

Hints for writing better survey questions

1. Only ask for one piece of information per question:

- ✗ Did you import or export any material in the past 12 months?
- ✓ Did you import any material in the past 12 months?
- ✓ Did you export any material in the past 12 months?

2. Make questions as specific and concrete as possible:

- ✗ Do you think other people would enjoy the course?
- ✓ Have you recommended the course to other people?

3. Don't ask questions which require information or a level of skill which respondents may not have

- ✗ What is the percentage increase in your IT budget from 2007 to 2008?
- ✓ What is the increase in your IT budget from 2007 to 2008?: \$___

4. Don't ask questions which require an unreasonable recall period

- ✗ Please provide budget details for the past five years
- ✓ Please provide budget details for the current financial year

5. Ensure questions are answerable – avoid abstract questions and concepts

- ✗ What do you think of the mobility policy?
- ✓ What do you think about the policy to encourage staff to change their geographic location approximately every five years?

6. Determine the level of precision needed from respondents – particularly concerning time frames

- ✗ Do you regularly consult the company intranet?
- ✓ On an average working day, how often do you consult the company intranet?

7. Avoid the use of undefined terms, e.g. "year", "technology", "management"

- ✗ What type of technology is used for managing your website?
- ✓ What type of content management system is used for managing your website?

«The owl can see that which others cannot; which is the essence of true wisdom» (ancient lore)

8. Be consistent in the use of words and terminology

- ✗ Use three terms interchangeably "human resources", "personnel" and "staff" policies
- ✓ Use only one term – e.g. "human resources" policy

9. Avoid biased, loaded or leading language in questions

- ✗ Do you still have confidence in your top management?
- ✓ How would you rate your level of confidence in your top management?

- ✗ How good was your experience in working with partners?
- ✓ How would you assess your experience in working with partners?

- ✗ Most organizations review management plans every year. What do you believe is the correct time period?
- ✓ What do you believe is the correct time period for reviewing management plans?

10. Ensure that response options match the question

- ✗ How would you rate your company's website?
●Not important ●Little important ●Important ●Very Important
- ✓ How would you rate your company's website?
●Terrible ●Poor ●Good ●Excellent

11. Ensure that response options are not overlapping

- ✗ What assets does your organisation hold?
Land Property Equipment Buildings Computers
- ✓ What assets does your organisation hold?
Land Buildings Equipment (not computers) Computers

12. Ensure that response options are exhaustive

- ✗ How do you learn about news in your organisation?
Intranet Corporate website Newsletter Events
- ✓ How do you learn about news in your organisation?
Intranet Corporate website Newsletter Events Colleagues
Direct manager Other (please specify_____)

Owl Research & Evaluation supports organisations in analysing, assessing and evaluating activities in the communications, training/events and development fields. Contact Glenn O'Neil, Owl RE for further information: 41 (0) 76 325 6213, oneil@owlre.com

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