire close-ended and open-ended)
- the format of a questionnaire
- The lay out of a questionnaire
- the types of questions to be avoided
- how to validate and pilot the questionnaire
- Strength and weaknesses of the questionnaire

Introduction

One of the most common methods of data collection in second language (L2) research is to use *questionnaires* of various kinds. The popularity of questionnaires is due to the fact that they are easy to construct, extremely versatile, and uniquely capable of gathering alarge amount of information quickly in a form that is readily processable (Dornyei, 2003). The field of questionnaire design is very vast. This course provides an introduction to its key elements.
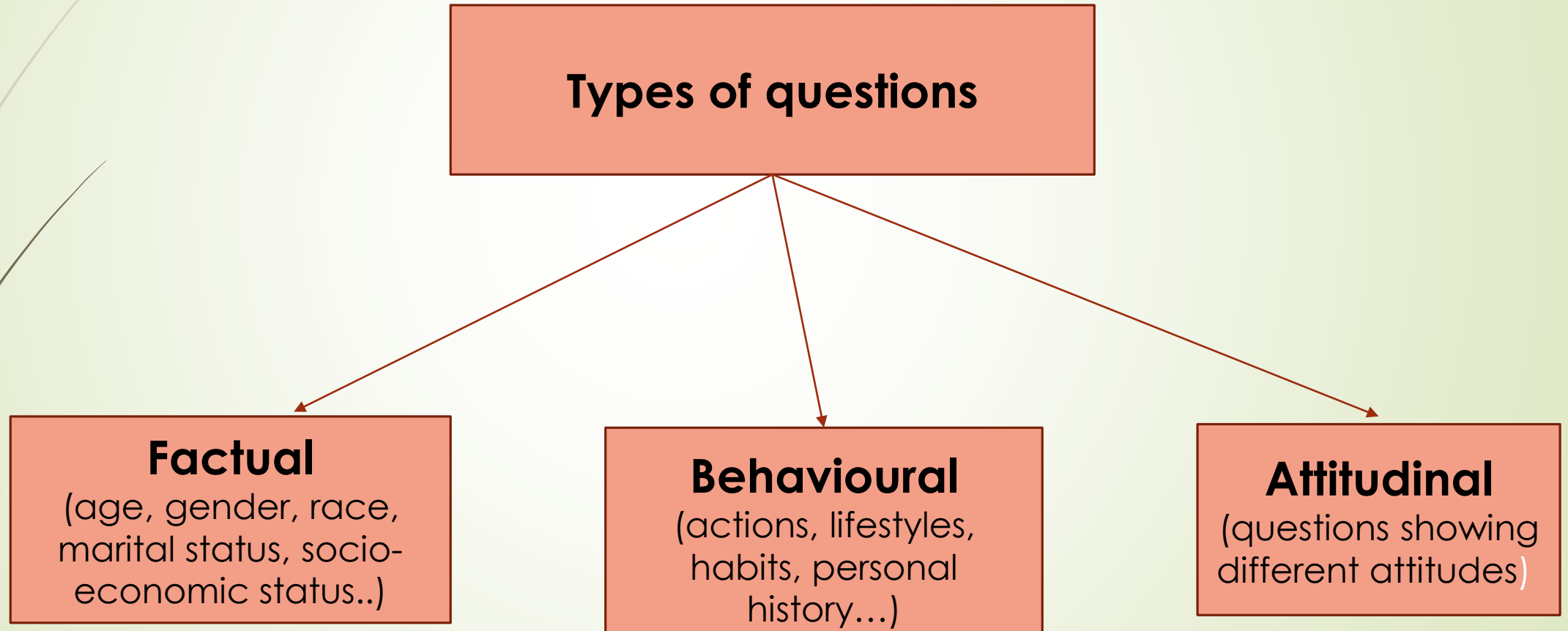
Definition

Questionnaires are any written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting from among existing answers. ''

questionnaires **are often referred to under different**

'batteries, ' 'checklists, ' 'scales, ' 'surveys, ' 'schedules, ' 'studies, 'profiles, ' 'indexes/indicators, ' or even simply 'sheets' (Aiken, 1997).

Types of questions to be yielded by questionnaires

Types of questions

Factual
(age, gender, race, marital status, socio-economic status..)

