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Creating Good Interview and Survey Questions

Summary: Primary research involves collecting data about a given subject directly from the real world. This section includes information on what primary research is, how to get started, ethics involved with primary research and different types of research you can do. It includes details about interviews, surveys, observations, and analysis.

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If you are conducting primary research using surveys or interviews, one of the most important things to focus on is creating good questions.

When creating questions you want to avoid:

Biased questions

Biased questions are questions that encourage your participants to respond to the question in a certain way. They may contain biased terminology or are worded in a biased way.

Biased question: Don't you agree that campus parking is a problem?

Revised question: Is parking on campus a problem?

Questions that assume what they ask

These questions are a type of biased question and lead your participants to agree or respond in a certain way.

Biased question: There are many people who believe that campus parking is a problem. Are you one of them?

Revised question: Do you agree or disagree that campus parking is a problem?

Double-barreled questions

A double-barreled question is a one that has more than one question embedded within it. Participants may answer one but not both, or may disagree with part or all of the question.

Double-barreled question: Do you agree that campus parking is a problem and that the administration should be working diligently on a solution?

Revised question: Is campus parking a problem? (If the participant responds yes): Should the administration be responsible for solving this problem?

Confusing or wordy questions

Make sure your questions are not confusing or wordy. Confusing questions will only lead to confused participants, which leads to unreliable answers.

Confusing questions: What do you think about parking? (This is confusing because the question isn't clear about what it is asking--parking in general? The person's ability to park the car? Parking on campus?) Do you believe that the parking situation on campus is problematic or difficult because of the lack of spaces and the walking distances or do you believe that the parking situation on campus is ok? (This question is both very wordy and leads the participant.)

Revised question: What is your opinion of the parking situation on campus?

Questions that do not relate to what you want to learn

Be sure that your questions directly relate to what it is you are studying. A good way to do this is to ask someone else to read your questions or even test your survey out on a few people and see if the responses fit what you are looking for.

Unrelated questions: Have you ever encountered problems in the parking garage on campus? Do you like or dislike the bus system?