



Your Guide to Writing Online Survey Questions Like an Expert



SurveyLegend®

Survey says!



You don't have to be a fan of Family Feud to know that today, surveys are everywhere. To get the answers they seek, researchers are approaching people on the street, making phone calls, mailing polls, holding incentivized focus groups, and more.

Of course, those types of surveys are nowhere near as prevalent as web-based surveys. When you go online, you're bound to find surveys in your email inbox, embedded within news stories, applied to pop-ups, and just about everywhere else. Since surveying seems to be at an all-time high, you may be tempted to think writing survey questions should be as easy as pie. Well, put down that fork!

Creating survey questions is a craft. While just about anyone can get the hang of it, it's necessary to learn and engage in some best practices first. Otherwise, you'll fail to capture participant interest and the data you want. Or, you may confuse participants with poorly-composed questions, which can lead to high drop-off rates or completely skew your data.

This guide will provide you with steps you can take to begin writing online survey questions like an expert!

Choosing Your Survey Question Type



Before you start writing questions willy-nilly, you need to decide which type (or types) of survey questions to use. Here are some of the most popular options.

-  **Multiple choice questions:** Just like those quizzes you took in school.
-  **Rating scale questions:** 1-5 stars, 1-10 points, A-F grading scale, two thumbs up/down, etc.
-  **Likert scale questions:** Questions with a range of answers (usually 5-7 points, such as strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree).
-  **Matrix questions:** A column of questions to the left, a row of answers across the top.
-  **Dropdown questions:** Click the answer box and a drop-down menu appears, allowing you to select your answer (think birth years).
-  **Open-ended questions:** As the name suggests, it's a question that allows participants to write in their answer any way they see fit.
-  **Demographic questions:** The usual suspects: age, gender, nationality, etc.
-  **Ranking questions:** These ask the participant to rank things in order of preference. These questions often take some time to complete as participants must consider each answer in relation to the others.
-  **Image choice questions:** The answers to the question here are a series of images from which to choose (often this is used to gauge recall of a brand or to choose a favorite style).
-  **Slider questions:** These allow participants to slide a bar across a scale, such as 1-10; participants tend to enjoy the interactive nature of sliders.



Pro Tip: Try to use the same types of questions or scales within your surveys. Changing them can cause confusion, resulting in inaccurate answers; plus, using similarly styled questions and scales will make your final analysis a whole lot easier!

Survey Question Do's and Don'ts



People generally *love* to give their opinion on things (even when someone else doesn't want it). So, getting them to fill out a survey should be easy, right? That all depends.

When survey questions are done well, people will usually take the time to complete them. However, when surveys are overly complicated, too long, or just poorly worded, people tend to disengage. Studies show that 80% of survey participants abandon a survey halfway through and more than 50% will not spend more than three minutes filling one out. So, it's important to do the right things—and to avoid some common pitfalls!

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Six Survey Question Do's

1. Do be clear.

Clarity is key to any survey question. Provide examples when necessary, spell out abbreviations and acronyms (just because you know what they stand for doesn't mean others do), and avoid overly complicated or technical jargon.

Clear question	What are your company's key performance indicators (KPIs)?
Unclear question	What are your company's KPIs?
Clear question	Do you use a streaming service? (e.g., Netflix, Hulu, Prime, Disney+)
Unclear question	Do you use a streaming service?

2. Do include an out.

Some questions may not apply to someone, or they may be uncomfortable with a particular question, causing respondents to answer dishonestly or drop out of the survey. So, you should always offer an “out.”

Question with an out	Have you ever been convicted of a crime? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Prefer Not to Answer
Question without an out	Have you ever been convicted of a crime? ☐ Yes ☐ No

3. Do provide all options.

You need to provide all possible answers (or if there are too many, an “other” or “all” category), otherwise, people are forced to answer untruthfully or skip the question, which can skew your results.

Questions with all options	Which cloud provider do you use? ☐ Microsoft ☐ Amazon ☐ Google ☐ Other ☐ All of the Above
Question without all options	Which cloud provider do you use? ☐ Microsoft ☐ Amazon ☐ Google

4. Do be delicate.

Surveys are all about collecting opinions. In a survey, participants should never feel as though they're taking a quiz that will be graded, or that they're going to "hurt" someone with their answer, so soften questions by making them more opinion-based to put them at ease.

Delicate question	Do you feel there are any problems with our product?
Harsh question	What are the problems with our product?

