

Question Bank guidance

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About this guide

This guidance includes tips on designing questions and answers for surveys and providing a wide range of question examples. You can use the questions as they are or adapt them for a specific purpose - although, in the case of the demographic question categories, you must use the standard wording from the Healthwatch taxonomy to allow data to be aggregated and compared.

It's not an exhaustive list but rather an aid to getting started with a new questionnaire. There is a wide range of questions to choose from, but it is essential to remember to balance the need for insight with demands on a respondent and the cost of the research.

You should carefully think about the purpose of each question and how it will contribute to actionable insight. You shouldn't include questions without a specific purpose. It can be tempting to throw in a few extra questions to squeeze maximum value out of a project - but this can result in a questionnaire that is too broad in its reach and too time-consuming for respondents, impacting the quality of answers and the response rate. Under data protection legislation, you must only collect relevant data ("data minimisation").

It's also crucial to consider which other characteristics about a person, their life, health, or environment can impact the topic you are exploring. Indeed, it's essential to include at least basic demographics i.e. age, gender and ethnicity to understand the experience of different groups.

When using the Question Bank, you may want to adapt the language to a specific audience or to ensure a consistent tone throughout.

Complementing it are guides on [Using Demographic Data](#), [How to develop a survey](#), [Bias](#), [Taxonomy](#) and [How to ask demographic Questions](#).

Key tips on writing questions

Question design can make or break a project. It's the difference between delivering valuable and actionable insight that is fair, unbiased and accurate versus insight that is misleading, biased and delivers the wrong recommendations entirely.

Bias is your enemy, and it's very easy to introduce bias into a survey inadvertently. Biased questions or responses options can adversely influence the answer given by the respondent - resulting in a false/inaccurate response.

To minimise bias, think about these factors when writing your survey questions:

Absolute: The absolute question usually only has the option of a "yes" or "no" answer. It also commonly includes words such as "all", "always", "ever", and "every". These questions can back respondents into a corner and make them uncomfortable - especially if their answers could be judged negatively. E.g., Do you use hand sanitiser every time you enter the practice? Yes/no.... would be better phrased "How often do you use hand sanitiser when you enter the practice?" - "always", "mostly", "occasionally", "never".

Appropriate: Think about the target audience. For example, questions on sexual health or habits will be inappropriate to respondents under a certain age.



Clear: Can a term used in a question mean different things to different respondents or be open to interpretation? Consider adding further information to a question to ensure clarity.

Compound (double-barrelled): Only ask about one measure in a question. Often questions are written in a way that tries to capture two different elements. An example of a compound question would be, "How satisfied were you with the attitude of the doctors and admin staff?" Doctors may have had a terrible attitude, the opposite being true of admin staff.

Concise: Is there a simpler way to ask the question using fewer words or simpler words (avoid sounding officious)?

Consistent scales: Every different scale requires a shift in evaluative construct. Use consistent response scales (agree/disagree with statements) to reduce mental effort.

Effort: Respondents shouldn't have to do mental gymnastics or trawl through their memory banks to come up with an answer.

Demographics: Demographics or other sensitive questions should ideally be towards the end of the survey to reduce survey drop-out.

Duplication: Some questions can seem different at first glance, but they address the same underlying theme. Don't ask three questions where one will do.

Jargon /acronyms: Avoid jargon, but if you must use it, you must provide an explanation up-front. Also, consider providing examples in responses.

Loaded: This means making assumptions about the respondent, e.g., "what is your favourite alcoholic drink?" assuming the person drinks alcohol. This would only be ok if you had established that fact in the sample or a previous question. It's tempting to add a response option to address this. For example, "I don't drink alcohol", but that is not what you asked and asking this question couldn't potentially offend someone who belongs to a religion that doesn't drink alcohol.

Logical Flow: You should avoid jumping around to different topics where possible. Instead, ask related questions together in sections. Also, avoid moving forwards and backwards in time frames. For example, if asking about a patient's experience of going into a medical setting and receiving treatment, the questions should follow the order in which the experiences unfolded in the patient journey.