Behavioural
(actions, lifestyles, habits, personal history…)

Attitudinal
(questions showing different attitudes)

Types of questionnaires

The researcher can select several types of questionnaires, from highly structures to unstructured. They are often referred to as

- **Closed-ended questionnaires (structured).** This type of questionnaire is used to generate statistics in quantitative research and can be scanned straight forward into computer for ease of analysis.

- **Open-ended questionnaires (unstructured).** This type is used in qualitative research. The questionnaire does not contain boxes to tick but instead leaves a blank section to write in an answer. . As there are no standard answers to these questions, data analysis is more complex.

- **Combination of closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires (semi-structured).** Many questionnaires begin with closed questions, with boxes to tick or scales to rank, and end with open questions for more detail response

Type of questions

I. close-ended questions

Close-ended questions require pre-defined answers or a choice from options.

➡ **1. Dichotomous questions: Yes/no, true/false**
Dichotomous questions are a type of survey questions that provides two options, while generally it is true that the more response options an item contains, the more accurate evaluation it can yield. There might be cases when only a polarized yes-no or true-falso decision can be reliable.

2. Multiple choice: It is familiar because of its popularity.
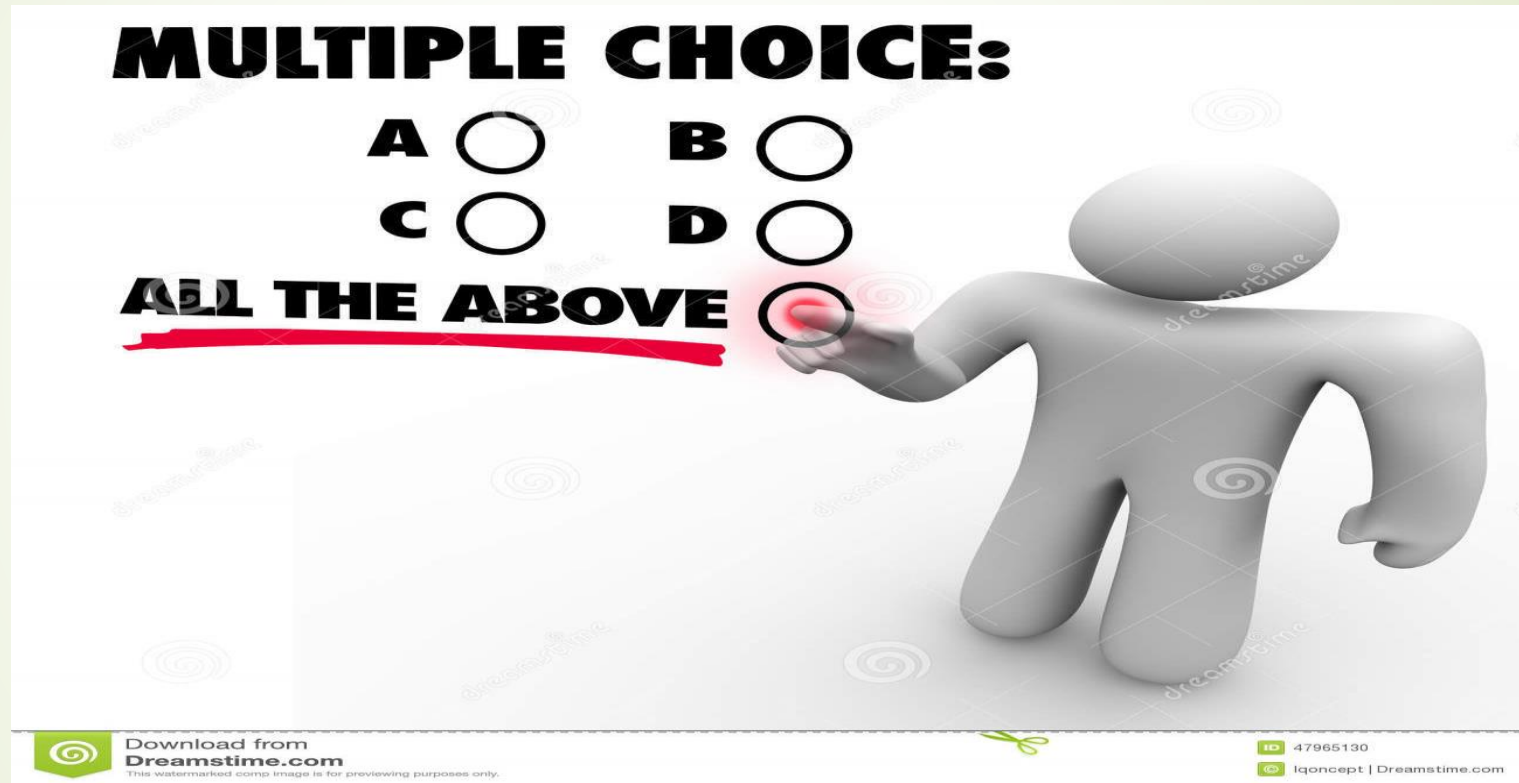
3. Semantic differential scales: in this technique, respondents are asked to by marking with a tick or an 'X' between two bipolate adjectives at the extreme
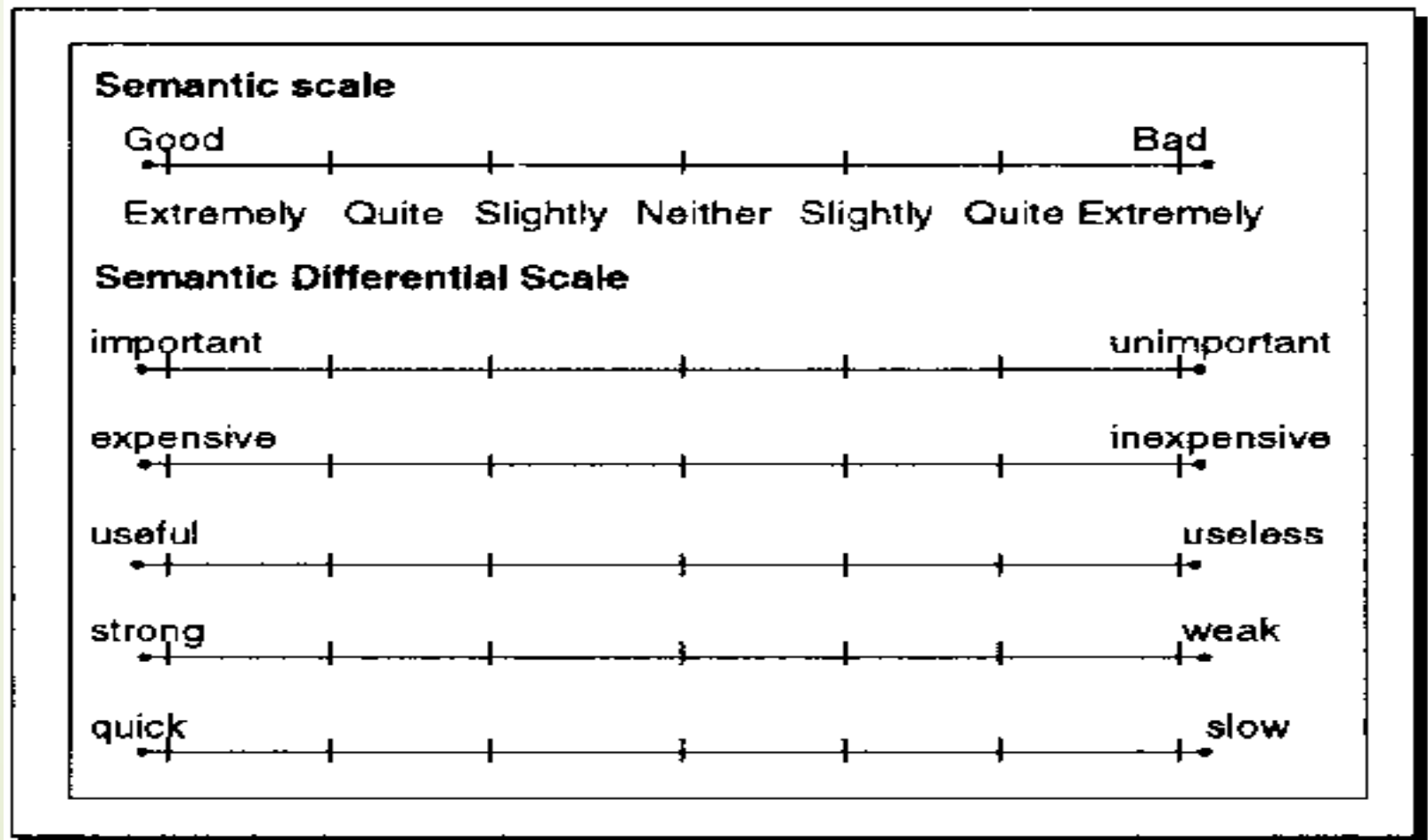
For each pair of adjective, place a cross between to express the extent to which the adjective descibes someone.

