
Questionnaire Design

Cheatsheet

The bottom half of the page is decorated with large, overlapping geometric shapes. A bright pink triangle is on the left, a large cyan triangle is on the right, and a dark blue triangle is at the bottom, all meeting at a central point.

At a glance

To create a survey that can gain and retain respondents' attention, we recommend:

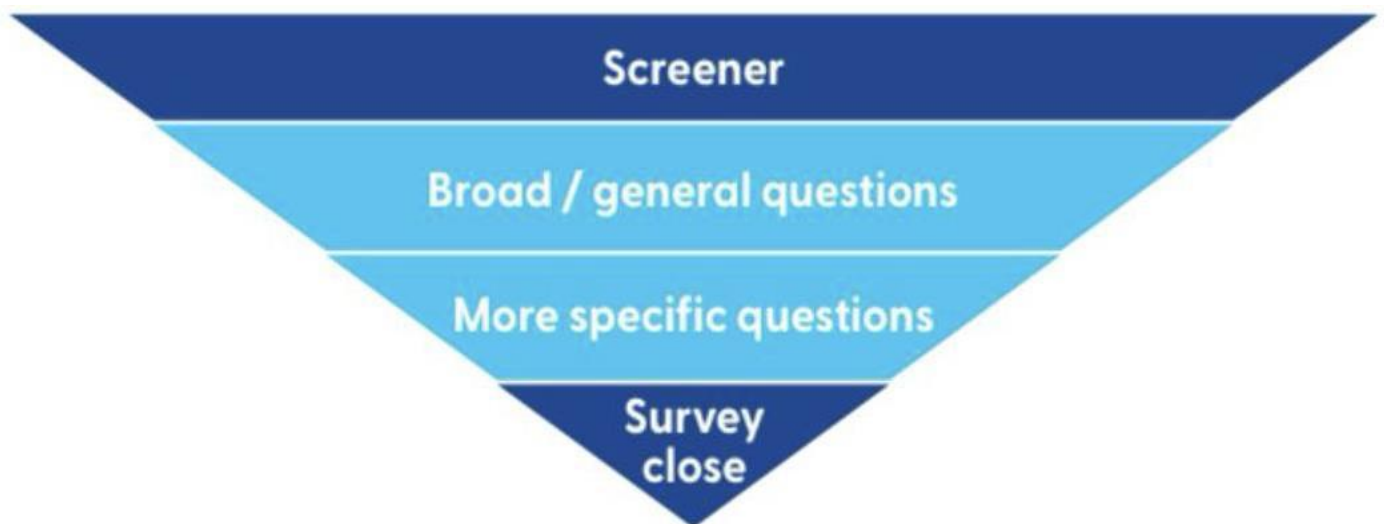
- Keeping it simple, short, neutral, and engaging – maximum of 20 minutes in length or less, which is roughly around 40 questions.
- A logical questionnaire 'flow' starting with broad questions and moving to specifics.
- Questions should be in a logical order; group questions on a similar subject together.
- Keep your screening section as succinct as possible – 10 to 12 questions maximum and ask classification / demographic questions that are not needed for screening at the very end of the survey. Where possible, use profiled demographic questions instead of asking them in the survey.
- Use a mix of different question types and layouts. Avoid repetition e.g. banks of similar questions, long lists or grids of click box answers.
- Design your survey with care; attention to details like spelling, grammar, and localization encourages respondents to engage more thoughtfully.
- Including quality checks like red herring / trap questions and logic checks. Refer to the Quality Checks Cheat Sheet for more details.

Surveys are constantly competing for respondents' attention. Distraction can come from many sources, so an engaging, intuitive questionnaire is key to keeping respondents motivated and focused. Below are our top tips to writing a good questionnaire. Failure to follow best practice design can lead to incorrect, unhelpful or biased results.

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- Our recommended maximum length of interview for online surveys is 20 minutes, which is roughly around 40 questions.

To make it easy for respondents to follow the survey, ensure it has a logical 'flow' by asking from broader questions to more specific questions. Think of it like a funnel



Consider the following elements for each section of the survey.