Non-leading: A leading question leads respondents to give the "correct" answer or "preferred" answer. You can do this unintentionally when using a survey to try and back up a hypothesis or pre-conceived conclusion. For example, your question, "how disappointed were you when...", makes assumptions that the person is disappointed and steers their thinking to a negative scale.

Reasonable: is it appropriate to ask a patient what the medical staff thought about something, or about decisions that were made which they were not party to, or about something they haven't experienced? For example, "How does your medical practice compare to other practices in the area?" or "What does your GP think about....?"

Relevant: Skip logic can help avoid asking respondents questions that are not relevant to them, but if you can't use skip logic, at least consider using "not applicable".

Tested: Often, questions can make sense to you but not others. It's good practice to pilot your survey questions before going live.

Question Types

Open-ended questions explore “how”, “why”, “where”, “what” - without providing pre-set answers - the answers are written or spoken in the respondents’ own words. For example, in an online survey, a free-text box would be provided so that the respondent can type in the answer. This is known as qualitative data.

Closed questions deliver quantitative answers and are generally quicker to analyse, especially with high volumes of respondents. As you are providing a range of pre-set answers, as mentioned above, it’s vital that the question and answer options do not introduce bias and avoid the many common pitfalls. Closed questions provide a list of two or more responses to choose from:

- **Multiple selection [MS]** means the respondent can choose one or more responses from the options available, for example, “Do you have any of these long-term conditions? Tick all that apply.”
- **Single selection [SS]** means the respondent can only select one response from the options available, for example, “Which age range do you belong to?”. The responses to single choice questions could be a list of categories or statements, a scale or numeric rating.

The use of **open or closed questions** depends on your survey objectives, but for surveys, it’s generally good practice to make most questions **closed**, as they require less mental effort from the respondent and are easier to analyse. However, if you wish to include some **open-ended** questions, consider whether you have the time to analyse the potentially long, wordy responses. Open-ended questions can provide some **valuable depth**, especially when there are gaps in your knowledge about the topic, but make sure the question is focussed and clear in its intention. If it’s too broad (left, in example A), can it be broken down into more specific points with some direction (right, in example A)?

Example A: Open-ended question

Tell about your experience of visiting the medical practice.	<p><i>Tell us about your experience of getting a face-to-face appointment to see your GP (for example, getting through on the phone, attitude of reception staff, waiting for an appointment etc.).</i></p> <p><i>Tell about your experience of checking in when you arrived at the medical practice (for example, queuing, staff attitude, etc.)</i></p> <p><i>Tell about your experience with the GP (for example, how much time you were given, attitude/empathy of the GP, were your concerns addressed)</i></p>
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Screening questions are at the start of a questionnaire. They facilitate the filtering out of respondents who are not in the target audience, and there can be one or several depending on the level of selection criteria. Imagine you are carrying out a piece of research on GP patients who are over 65 and frequent visitors to the GP:

Example B: Screening questions

Are you?	<p><i>Under 65 [close survey]</i></p> <p><i>65 or over [continue]</i></p>
How many times did you visit your GP in the last year?	<p><i>None</i></p> <p><i>1-2 times [close survey]</i></p> <p><i>3-4 times [close survey]</i></p> <p><i>5-6 times [close survey]</i></p>

More than 6 times [continue]
Don't know [close survey]

Response options

Responses can come in various forms - and they determine what your data looks like.

- **Categorical (nominal)**: a list of possible answers (categories), e.g., "how would you describe your ethnicity? Asian, Black, White etc."
- **Dichotomous** questions have only two real responses, e.g., true/false or yes/no. Be careful not to force a response with only two choices when the answer could be more nuanced ("yes - but it depends on")
- **Rating scales** are a way to provide feedback on an attribute, feature, or experience. They can be:
 - **ordinal**, where the responses are in any order relative to each other (e.g., very bad, quite bad etc.) - also known as a **Likert scale***
 - **interval** - where the order is meaningful, the 'distance' between each response is the same. For example, "on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means not at all satisfied and 10 means completely satisfied" or,
 - **ratio**, which is the same as interval, but you can have a zero option, e.g., "how many times did you visit your GP in the last year? None, 1-2 times, 3-4 times, 5-6 times, more often etc."