5. Do label scales.

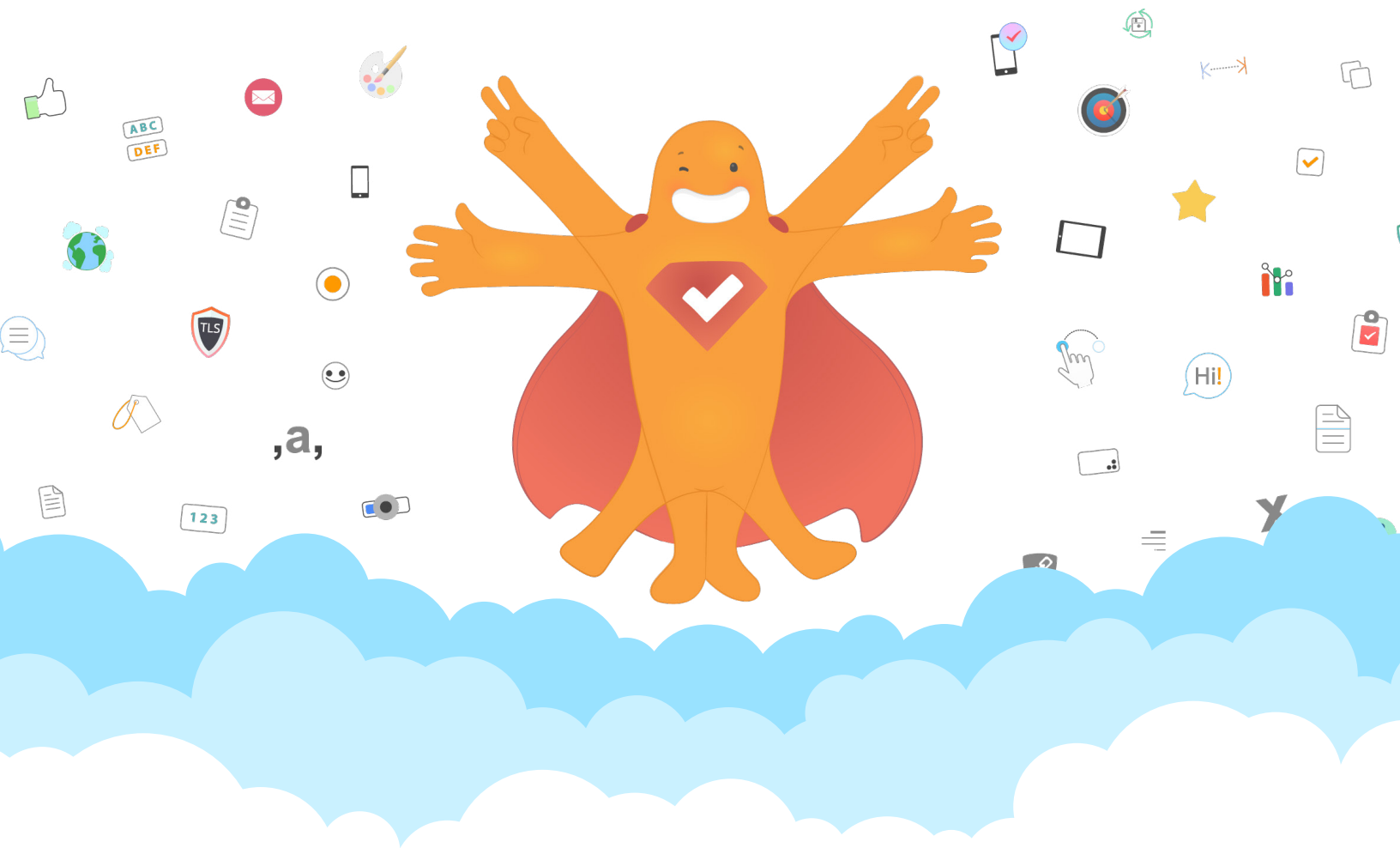
While everyone knows five stars are better than one, and an A is better than an F, numbered scales can get confusing; sometimes, one is the worst, while other times, being number one is the best! To avoid confusion, always use labels.

Labeled scale	Use the slider to rate your customer service experience. 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Awful Poor Average Good Excellent
Unlabeled scale	Use the slider to rate your customer service experience. 1-----2-----3-----4-----5

6. Do include timeframes.

Questions become more meaningful for analysis when a timeframe is attached to the answer.

Timeframe question	Have you visited a doctor in the past six months?
No timeframe question	Have you visited a doctor?





Six Survey Question Don'ts

1. Don't ask leading questions.

Leading questions intentionally or unintentionally persuade a participant to one side or conclusion. In the leading question example below, the wording may precondition the participant to think of customer service as helpful.

Leading question	How helpful was our customer service?
Non-leading question	Was our customer service helpful?

Leading questions can also occur when more weight is given to the positive or negative side of a scale, as follows:

Leading question	How satisfied were you with customer service? ☐ Very satisfied ☐ Satisfied ☐ Dissatisfied
Non-leading question	How satisfied were you with customer service? ☐ Very satisfied ☐ Satisfied ☐ Dissatisfied ☐ Very Dissatisfied

2. Don't ask loaded questions.

Loaded questions force participants to answer a question even if it doesn't apply to them. In the loaded question below, the participant may like to stay home on the weekend.

Loaded question	Where do you like to go on the weekend?
Unloaded question	What do you like to do on the weekend?