Toluna DIY Automated Solutions: These templates have already undergone rigorous reviews by our research experts. Certain project setup wizard elements integrate seamlessly into the questionnaire, ensuring high-quality design. Additionally, we have added in technical checks for the ability to see/hear stimulus before the actual project stimulus gets rated.

Survey Intro Page

In accordance with ISO 20252 section 4.1.2.3, we recommend adding a survey introduction page that includes the following details:

- a general description of the purpose of a project
- the estimated length of their participation time

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- a statement of the confidentiality of each participant's responses
- a statement of the anonymity and/or identification of each participant's responses
- the closing date for completed responses (if applicable)
- full disclosure of incentive terms and conditions related to the project
- information as to whether the invitation is sent out on behalf of another service provider
- the opportunity to unsubscribe or opt out of the research activity

★ Toluna DIY Automated Solutions : These templates have a generic survey intro page which can be edited to include these details.

Please refer to the Appendix for pre-designed survey intro pages for both Toluna Sample and My Own Audience Sample.

Survey Intro Page

- Only ask questions that are relevant for determining your target group – keep to 10 to 12 questions maximum.
- Screen out respondents as early as possible – if the respondent does not fit a screening criteria, screen out immediate after that question.
- Don't give away the survey topic, as some respondents may be especially interested in a certain subject and may try to qualify for the survey if they find out its topic. Include multiple brands or activities when screening for one in particular.

Example: Instead of asking 'Did you buy chocolate in the last week?', ask

'Did you buy any of the following products in the last week?'

- Ensure the target population is defined correctly and set up quotas to reach the right audience for the survey.

★ Toluna DIY Automated Solutions : These templates always use Random Assignment (RA) and quota balancing to ensure accuracy and reliability.

Screeners

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- Only ask about previous survey participation if it directly impacts the representativity of the data (e.g. recent exposure to a similar survey would skew responses).
 - Example: Instead of asking 'Have you participated in a market research study?', ask 'In the past month, have you participated in any research studies in any of the following categories?'
- When asking about what industry the respondent works in, keep it relevant and focused. Only include this question for data segmentation or avoiding bias.
- Surveys must consider the unique needs of children and vulnerable groups. As per ISO 20252 section 4.1.2.4, thoughtful preparation ensures ethical, accurate, and respectful data collection while avoiding distress for participants and their parents. Always follow the ESOMAR standards when conducting research with children and other vulnerable respondents:
 - Obtain consent from the responsible adult first, then ask the child for their agreement.
 - The responsible adult must be informed of:
 - Name and contact details of the researcher and/or research organization
 - The nature of the data to be collected, including any data that might be considered sensitive or not age appropriate
 - The purpose of collecting the data must be specified
 - How the data will be used and protected
 - The reasons for asking a child to participate and likely benefits or potential impact of the research
 - An outline of activities that may be undertaken (e.g., product testing)
 - Description of any incentive being offered

- The procedure for giving and verifying consent
- Request for the responsible adult's contact details for verification of consent

Key Criterion: Ensure the research content and process minimize the risk of upsetting the child or their parents.

Main Body:

- Start with the general question before the more specific ones. Questions should be in a logical order to help respondents follow the survey's train of thought.
- Keep it simple and ask about one thing at a time; every respondent should understand each question in the same way.
- Group questions on a similar subject together and avoid jumping between topics. Use a "cushion statement" to help respondents ease into a new topic.
- Utilize a variety of question types and formats in your survey. Avoid repetitive patterns such as groups of similar questions, lengthy lists, or extensive grids of checkbox answers.
- Use consistent words and phrases throughout.
- Make sure expected knowledge and memory is reasonable.
- Use randomization of answer options or concepts where it makes sense.
- Consider cultural differences to ensure the relevance and appropriateness of the questions.
- If the survey is about a sensitive topic, make sure to include this in the introduction and always allow respondents to skip certain sensitive questions.

★ Toluna DIY Automated Solutions : These templates have been carefully designed, worded, and structured to create high-quality surveys with well-crafted phrasing for key metrics like Purchase Intent. The wording selected in the wizard is consistently applied to the relevant questions, such as category and subcategory, ensuring clarity and alignment.

