**Survey Design Tips and Tricks**

**Consider the timing and how long your survey takes.** Survey fatigue is a real thing. If your survey is too long, participants may stop answering or keep on picking a response over and over again just to get through it.There is no set “perfect time” but generally longer surveys mean less completion. For online surveys, you may give participants the option to save and continue if your survey has to be long.

**Provide an introduction.** If you have a research project, your survey introduction will likely be your consent form. If otherwise, it’s always good to have an introduction or a preamble to provide context for your survey, communicate the value of the survey, and give instructions on how to complete the survey.

**Preambles for question sections**. If you have sections containing questions about the same topic you could set the context of those questions by having a preamble for that section. For example, if you have a set of questions about demographic you could say something like “The following section asks about your demographics. This is so we can understand the participants that are responding to this survey. Please select one answer per question.” This lets the participant know what’s coming up and helps sets the stage for how they should think about and answer questions.

**General formatting.** For formatting text and space, try to limit your amount of variation with font and style. When you switch fonts, for example, it can be distracting. Also, limit FULL CAPS and underlines in instructions – some are fine for emphasis but try not to go overboard.

A helpful thing to do for visual appeal is to use variation to make questions/answers/instructions distinguishable. For example:

**This next section of questions asks about some of your personal demographic information. This is being used to describe the people we are surveying. For each question please choose one answer by circling your selection.**

* 1. **What is your marital status?**
     1. Single
     2. Married/Co-habituating
     3. Separated/Divorced
     4. Widowed
  2. **Were you born in Canada?**
     1. Yes
     2. No

**Question ordering.** We recommend using the “sandwich model” of question ordering – especially if you have no choice but to have a long survey. Typically, it’s good to start with “easy” questions as this builds trust. In the middle of your survey, try to include your most relevant questions. Finally, end with the “nice to haves”. This is because answers to questions asked at the end tend to be answered faster (tracked timing online), are shorter (qualitative), and answer choices are more uniform (same answers being selected).

**Put similar questions together.** Try putting questions about the same topic together as a group, either by using separate pages for question topic, section breaks, colours/lines, etc. This helps with flow, reliability, and is easier for participants to keep focused on what they need to.

**Open-ended questions.** Generally, these are better if left at the end. Try to not use too many. Keep in mind that the size of space influences how much writing participants will do. If you just want a few words as an answer, use a small text box. If you want several sentences, make your text boxes larger.

**Make the valence direction of answers consistent throughout the survey.** For example, in the below example you can see that the first section has Agree to Disagree from left to right, but in the second section it goes from right to left. This makes the participant have to mentally rotate how they are answering and is generally confusing. Try to make your answer choices facing the same way so participants don’t have to do this.



