



How to Plan Good Projects

How to Make Up Good Questions

Asking people questions is a good way to find out what people believe, feel, prefer or think. It is very important to ask questions that are *clear* and *fair*.

Clear questions are easy to understand. Clear questions mean the same thing to everyone, even if different people give different answers. To see if the questions you make up are clear, ask some one else to put the questions in different words. If the way they say your questions mean the same, then they are clear.

The only right answer in the “ask people” method is what the people who answer feel is true for them. A fair question does not suggest that one answer is better than another. People should not be able to tell how you feel about the question from the words you use. Fair questions are worded so that people can easily give the answer that is true for them.

Make every question count. Decide what you need to ask in order to answer your research question. Some questions are good, but they do not help answer your research question.



Types of Questions

There are two kinds of questions.

- **Multiple choice** - questions where people have to pick the answer from a set you give them. You can ask people to “pick one,” say “yes” or “no.”
- **Open ended** - questions where people can make their answer as long as they want and say anything.

Which one is best depends on your research question. Multiple choice is good for answering “who,” “what,” “when,” “where” and “how many.” For example, pretend you want to know how many people with disabilities can take vacations. You can ask people if they went away on a vacation last year. You can count up the number of ‘yes’ and ‘no’ answers.



Open ended questions are good for answering “why” and “how” questions. They are also best if you want to ask people how they feel about their experiences and what they think. Open ended questions can also be used to find out more, or to get a better understanding of why people think or feel the way they do.

Good multiple choice questions are harder to make up than open ended questions. But answers from multiple choice are easier and faster to organize and make sense of than open ended questions. Good open ended questions give you lots of information. But it takes a lot of time to organize the answers and see a pattern.

Methods used to ask people

There are 3 methods used to ask people questions:

- fill out a form (or survey)
- a one-to-one talk (or interview)
- a group discussion (or focus group).



Surveys: You can send survey forms to people in the mail. Or you can ask people to fill out the form in a room with you. Each person fills out the form alone. Most survey forms are made up of multiple choice, like 'yes-no' or 'pick one' questions, and ratings. Sometimes there are also some open ended questions.

Survey forms let you ask a lot of people many questions in a little time. But people can not ask you for help if they do not understand your questions. A lot of people do not fill in surveys. If the people who fill in the form think or feel different from those who throw it away, then you will not get a true answer from a mail survey.



Interviews: An interview lets you learn more about people's experiences or feelings. You can clear up questions or answers that are hard to understand. You can ask multiple choice or open ended questions in an interview. Both phone interviews and face-to-face interviews take more time than a written survey. You must be able to write very fast if you ask open ended questions.

Focus groups: In an interview, each person answers the questions alone. In a group discussion, what people say can relate to what others said. This is good if you want to come up with a lot of ideas. What one person says may make you think of something else to add to the discussion.

Only open ended questions are used with a focus group. It is OK to tape record the discussion if every one agrees.



Each way to ask people questions has good and bad points.

Which you pick depends on the research question and your situation.

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