Clean	:	:	:	:	:	dirty
Honest	:	:	:	:	:	dishonest
Kind	:	:	:	:	:	cruel
Fair	:	:	:	:	:	biassed
Strong	:	:	:	:	:	weak
Energetic	:	:	:	:	:	lazy
Reliable	:	:	:	:	:	unreliable

4.Likert scales: the most famous type of closed ended items is the 'Likert scale which consists of a characteristics and the respondents are asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with it by ticking or circling. For example:

A Likert scale was developed in 1932 by Rensis Likert, a psychologist, to better understand the feelings of respondents given a balanced set of choices.

It allows researchers to gain insights on perceptions, behaviors, feelings and more by asking respondents to self-report their reactions based on how they feel using the Likert scale.

Please select the number below that best represents how you feel about your recent online software purchase for each statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. The software I wanted was easy to find					
2. The checkout process was easy					
3. The software solved my needs					
4. I am happy with my purchase					

5* How would you rate the ease of use for each of the following items based on your experience with Moodle?

	Very easy to use	Easy to use	Somewhat difficult to use	Difficult to use
Formatting Your Course	○	⊙	○	○
Laying out Your Course	○	○	⊙	○
Number of Clicks to Access Needed Content	○	○	○	⊙
Adding Content	○	⊙	○	○
Ability to Add/Change Themes/Appearance	⊙	○	○	○
Overall Navigation of Moodle	○	○	⊙	○

5.Rank order items

The rank order question is akin to the multiple choice question, but it asks respondents to identify priorities.

For example: please indicate your priorities by placing numbers in the boxes to indicate your views, 1= the highest priority; 2= the second highest priority and so on (see the examples in Cohen et.al., 2007:325)

Please rank the following in order of importance from 1 to 4 where 1 is most important to you and 4 is least important to you

Speed of Service ☐

Ease of Parking ☐

Cleanliness ☐

Friendliness of Staff ☐

6. Rating scales: They provide a range of responses to a given question or statement.

Numerical scales give so many marks out of so many, that is assigning one of several numbers (which corresponds to a series of ordered categories).

	Please rate your most recent restaurant experience in the following areas				
	Poor 1	2	3	4	Excellent 5
Dining Room Cleanliness	○	○	○	○	○
Courtesy of Wait Staff	○	○	○	○	○
Speed of Meal delivery	○	○	○	○	○
Quality of meal	○	○	○	○	○

Open-ended questions: open-ended questions include items where the actual question is not followed by response options.
This kind of questions works well if they are not completely open but contain certain guidance.

Rules about item wording

The format of your questions will affect the anwers; keep them short and understandable.

- Use short and simple items
- Use simple language
- Avoid ambiguous and loaded words and sentences.
- Avoid negative constructions
- Avoid double-barreled questions
- Avoid items that are likely to be answered in the same way by eveybody.
- In a rating scale, better to include both positively and negatively word items

                                                    (DÖrnyei, 2003)

- Avoid jargon (words not usually used)
- Avoid leading questions (containing judgment)
- Avoid double negatives

The question type and also the lay out of the questions is of a great importance.

The main parts of a questionnaire

Title: like any other piece of writing, a questionnaire should have a title to identify the domain of the investigation.

General introduction: 'the opening greeting' usually describes the purpose of the study. The important functions of this section involve emphasizing that there are no right or wrong answers and saying 'thank you

Specific instructions: these explain and demonstrate how respondents should go about answering the questions.

Questionnaire items

Questionnaire items: These constitute the main body of the questionnaire. They need to be very clearly separated from the instructions. This is where different typefaces and font styles are useful.

Additional information: at the end of the questionnaire, we may add information such as contact name.
Final 'thank you.

Grouping and ordering items

Item sequence is a very significant factor.
The items should seem as **a series of logically organized** sequences, hence, we need to follow some organizing principles.

