

How a questionnaire survey is designed and delivered in the field makes a huge difference to its success. Follow these ideas to not only ensure that your questionnaire will create valid and reliable data, but also to get a sample size that is worthy of analysing.

Styles of questions

The table below lists some of the most common styles of questions that are used in questionnaire surveys.

Type	Description	Example	Advantages of use	Disadvantages of use
Binary	Respondents make one choice between two options.	“Do you own a car?” (Yes/No)	The question is quick to answer and the results are very easy to analyse.	It may be difficult for respondents to answer if the truth is more nuanced.
Score	Respondents give a score based on their opinion.	“On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is the least attractive and 5 is the most attractive, how would you score the appearance of...?”	This uses an easy to interpret scale which can be adjusted to suit the needs of the analysis. For example, the interviewer might choose to have a 1 to 3, 1 to 5 or a 1 to 10 scale.	It is not always easy for respondents to differentiate between values that sit between either extreme of score. The result is that they frequently end up choosing the middle value.
Option	Respondents make one choice from a range of options.	“Which of the following options best describes your reason for visiting the town today...?”	Limiting the number of possible ways that a respondent can answer to a few options makes the analysis of what is otherwise an open question much easier.	A pilot study would be needed to ensure that all the possible ways in which someone could answer are covered.
Likert	Respondents say to what extent they agree or disagree with a statement.	“Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree or have no opinion about the following statement...?”	This scale is easy for respondents to understand and gauges their degree of agreement without allowing for too many options.	Respondents may not have enough background knowledge to be able to give an opinion about an issue, or they may agree with one part of a statement but disagree with another part.
Rank	Respondents rank options according to a stated criteria.	“Based on your opinion, rank the following features of a national park from most to least important for visitors.”	This can be a useful structure if the questionnaire is about a set of proposals, which the respondent can then choose from.	Analysing ranked data can be a little tricky. Just because a feature is ranked at the top does not mean the respondents are actually in favour of it.
Open	Respondents can answer in any way they choose.	“What do you feel could be done to improve pedestrian safety in this area?”	This allows the respondent the freedom to discuss an idea or issue, which may reveal new points that the interviewer had not thought of.	It might be difficult to analyse data from these questions, especially if the interviewer is analysing a large sample.

A good questionnaire will use styles of questions that best suit the type of data that the geographer wishes to use in their analysis. Sometimes it may be possible to ask a very similar question but in a different way in order to generate data that can then be used more easily. For example, many questions that would normally be answered with a qualitative answer can be adjusted to an option question which can generate quantitative data (in the form of frequencies) instead. It is usually a good idea to start the questionnaire with the shortest and easiest to answer questions while more open questions should appear at the end of the questionnaire.

Delivering the questionnaire

Traditionally, an interviewer verbally asks a respondent each question in turn and their response is recorded, usually in writing. However, there are other ways of delivering a questionnaire. It might be suitable for the questionnaire to be presented on a sheet of paper and then filled in, or it might be helpful for respondents to be able to see a separate sheet of resources that form part of the questionnaire (such as word lists or photographs) which will aid them answering. Surveys that require a wider geographical sphere of respondents can benefit from being put out onto social media platforms, or a link to an online survey can be sent out to people from a section of the population that the geographer wishes to analyse in particular.



Think about geographical words you have in the questionnaire and whether these are likely to be understood by the respondent. Though words like 'economy' or 'infrastructure' might have clear meanings to the interviewer when placed in the context of the questionnaire, to the respondent, what these words mean might not be so obvious.

Consider only using language from the *Oxford 3000* - this is a list of the 3000 most common words in the English language and doing so ensures that the questions will be simple enough for everyone to understand. In most cases, carrying out a pilot study can weed out any questions that repeatedly cause issues for respondents and they can be rewritten before going live.

Getting questionnaire respondents

You might have the perfect questionnaire, but if members of the public don't seem willing to be stopped then it will not give you enough responses to analyse and draw reasonable and meaningful conclusions from. Bear in mind that how you go about recruiting questionnaire respondents may be dependent on the sampling strategy you are using.

- Make sure you are standing in a busy part of the sample area, where lots of people are passing by.
- Make yourself approachable in dress and manner. A smile is often the best first impression.
- Always introduce who you are, which school you are from and why you would like to carry out a questionnaire survey.
- Look for people who have time on their hands - people standing outside shops (and hold onto a dog!) while a partner or spouse are inside may welcome something to do while they wait, as may people waiting at a bus stop, or people temporarily sheltering from rain.
- Do not bother people who are socially engaged - such as those having a picnic with others in a park.