3. Don't ask double-barreled questions.

Double-barreled questions ask two questions in one when the answer to each may be very different. These questions should always be broken into two individual questions.

Double-barreled question	Are you happy with your job and pay?
Singular questions	Are you happy with your job? Are you happy with your pay?

4. Don't ask absolute questions.

Being too rigid backs participants into a corner and can lead to inaccurate results.

Absolute question	Do you always brush your teeth at night? ☐ Yes ☐ No
Flexible question	Do you brush your teeth at night? ☐ Always ☐ Sometimes ☐ Never

5. Don't ask questions with overlapping answers.

Overlapping answers unintentionally gives the participant the ability to check multiple boxes. In the overlapping example below, does the person working remotely three days per week check box 1 or 2?

Overlapping answers	How many days per week do work from home? ☐ 1-3 days ☐ 3-5 days ☐ 5-7 days
Non-overlapping answers	How many days per week do work from home? ☐ 1-2 days ☐ 3-4 days ☐ 5-7 days

6. Don't ask questions that tarnish self-concepts.

People don't like to tarnish their self-concept, or how they see themselves. Consider the case of an IT guy who thinks of himself as an expert. In the initial question below, he must admit to confusion which tarnishes his self-concept, something he's unlikely to do which blows the opportunity to collect valuable feedback. In the reframed question, he doesn't have to admit confusion but gets to provide feedback under the guise of helping others.

Initial question	How could we improve this app to make it less confusing for you?
Reframed question	How would you improve this app to make it less confusing for users?



Ready to Create Your Survey?

Armed with your new *Guide To Writing Online Survey Questions Like an Expert*, you should be ready to go!

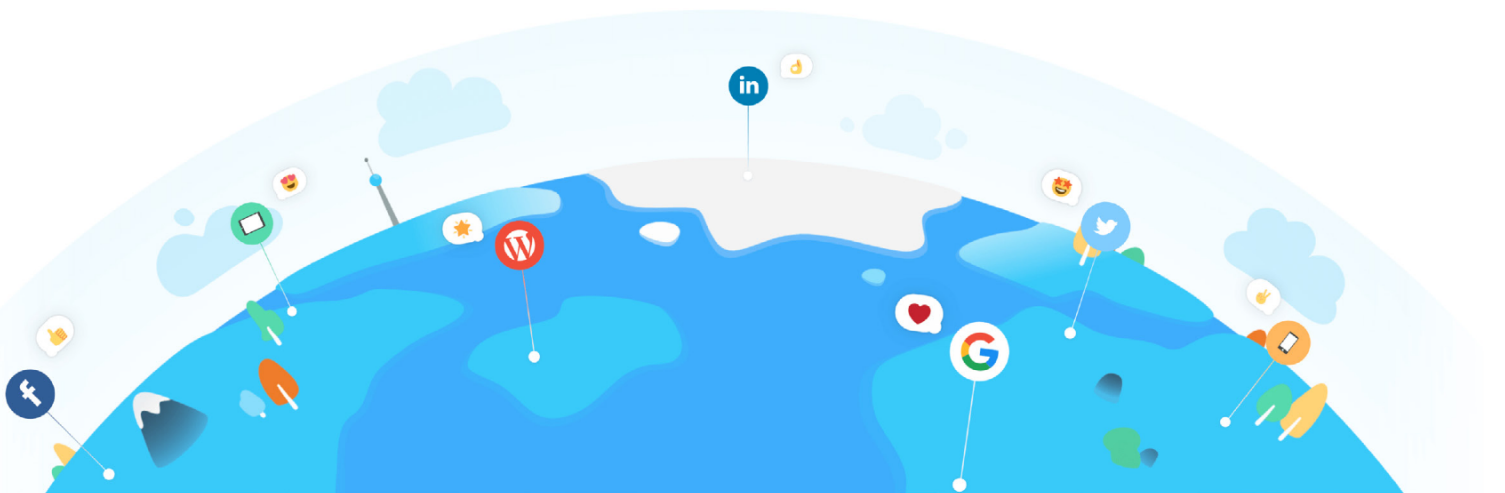
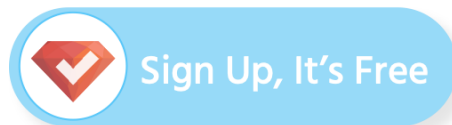
With SurveyLegend, there are many benefits:

- Those different survey types we talked about at the beginning? We offer them all.
- When it comes to surveys, brief is best, so we automatically collect some data, such as the participant's location, reducing the number of questions.
- People like eye candy and many surveys are just plain dull. SurveyLegend offers beautifully pre-designed surveys that will get your participant's attention (Want to keep it formal? We do that too).
- Today, most surveys are taken on mobile devices, and often surveys created on desktop computers don't translate well. Our designs are responsive, automatically adjusting to any screen size.





SurveyLegend®
A joy to get insight



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