Encourage good open-end quality by activating Qprobe, Toluna's AI-powered probing feature (Toluna Start only):

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- QProbe identifies insufficient open-end answers and crafts personalized follow-up questions to gain more insightful detail.
- QProbe can be switched on for up to 3 open-ended questions (this increases to 4 for Random Assignment concept, pack or ad surveys).
- It is available in 14 languages across 37 markets.

Survey Close:

Ask any general demographics or profiling questions you haven't asked yet.

Questions & Answers:

Keep it simple:

Avoid slang, jargon, abbreviations, acronyms or technical terms.

Example: 'How often do you buy FMCG products?' – normal shoppers don't know what 'FMCG' products are.

Avoid ambiguous questions or expressions.

Example: 'How often do you buy premium soft drinks?' – 'premium' may be different for every respondent.

Avoid double-barreled questions.

Example: 'Do you like the summer season and warm temperatures?' – the respondent may like one but not the other, but has to choose the same option for both.

Focus on recent behaviour and ask about actions performed within a specific time frame.

Example: 'Have you used hot sauce recently?' – 'recently' may be different for every respondent; instead, use a specific time frame like 'within the past three months.'

Provide exhaustive response options.

Example: Consider including a 'Don't know' or 'Prefer not to say' option for sensitive questions, such as household income.

Keep it short:

Cut out lengthy descriptions about things respondents can see or complete intuitively.

Example: Instead of 'Please select the region you currently reside in from the list below', use 'Where do you live?'

Keep it neutral:

Avoid leading or biasing questions.

Example: 'Wouldn't you agree that this is a great idea?' – instead, use: 'What do you think about this idea?'

Avoid assumptive questions.

Example: 'When you get stressed at work, do you go home?' – instead, use: 'Do you ever get stressed at work?' & '[if yes] What do you do when you get stressed at work?'

Keep it engaging:

Use a mix of different question types to keep the survey engaging:

Single & multi select questions

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- Ensure options are not too similar
- Limit answer options to a maximum of 10 where possible
- Sort options where there is a logical order, otherwise randomize
- Include 'don't know', 'other', or 'prefer not to say' options

Open ended questions

Use open-ended questions where they add value, e.g. for unprompted questions or questions that have too many possible answer options to list in a single or multi select question.

Example: 'What brands of home insurance can you think of?' Example: 'Why did you give this score?'

Limit open ends to a maximum of three per respondent where possible.

Grids

Keep the number of grids used to a minimum and ensure they are not too large, e.g. limit the number of rows and columns.

Appendix: Templated Intro Pages

[For Toluna Sample]

Thank you for taking the time to participate in our survey.

The purpose of this survey is to **[insert purpose (keep this generic to avoid bias and fraud, e.g., understand consumer preferences or gather feedback)]**, and it will take approximately **[insert duration]** to complete. **For MR Clients ONLY:** This invitation has been sent on behalf of **[insert MR client name]**.

Participation in the survey is completely voluntary, but we still want to ask you for your consent to process your input in aggregated form. Your individual response will not be identifiable back to you. If you do not want to grant this consent, then you cannot participate in this survey.

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Participants are eligible for an incentive; please contact your survey provider directly for full terms and conditions.

Please complete the survey as soon as possible to ensure your input is included.

If you prefer not to participate or wish to opt out of future surveys, you may do so by contacting your survey provider.

Thank you for your time and valuable feedback!

[Single Select Question]

I CONSENT and continue the survey [Continue to survey] I DO NOT CONSENT and leave the survey [Screen out]

[For My Own Audience (MOA) Sample]

Thank you for taking the time to participate in our survey.

The purpose of this survey is to **[insert purpose (keep this generic to avoid bias and fraud, e.g., understand consumer preferences or gather feedback)]**, and it will take approximately **[insert duration]** to complete. This invitation has been sent on behalf of **[insert client name]**.

Participation in the survey is completely voluntary, but we still want to ask you for your consent to process your input in aggregated form. Your individual response will not be identifiable back to you. If you do not want to grant this consent, then you cannot participate in this survey.

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