Survey Research: Tips for Do-It-Yourselfers

1. Before you start, decide how you can tabulate the results
2. Keep the survey as short as possible, by mail or by phone
3. Start with general questions and progress to more specific items
4. Start with "nonthreatening" questions
    - things people would be willing to talk about with anyone
5. Put threatening questions near the end, after you have gained the rest of the information you want
    - things that might be embarrassing if talked about in public
        - > personal habits (drinking, gambling, fighting), fired?, arrested?
        - > most demographic questions (age, income, race/ethnic, marital history, children) are seen as threatening; put them at the end unless you need them earlier
6. Remember that people may terminate a survey, in writing or on the telephone, when they encounter threatening questions or questions that reveal lack of education
7. Avoid "knowledge" questions that seem like a test
    - Make it easy and comfortable to respond
        - > "Do you happen to know . . . " or "Have you run across these terms . . .
        - > "Based on what you know right now, what do you think about . . ."
8. When writing questions about attitudes, write separate questions for:
    - affective "How strongly do you approve of . . . "
    - cognitive "How familiar do you happen to be with . . . ."
    - action "How likely would you be to [do something] . . . "
9. "Scaled" questions help you judge the strength of the response
    - "Strongly approve/somewhat approve/somewhat disapprove/disapprove"
    - A five- or seven-point scale (Likert scale)
        - > Indicate that the largest number means the strongest response
        - > This makes averages easier to understand

Example:

3. Thinking about how times are changing, how well do you think our schools are preparing our students for the future -- conditions they will meet after graduation?

Very well			Average			Not very well	No opinion
7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0

Using this kind of response scale, you can process your responses by hand or with a calculator, if you need to, to compute the average. The data can also be readily handled in computer statisical programs.

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