The item format: items of the same type need to be **clustered together into well-marked sub-sections**, seperated from each other by a **clear instruction to highlight the fo**rmat change for the respondent.

Follow up

- **The initial part of the questionnaire**, as any other piece of writing is very imporatnt as it sets the tone.

- **The first opening questions** need to be easy and intersting.

- **Factual questions** come next

- **Real open questions that require substantial and creative writing at the end**

Lay out and length of the questionnaire

Layout: It is an important aspect. Three points in particular are worth bearing in mind.

1. **Booklet format**

2. **Appropriate density:** it refers to how much we put on a page

3. **Items sequence:** we need to decide on the **order** of items.

The **opening questions need to be interesting,** relatively **simple** and at the same time **focusing on important aspects**.

Using closed-ended at beginning and open-ended at the end.
Mixing up the scales creates a sense of variety and prevents respondents from repeating previous answers.
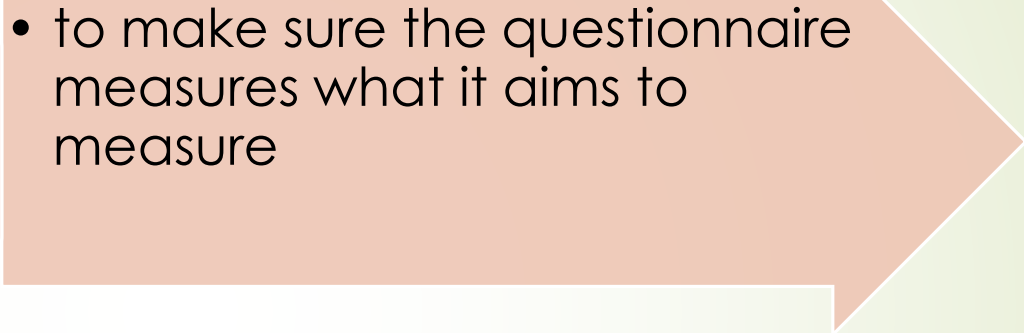
Length: Most researcher agree that anything that is more than 4-6 pages long and requires over half an hour to complete may be considered too much.

Before the administration of the questionnaire, the following steps are compulsory.
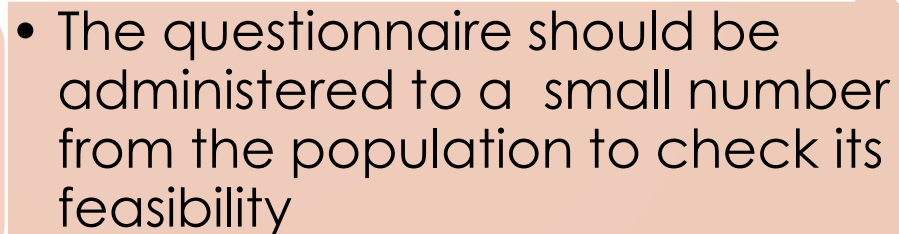
Validation ot the questionnaire
- to make sure the questionnaire measures what it aims to measure

Piloting of the questionnaire
- The questionnaire should be administered to a small number from the population to check its feasibility

To validate the questionnaire, the following questions are addressed.

Is the questionaire measuring what it intended to measure?
Does it represent the content?
Is it appropriate for the sample/ population?
Is it comprehensive enough to collect all the information
Is it comprehensive enough to collect all the information needeed to address the purpose of the study?
Does it look like a questionnaire?

How can the questionnaire be validated?

Face validity
- This can be checked by experts who evaluate whether the questionnaire effectively capture the topic under investigation

Internal consistency
- This can be checked through a standard test called Conbrach's Alpha (CA) which ranges from 0 to 1.0.
- The values should be at least 0.70 or higher.

Ways of administering the questionnaire

- Selt- administered
- By mail
- One-to one administartion
- Group administration

Strength and weaknesses of questionnaires

Strenghts

- Collect large amounts of data about people's attitudes and perceptions.
- Supply standardized answers
- practical
- Economical
- Easier to be administer
- Easy analysis and visualization…

Weaknesses

- People may not tell the truth/ the researcher has no opportunity to check the truthfulness
- Limited responses
- Poor response rate
- Poorly completed answers
- Unreliability
- Illegibility …

References

- Descombe, M. (2003). The good research guide for small-scale social research projects, 2nd edn. Maidenhead: Open University.

