

Qualities and Characteristics of a good questionnaire

Understanding the use of questionnaire

A questionnaire is consists of a number of questions printed (or typed) in a definite order on a form (or set of forms). The form/s are usually mailed to the respondents who are expected to read and understand the questions and reply to them in writing in the relevant spaces provided for the purpose on the said form/s. Ideally the respondent has to answer the questions on his own, i.e., totally unaided. It is used in gathering objective, quantitative data as well as for securing information of a qualitative nature. In some studies, the questionnaire is the sole research tool utilized but it is more often used in conjunction with other methods of investigation or survey methods.

Questionnaires are a common and inexpensive research tool used by private companies, government departments, individuals, groups, NGOs etc to get feedback, research, collect data from consumer, customers. or from general public depending on the need. Questionnaire plays an important role in surveys and in other purposes for which it is being made and there are many points which needs to be kept in mind so as to get the desired results. These are one of the most important part of primary surveys and the data collected us generally meant for the end-user/company for which survey is being conducted. However when the data collection is large an independent firm or a department can be given the task of getting the questionnaire filled. It is not possible to conduct a primary survey without a questionnaire. There are several characteristics of a good questionnaire, some of the important qualities of Good Questionnaire are described below :

Qualities & characteristics of a good questionnaire

- Need to know what needs to be measured – Having a clear picture and understanding of what data needs to be collected contributes to the quality of data collection
- Should know how to word/frame question and words should be neutral and should not be leading – Whatever your opinion may be, own opinion should never be reflected in the questions. This is done both intentionally and unintentionally but should be taken care of.
- Emphasis on right word/phrase should be kept in mind – The language should be clear so that the required data can be received. This also makes the question and the requirement of survey easy to understand and thus help in getting a better response and answer.
- Define and qualify terms – This is most essential when a technical survey or a field specific survey is being done. If you think that the audience being surveyed might not know about some terms than they must be defined to get any proper response. This will increase the quality and decrease the bounce rate or number of questions which were left unanswered.
- Avoid double negatives or more than 1 negative word in question – Use of negative word has a psychological effect and can influence the answer.
- Sufficient or adequate alternatives should be provided – Available options should have the most expected answers

- Multiple questions in question should be avoided – One question should have one answer. If more than one question needs to be asked than it should be made a separate question to improve clarity of questions.
- Word requiring emphasis should be emphasized – It helps in making a point and question clear
- options like good/bad/fair/average should be quantified through photographs or other mean – These are very vague terms and interpretations of these varies from person to person
- Unwanted assumptions should be avoided – A survey is about getting factual data and assumptions should be avoided.

What to avoid in a Good Questionnaire?

Apart from the characteristics of a good questionnaire listed above there are certain negative points which should be avoided as far as possible.

1. **Greater than required length** – If there are too many questions than the chances of getting them answered is very less. In a busy schedule no one is willing to give answer for too many question. So try to keep it short and to the point. A good questionnaire is short and precise to fulfil the requirement, try to keep it under 1 page.
2. **Subjective Questions** – Until and unless it is very necessary to get the opinion of the user or targeted group, subjective or open-ended questions should be avoided. This is because everyone have a different perspective and the answer received might not give any useful information. It will be difficult to quantify and present. It is also seen that people start narrating their experiences in open-ended questions which does not add much value to the research being conducted. It also takes a lot of space, time and efforts so should be avoided.
3. **Contradicting questions** – Before getting a questionnaire filled make sure to read it three to four-time. This is to ensure no question is contradicting or repeating.
4. **Objectify/bias/conclusion** – This is one of the most frequent mistakes done while preparing a questionnaire. Always keep in mind that the survey being conducted needs to be unbiased and must not reflect any opinion of the company or the person preparing questionnaire. All the questions should be neutral, also no question should influence the answer of any other question.

Advantages of an questionnaire

1. The questionnaire is usually mailed to the respondents and contains specific, clear-cut directions; the persons charged with the collection of data need not exert themselves on offering additional explanations or instructions.
2. It possible to cover large number of population spread over a large territory. It is more economical in terms of time, energy and money.
3. It is an impersonal technique. Uniformity from one measurement situation to another is provided by virtue of its standardized wordings of questions, sequence and instructions.
4. It ensures anonymity. The respondents have a greater confidence that they will not be identified as holding a particular view of opinion.
5. Impose less pressure on the respondents for immediate response. The respondent can consider each point carefully before actually putting his reply in writing.

Disadvantages of Questionnaire

1. It can be administered only on a person with a considerable amount of education.
2. In a Mailed questionnaire the return is low.
3. Misinterpretation of question may lead to incorrect information. There is a little chance to clarify a particular response.
4. Success depends upon the *sense of responsibility* of the respondent.
5. The investigator does not get opportunity to understand the stimuli impinging upon the respondent according to his design.

Points to keep in mind while designing a good questionnaire

- The physical appearance of the questionnaire affects the cooperation or the response from the people. An attractive looking questionnaire is a plus point. Size, quality of paper, color of paper, arrangement of items on the questionnaire or layout/ format of the questionnaire is important for improving the physical appearance.
- Consideration of who is to record the responses. If a highly trained investigator is to do the questioning and enter the replies, the form should be different from the one drawn up for the informant to fill by himself.
- Choice of word is an important consideration. Respondent with limited vocabularies are likely to be suggestive. He may just choose one of the alternative responses without any idea as to the meaning of his response. Simple word with out multiple meaning is to be considered. Danger words, catchwords or words with emotional connotations should be avoided. Long questions should be avoided.
- Choice and sequence of question is important. Many refusals and misunderstandings can be avoided by a proper arrangement of questions. The opening questions should be easy to answer. Questions, which might embarrass the informant, should be placed in the middle or at the end of questionnaire.
- If the numbers of questions are less their arrangement on the questionnaire will not require detailed planning.
- Questions should be designed based on the purpose of the survey. The formulations of problems provide the starting point for developing the question. It is necessary to be clear about the information to be sought and type of questionnaire to be used.
- Must be designed with the understanding of possible process of analysis.

This will help in making a good questionnaire

Following the above mentioned characteristics and characteristics of good questionnaire will help your questionnaire to be easy to answer for the audience. It will yield better results in terms of answer received. It will help in analyzing the data and concluding a better result.