

Selecting Scales for Survey Questions

(Adapted from Campus Labs resource)

SURVEYS

Tips for Selecting Scales in Surveys

Select labels for each of your scale points – it’s important! It helps respondents more accurately gauge their response.

Think about your respondents when selecting the scale! People are less likely to rate themselves or others negatively. If you’re having respondents evaluate themselves or other people, use a unipolar scale. This will help keep respondents from clustering their answers on the positive end of a bipolar scale and will allow you to see greater differentiation in responses.

*To what extent do you agree with the following statement?
– The session facilitator was knowledgeable about the topic.*

Strongly agree

Moderately agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Moderately disagree

Strongly disagree



How knowledgeable was the facilitator on the session topic?

Extremely knowledgeable

Very knowledgeable

Moderately knowledgeable

Slightly knowledgeable

Not knowledgeable at all



Ensure that the question being asked matches the scale options given.

How satisfied were you in the information provided during the following sessions? – New employee orientation

Very satisfied

Moderately satisfied

Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied

Moderately dissatisfied

Very dissatisfied



How informative were the following sessions? – New employee orientation

Extremely informative

Very informative

Moderately informative

Slightly informative

Not informative at all



Be consistent! If possible, limit the number of different scales you use within one survey. This will make the survey taking experience easier for the respondent. If you do need multiple scales, make sure they all have the same number of points.

Be consistent x2! If you use multiple scales within the same survey, make sure they all run in the same direction: high → low, low → high.

Keep (most) survey scales to between 3-5 scale points. Leave the 10-point scales to the researchers! In assessment, we don’t typically have enough respondents or sensitive enough instruments to make large scales helpful or worthwhile.

Make sure answer options are mutually exclusive (i.e., no overlap!).

5 or more times

4 - 5 times

2 - 4 times

1 - 2 times

Less than 1 time

Never



More than 5 times

4 - 5 times

2 - 3 times

1 time

Less than 1 time

Never



Make sure answer options are exhaustive! Include “Not Applicable”/”No Response”/”Neutral” options when appropriate.

Lose the “Neutral” option if you want to! All bipolar scales have some kind of midpoint. In an odd-numbered scale this is often interpreted as a “Neutral” option. If you want to force respondents to either lean slightly positively or slightly negatively, go ahead and make an even-numbered scale!

Adaptable Survey Scales

Unipolar scales: Extremely X, Very X, Moderately X, Slightly X, Not at all X

Bipolar scales: Very X, Moderately (Slightly) X, Neither X nor Y, Moderately (Slightly) Y, Very Y
Add a non-response option (e.g., not applicable, unable to judge) or neutral as appropriate.

Agreement: Strongly agree, Moderately agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Moderately disagree, Strongly disagree
(another version removes the “moderately” qualifier and/or uses “neutral”)

Comparison: Much X, Slightly X, About the same, Slightly (opposite of X), Much (opposite of X)

Ease: Very easy, Moderately easy, Neither easy nor difficult, Moderately difficult, Very difficult

Expectations (4pt): Exceeds expectations, Fully meets expectations, Partially meets expectations, Does not meet expectations

Extent (5 pt): A great deal (Completely, if appropriate), Considerably, Moderately, Slightly, Not at all

Extent (4 pt): Significantly, Moderately, Slightly, Not at all

Frequency (no set time): Always, Often, Occasionally, Rarely, Never

Frequency (general): Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Once a semester, Once a year, Never

Frequency (based on number of occurrences): More than 5 times, 4 - 5 times, 2 - 3 times, 1 time, Less than 1 time, Never

Frequency (based on timeframe): More than once a week, Once a week, Once a month, Once a semester, Once a year, Less than once a year, Never

Helpfulness: Extremely helpful, Very helpful, Moderately helpful, Slightly helpful, Not at all helpful

Importance: Extremely important, Very important, Moderately important, Slightly important, Not at all important

Interest: Extremely interested, Very interested, Moderately interested, Slightly interested, Not at all interested

Likelihood: Very likely, Moderately likely, Neither likely nor unlikely, Moderately unlikely, Very unlikely

Probability (4 pt): Definitely would, Probably would, Probably wouldn't, Definitely wouldn't

Proficiency: Beginner, Developing, Competent, Advanced, Expert

Quality (version 1): Excellent, Good, Average, Fair, Poor

Quality (version 2): Excellent, Above average, Average, Below average, Poor

Satisfaction: Very satisfied, Moderately satisfied, Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, Moderately dissatisfied, Very dissatisfied