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- DÖrnyei, Z. (2003). Questionnaires in second language research: Construction, administration and processing. London: Lawrance Erlbaun Associate Publishers.

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Appendices
Checklist for planning a questionnaire

Checklist for planning a questionnaire survey

When undertaking a questionnaire survey you should feel confident about answering 'yes' to the following questions: ✔

1   Has time been scheduled for:
   - The planning stage itself?
   - The design of an initial draft?
   - The production of an initial draft?
   - The piloting of this initial draft?
   - The design of a subsequent draft?
   - The production of the subsequent draft?
   - Packing, posting and distribution of the final version?
   - Turnaround time: time for respondents to complete and return the questionnaire?
   - Time to pursue non-respondents; the 'follow-up' to boost response rates?
   - The collection and checking of questionnaires?
   - Data preparation for computer analysis (if applicable)?
   - The analysis of the results?

2   Have resources been allocated for:
   - All the costs involved in production and distribution of the questionnaire?

3   Has access been granted from:
   - Appropriate authorities?
   - Respondents (if appropriate)?

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Checklist for the production of a questionnaire (Descombe 2003)

Checklist for the production of a questionnaire

When producing a questionnaire for research you should feel confident about answering 'yes' to the following questions: ✔

1. Has the questionnaire been piloted?
2. Is the layout clear?
3. Has the questionnaire got a suitable cover page?
4. Is there an explanation of the purpose of the questionnaire?
5. Is there a return address on the questionnaire?
6. Have thanks been expressed to the respondents?
7. Are there assurances about confidentiality of information or anonymity?
8. Have serial numbers been given to the questionnaires?
9. Are there clear and explicit instructions on how the questions are to be completed?
10. Have the questions been checked to avoid any duplication?
11. Are the questions clear and unambiguous?
12. Are the essential questions included?
13. Are the non-essential questions excluded?
14. Are the questions in the right order?
15. Has the questionnaire been checked for spelling and typographical errors?

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Questions examples (Descombe, 2003)

Nine types of question that can be used in a questionnaire

1 A statement

Example:
What do you think about the UK's membership of the European Union?

_____
_____
_____

2 A list

Example:
Please list the issues you feel are most important in relation to the UK's membership of the European Union:

_____
_____
_____
_____

3 A 'yes/no' answer

Example:
Have you travelled from the UK to another European country in the past 12 months? Yes/No

4 Agree/disagree with a statement

Example:
Would you agree or disagree with the following statement?
European economic unity carries economic advantages which outweigh the political disadvantages. Agree/Disagree

5 Choose from a list of options

Example:
Which ONE of the following list of European countries do you feel has the strongest economy?

| Spain | UK | Belgium | Netherlands |
| Ireland | France | Germany | Italy |

6 Rank order

Example:
From the following list of European countries choose the THREE which you feel have the strongest economies and put them in rank order: 1 = strongest, 2 = second strongest, 3 = third strongest.

| Spain | UK | Belgium | Netherlands |
| Ireland | France | Germany | Italy |

7 Degree of agreement and disagreement: *the Likert Scale*

Example:
Membership of the European Union is a bad thing for the UK.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
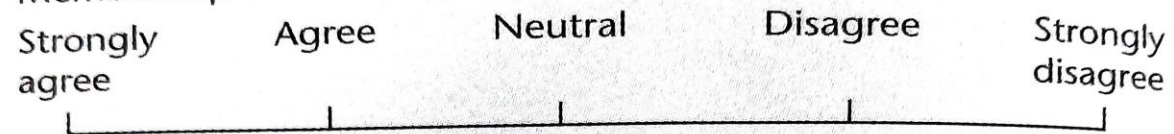
8 Rate items

Example:
How significant would you rate the following factors in affecting further European integration?

	Not significant						Very significant
political sovereignty	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
national identities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
past history	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
religious differences	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
language barriers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

9 Feelings about a topic: *the semantic differential*

Example:
European unity is:

Boring	1	2	3	4	5	Interesting
Unlikely	1	2	3	4	5	Likely
Risky	1	2	3	4	5	Safe
Important	1	2	3	4	5	Unimportant
Difficult	1	2	3	4	5	Easy