

Question Design Guidelines

Before you start

Before you start designing your questions it is important that you have a clear understanding of:

- Your target population (audience)
- What exactly it is that you are trying to find out or measure
- Any specific goals or objectives
- Wider considerations, such as sensitivity and potential issues with perception
- The analysis that you are going to carry out and how you will use the data once you have received it

Having a clear understanding of these elements will help to ensure that you ask the right questions in the right way, resulting in answers that will best meet your needs.

Question Design Principles

Current ONS standards advise that the following considerations are taken into account when designing questions:

- Avoid using long sentences, jargon, and complicated sentence structures
- Any explanatory introductions to the module should be kept short
- Avoid hypothetical questions wherever possible
- Options on show cards should be limited to a maximum of 10
- Do not ask questions that require a more complex understanding of numbers (e.g. percentages and proportions)
- Wherever possible use pre-existing scales (e.g. agree/disagree)

If you need support from our survey experts in designing or developing your questions please contact us. We provide basic support free of charge, with support for more complex data requirements available upon request.

Question Types

There are a number of types of question that can be asked. The Opinions and Lifestyle Omnibus Service charges questions at a flat rate, irrespective of their complexity. The ONS standard is to allow responses of “refusal” or “don’t know” to all questions. Please note if you would like the respondents to have the choice of only the options that you have, you must specifically request this.

Simple questions

“Have you used a vehicle for business purposes in the last 12 months?”

- 1) Yes
- 2) No

Running prompts – the interviewer reads to the question mark

“What colour is your hair, is it...”

- 1) brown,
- 2) blonde,
- 3) black, or
- 4) red?
- 5) Other (spontaneous only)

Individual prompts – the same question is repeated for slightly different circumstances, each of these ‘responses’ is read out and the answer (yes/no) is recorded. The ‘stem’ of the question is not usually repeated unless the ‘response’ list is very long.

“When you were ill, did you receive any extra help from...”

- 1) Your partner? (Yes/No)
- 2) Other relatives? (Yes/No)
- 3) Friends? (Yes/No)
- 4) A home helper? (Yes/No)
- 5) None of these? (Yes/No)