

Designing Surveys for Educational Research: A Quick Guide

Purpose of surveys

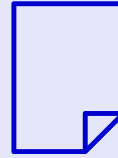
- To gather information on a specific topic
- Possible types of data:
 - Quantitative data (e.g. numbers, statistics)
 - Qualitative data (e.g. opinions, experiences)
- Data can be used to:
 - Identify patterns and relationships
 - Generalise findings (where possible, and with caution)
 - Acknowledge limitations and biases



Tip: Depending on your research question and aim, surveys can be used as a single method or with another method, e.g. interviews or focus groups.

Survey formats

Paper-based



Online (e.g. Qualtrics)



- Offer both formats to support accessibility
- Apply the same design principles across formats

Types of questions

- Multiple choice (MCQ) → Easy to quantify
- Likert Scale → Measures agreement or satisfaction
- Ranking → Prioritises preferences
- Closed (Yes/No/Maybe Questions) → Provides quick binary insights
- Open-ended → Gathers rich, contextual feedback



Note: Avoid leading questions to ensure richer, valid data

Key design considerations



Choose question type(s) based on the aim of your research



Include brief, clear instructions



Use clear, jargon-free language and avoid ambiguous wording



Be mindful of General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) - only collect data essential for your project





Pilot your survey to test out question wording, gauge accessibility and identify potential weaknesses

Survey structure

- Group related questions into themes/sections
- Use branching logic to skip irrelevant questions
- Keep the presentation visually clean & concise
- Ensure accessibility for all participants
- Proofread carefully (spelling, grammar, punctuation)
- State incentive details, if offered

When constructing your survey:

 Do	 Don't
Ask one thing per question	Ask about multiple ideas in one question
Use plain language	Use jargon or technical language
Provide clear response scales	Leave scale descriptors vague
Make questions optional, where appropriate	Make questions mandatory, unnecessarily