

SELF-ADMINISTERED QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN PRINCIPLES¹

1. Present information in a format that respondents are accustomed to reading.
2. Present only the most relevant information using graphical design features and composition.
3. Pique respondents' interest early in the questionnaire.
4. Dominantly feature questions over additional explanatory information.
5. Include in each question all of the relevant information necessary for respondents to answer it, rather than specifying information in a subsequent instruction.
6. Vertically align the questions and response categories.
7. If incorporating needed information into the question makes it too complicated to understand, then provide accompanying instructions at the place where they are needed.
8. Utilize single-task formats rather than multi-task formats.
9. Utilize single-question formats rather than matrix-question formats.
10. Make headings and instructions at the top of the page more prominent than those in the middle of the page.
11. Provide directions in a natural reading format and utilize graphical design features to make the directions more salient.
12. Utilize graphical design techniques to establish a clear path through the questionnaire for the respondent to follow.
13. Avoid using the same design feature to request different respondent actions.
14. Utilize variability in design features judiciously.
15. Visually emphasize information the respondent needs to see and de-emphasize information which the respondent does not need to see.

¹From Jenkins, C.R. and Dillman, D.A. 1993. "Combining Cognitive and Motivational Research Perspectives for the Design of Respondent-Friendly Self-Administered Questionnaires." A Revised Paper Prepared for Presentation at the American Association for Public Opinion Research, St Charles, Illinois, May 1993.

16. Utilize graphical layout of questions on the page to distinguish among different types of question structures; maintain consistency within types.
17. Provide descriptive captions either above, beneath, or to the right of blank answer spaces and utilize appropriate signs or symbols whenever numbers are requested.
18. Utilize dominate graphical markings to provide the most important information needed by the respondent to guide them through the answering process.
19. Avoid the separation of questions through the use of lines and rectangles in favor of an open format.
20. Structure and organize the questionnaire in such a way that it, first, makes sense to respondents and, second, avoids leaving the choice of the order in which questions get answered up to the respondent.