

Penn State **Extension**

Useful Answer Categories

Can you provide answer categories for questions in surveys that are useful?

Tips

Research among dairy farmers in Pennsylvania reveals that they prefer words rather than numbers or boxes. Perhaps your target audiences do too.

- Repeat the same set of answer categories a number of times. It helps the respondent. Avoid repeating the same set of answer categories too often so the respondent does not get lulled to sleep.
- Type answers in bold and 'small caps.' Research has shown that these characteristics work well in a survey.
- In most cases use at least four categories not counting answers like "not sure."

1. If you want to find out how often something occurs, ask for the exact number of times, or use these answers with a question.

Never -- Rarely -- Occasionally -- Regularly -- Don't Know

Almost Never -- Occasionally -- Sometimes -- Often -- Don't Know

Never -- Rarely -- Sometimes -- Often -- Don't Know

Hardly Ever -- Rarely -- Sometimes -- Often -- Very Often

None at All -- Some (little) -- A lot -- A Great Deal

Never -- Almost Never - Sometimes - Fairly Often -- Very Often

2a. If you want to find out the degree of people's feelings, their attitude, strength, or belief, ask "to what extent...." and choose from the following categories.

Not Very Effective - Somewhat Effective - Moderately Effective - Very Effective - Not Sure

Definitely No -- Probably No -- Probably Yes -- Definitely Yes

Very General - Somewhat General - Somewhat Detailed - Very Detailed - Not Sure

Not a Problem - Somewhat of a Problem - A Moderate Problem - Serious Problem - Never

Thought About It

Strongly Disagree -- Disagree -- No Opinion -- Agree -- Strongly Agree

Very Dissatisfied -- Fairly Dissatisfied -- Fairly Satisfied -- Very Satisfied

Not Very Prepared - Somewhat Prepared - Moderately Prepared - Well Prepared

Not Important - Relatively Unimportant - Moderately Important - Highly Important - Don't Know

Needs Improvement -- Satisfactory -- Good

Definitely False -- False -- Not Sure -- True -- Definitely True

A Great Deal Lower - Somewhat Lower - About the Same - Somewhat Higher - A Great Deal Higher - Not Sure

Not at All -- Slightly (or Sparingly) -- Moderately -- Extremely

Poor -- Not So Good -- Satisfactory -- Very Good -- Outstanding

Poor -- Fair -- Acceptable -- Good -- Excellent

Non-existent -- Minimal -- Moderate -- Considerable

Needs Work -- Good -- Excellent

Not Very Helpful - Somewhat Helpful - Moderately Helpful - Very Helpful - Not Really Sure

Not Very Useful - Somewhat Useful - Moderately Useful - Very Useful - Not Really Sure

No Extent - Some Extent - Moderate Extent - Great Extent - Very Great Extent - No Basis to Judge/Not Sure

Not Useful at All - Of Very Little Use - Somewhat Useful - Fairly Useful - Very Useful

Not a Problem -- A Minor Problem - A Major Problem

2b If you want to ask how important something is, you could also say: "How important do you consider each of the following" and use these answer categories:

Not at All Critical - Slightly Critical - Somewhat Critical - Very Critical - Absolutely Critical

3a If you want to find out people's intentions or aspirations ask, "do you expect to..." and ask them to choose from the following categories.

Definitely Yes - Probably Yes - Possibly Yes - Uncertain - Possibly No - Probably No - Definitely No

Definitely No - Probably No - Probably Yes - Definitely Yes

3b Even more preferable in wanting to ask peoples' intentions, is to ask, "How willing are you to....." in the next six months?

Not Willing - Reluctant - Somewhat Willing - Moderately Willing - Very Willing

4 A significant percentage of people often do not have an answer. It is more valuable to you and scientific to find that out. Always consider the need for the following in your answers.

Never Thought About It - Not Sure - Don't Know - No Opinion - None (at the top of a list) - None of the Above (bottom of the list)

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