Response options should be:

- **Mutually exclusive**: the meaning/scope of each response should not overlap with another response (e.g., 1-2 weeks, 2-3 weeks, 3-4 weeks etc. includes two weeks in more than one response).
- **Exhaustive**: the response options should cover all (or at least the most frequent) reasonable responses that respondents could give. You can use "other - write/type in" to limit the number of responses on the questionnaire or try to capture some you may have missed in the design. A respondent shouldn't be left frustrated because none of the responses provided allows them to give their answer, which can lead to drop out.
- Only contain **one measure** within the response option (e.g., "I was happy with the care I received, but there was room for improvement", "I was happy with the care I received and there was no room for improvement" etc. contains "happiness with care" and "room for improvement" measures).
- Consider using "**none of the above or not applicable**" if the question may not apply to all respondents - but remember, you can use routing/skip logic in online surveys to guide respondents away from questions not relevant to them.
- It's good practice to include a "**prefer not to say**" response option so that respondents don't feel forced to disclose something sensitive about themselves.

You can use **Likert scales** for measuring experiences or opinions, where the options range from one extreme attitude to another. They can be **bipolar**, meaning balanced and including a neutral option, with usually 5, 7 or 9 points, or **unipolar**, which means they are one-sided and relate to the absence or presence of a measure.

Example C: Examples of unipolar and bipolar scales

<i>Unipolar (absence or presence)</i>	<i>Bipolar (neutral midpoint)</i>
<i>do not agree at all...completely agree no better... a lot better not at all likely... very likely not at all easy... very easy not at all helpful... very helpful</i>	<i>strongly disagree...strongly agree a lot worse... a lot better very unlikely... very likely very difficult...very easy very unhelpful... very helpful</i>

One way to avoid a wide range of different scales - which can be challenging for respondents and more time-consuming to complete, is to use a **bank of statements** covering different measures - using a **level of agreement scale**. This also makes it easier to chart many factors on one graph!

However, this also carries a **risk**. People tend to agree rather than disagree because human nature leads us to comply. This is called **acquiescence response bias**. So, you should consider the benefits of asking the level of agreement in a bank of statements against this risk. To avoid simply agreeing to everything, you can put statements in the mix that are more likely to elicit a disagree response.

Example D: Bank of statements

<i>To what level do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?</i>	Disagree completely	Disagree slightly	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree slightly	Agree completely	Unsure or don't know
My experience visiting [medical setting] was better than last time						
I prefer to talk to my GP over the phone rather than in person at the practice.						
The GP provided me with the right amount of information to make an informed decision.						

Skip logic/ routing

You can use skip logic to direct a respondent on the relevant route through the survey, depending on their answers - or even drop out of the survey at a certain stage because the remainder of the survey is not for them (e.g., not part of the target audience).

This ensures you don't ask respondents questions that are not relevant to them, and it's something to consider when designing questions and responses.

Different survey software may handle skip logic or routing differently. For example, Smart Survey only allows you to skip a page, not a question, so you must use a number of page breaks to do the routine you want.

Example E: Skip logic

Q1 Did you...?	a) Yes, I have [skip to Q2] b) No, I haven't [skip to Q3] c) Don't know/ can't recall [skip to Q4]
Q2 You previously said that <u>you have</u> ...Which, if any, of the following BEST describes your reason(s) for this? (Tick all that apply)	skip to Q4 - Q3 is not relevant

<p>Q3. You previously said that <u>you haven't</u>...Which, if any, of the following BEST describes your reason(s) for this? (Tick all that apply)</p>	<p>skip logic isn't needed here</p>
<p>Q4 How often...</p>	<p>this question is for everyone</p>