

toluna*start

Cheat Sheet Questionnaire Design.



At a glance:

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

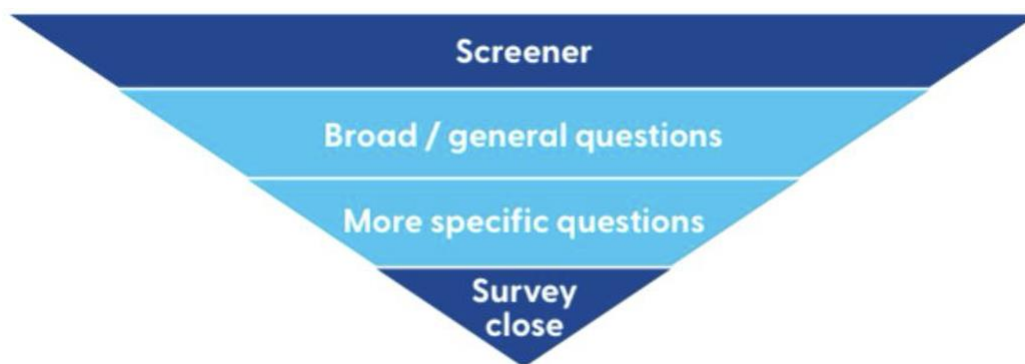
- Keeping it simple, short, neutral, and engaging – maximum of 20 minutes in length or less, which is roughly around 40 questions.
- A logical questionnaire 'flow' starting with broad questions and moving to specifics.
- Questions should be in a logical order; group questions on a similar subject together.
- 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.

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.



Survey Design:

- Our recommended maximum length of interview for online surveys is 20 minutes, which is roughly around 40 questions.
- Carefully design your survey to ensure it is well-crafted and professional. Paying close attention to details like spelling, grammar, and localization encourages respondents to take the survey more seriously and engage more thoughtfully.
- 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.

Screeners:

- 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 immediately 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.

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.

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

- 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.



Quality Checks:

Respondents are only human and sometimes they may get distracted due to external factors or they may lose engagement with the survey. Their bus stop may be coming up, their child cries, or a friend calls them. Temporary distraction is ok and normal, however we want to identify those respondents who may have gotten a little too distracted and should be removed from the data for quality purposes.

When creating your questionnaire, it's important to incorporate a range of quality checks to ensure the accuracy and reliability of your data. We recommend considering the following quality checks as part of your design process:

Red herring / Trap questions:

These questions are designed to check if respondents are paying attention and reading questions carefully.

Recommendation: For surveys with 10-30 questions, we recommend including 2-3 red herring questions, and for surveys with 30+ questions, 3-4 red herrings are ideal.

- **If a respondent fails 1 red herring:** Flag and review their responses alongside other quality checks.
- **If a respondent fails 2 or more red herrings:** Remove these respondents from the survey by using survey logic/filters.



You can include red herring questions in two forms:

Individual question – set up a separate question with only one correct answer	Part of a grid – include an instruction as part of a grid question
<p>Example: Hey, are you still paying attention? Please choose the third option from the list below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Green• Red• Blue• Yellow	<p>Example: Please choose ‘completely agree’ for this statement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Completely disagree• Disagree• Neither agree nor disagree• Agree• Completely agree

Logic checks:

These questions evaluate whether a respondent's answers follow a logical pattern.

Recommendation: We recommend reviewing these checks post-field, alongside other quality assurance measures, to ensure response accuracy and reliability.

Some examples of logic checks include low-incidence options, overstatement, fake options, inconsistencies, and unlikely combinations. Please see a few examples below:

Overstatement checks – include a few rare items in existing question lists. If a respondent selects all the items, they may be over-stating.
<p>Example: Did you buy any of the following in the last 7 days?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bread• Flowers• Chocolates• Cleaning Products• Car Insurance• Mobile Phone• DVD• None of these



Fake Options – include fake brands, sports, cities, etc. in question lists. If a respondent selects the fake option, they may not be paying attention

Example:

Which of the following German car brands have you heard of?

- Audi
- BMW
- Porsche
- **Pitu**
- Volkswagen
- None of these

Straight-lining checks:

These checks help identify respondents who may have lost focus or motivation and are simply clicking through the survey by selecting the same option repeatedly in grid questions.

Recommendation: Apply straight-lining checks on grids with 15+ items. To reduce respondent fatigue, split grids with more than 20 items into pages with at least 10 items each. If, after splitting, no grids have 15+ items, apply the check to those with 10+ items.

- If the **standard deviation is above 0.5 in two or more grids**, the respondent should be removed from the dataset.
- If the **standard deviation is above 0.5 in only one grid**, the respondent should be flagged and their responses reviewed alongside other quality checks.



Open end checks:

These checks are designed to identify respondents who may be disengaged or providing fraudulent responses. A combination of automated and manual checks is used for comprehensive validation.

Recommended post-field checks include:

- Gibberish
- Foreign Language
- Duplicate Responses
- Short Open-Ended Responses
- Profanity
- Illogical Responses
- Nonsensical Responses
- Suspected AI-Generated Responses

Automated OE Checks in Toluna Start

Toluna Start offers built-in automated checks to review open-ended survey responses. These checks validate responses based on the following criteria, and any respondents failing these checks are automatically removed from the survey:

- Gibberish
- Foreign Language
- Duplicate Responses
- Copy & Paste Behavior