

LESSON 2: Questionnaire

A questionnaire is a research instrument that consists of a set of questions or other types of prompts that aims to collect information from a respondent. A research questionnaire is typically a mix of close-ended questions and open-ended questions. Open-ended, long-form questions offer the respondent the ability to elaborate on their thoughts. Research questionnaires were developed in 1838 by the Statistical Society of London.

The data collected from a data collection questionnaire can be both qualitative as well as quantitative in nature. A questionnaire may or may not be delivered in the form of a survey, but a survey always consists of a questionnaire.

Advantages of a Questionnaire

- With a survey questionnaire, you can gather a lot of data in less time.
- There is less chance of any bias creeping in if you have a standard set of questions to be used to your target audience. You can apply logic to questions based on the respondents' answers, but the questionnaire will remain common for a group of respondents that fall in the same segment.
- Conducting a survey through online survey software is really quick and cost-effective. It offers you a rich set of features to design, distribute and analyze the response data.
- A questionnaire can be customized to reflect your brand voice. Thus, it can be used to reinforce your brand image.
- The responses can be compared with the historical data and understand the shift in respondents' choices and experiences.
- Respondents can answer the questionnaire without revealing their identity. Also, many survey software comply with major data security and privacy regulations.

Characteristics of a Questionnaire

Your questionnaire design depends on the type of information you need to collect from respondents. Qualitative questionnaires are used when there is a need to collect exploratory information to help prove or disprove a hypothesis. Quantitative questionnaires are used to validate or test a previously generated hypothesis. However, most questionnaires follow some basic characteristics:

- **Uniformity:** Questionnaires are very useful to collect demographic information, personal opinions, facts, or attitudes from respondents. One of the biggest characteristics of questionnaires is uniform design and standardization. Every respondent sees the same questions. This helps in data collection and statistical analysis of this data. For example, the retail store evaluation questionnaire template contains questions for evaluating retail store experiences. Questions relate to purchase value, range of options for product selections, and quality of merchandise. These questions are uniform for all customers.
- **Exploratory:** To collect qualitative data, the questionnaire should be exploratory. There is no restriction to questions that can be in your questionnaire or the specific objective of the questions. For example, you use a data collection questionnaire and send it to the female of the household to understand her spending and saving habits relative to the household income. Open-ended questions give you more insight and allow the respondents to explain their habits. A very structured question list could limit the data collection.
- **Question Sequence:** A questionnaire typically follows a structured flow of questions to increase the number of responses. This sequence of questions is screening questions, warm-up questions, transition questions, skip questions, difficult questions, and classification questions. For example, our motivation and buying experience questionnaire template covers initial demographic questions then asks for time spent in sections of the store as well as the rationale behind purchases

Types of Questionnaires

As we explored before, questionnaires can be either structured or free-flowing. Let's take a closer look at what that entails for your surveys.

- **Structured Questionnaires:** Structured questionnaires collect quantitative data. The questionnaire is planned and designed to gather precise information. It also initiates a formal inquiry, supplements data, checks previously accumulated data, and helps validate any prior hypothesis.
- **Unstructured Questionnaires:** Unstructured questionnaires collect qualitative data. They use a basic structure and some branching questions but nothing that limits the responses of a respondent. The questions are more open-ended to collect specific data from participants.

Types of Questions in a Questionnaire

You can use multiple question types in a questionnaire. In fact, using multiple question types can help increase responses to your research questionnaire as they tend to keep participants more engaged.

Some of the widely used types of questions are:

- **Open-Ended Questions:** Open-ended questions help collect qualitative data in a questionnaire where the respondent can answer in a free form with little to no restrictions.
- **Dichotomous Questions:** The dichotomous question is generally a “yes/no” close-ended question. This question is generally used in case of the need of basic validation. It is the easiest form of a questionnaire.
- **Multiple-Choice Questions:** Multiple-choice questions are a close-ended question type in which a respondent has to select one (single select multiple choice question) or many (multiselect multiple choice question) responses from a given list of options. The multiple-choice question consists of an incomplete stem (question), right answer or answers, incorrect answers, close alternatives, and distractors. Of course, not all multiple-choice questions have all of the answer types. For example, you probably won’t have the wrong or right answers if you’re looking for customer opinion.
- **Scaling Questions:** These questions are based on the principles of the four measurement scales – nominal, ordinal, interval, and ratio. A few of the question types that utilize the fundamental properties of these scales are rank order questions, Likert scale questions, semantic differential scale questions, and stapel scale questions.
- **Pictorial Questions:** This question type is easy to use and encourages respondents to answer. It works similar to a multiple-choice question. Respondents are asked a question, and the answer choices are images. This helps respondents choose an answer quickly without over-thinking their answers, giving you more accurate data

Questionnaires can be administered or distributed in the following forms:

- **Computer Questionnaire:** In this type, respondents are sent the questionnaire via email or other online mediums. This method is generally cost-effective and time-efficient. Respondents can also answer at leisure. Without the pressure to answer immediately, responses may be more accurate. The disadvantage, however, is that respondents can easily ignore these questionnaires.
- **Telephone Questionnaire:** A researcher makes a phone call to a respondent to collect responses directly. Responses are quick once you have a respondent on the phone. However, a lot of times, the respondents are hesitant to give out much information over the phone. It is also an expensive way of conducting a questionnaire. You’re usually not able to collect as many responses as other types of questionnaires, so your sample may not represent the larger population.
- **In-House Questionnaire:** This type of questionnaire is conducted by a researcher that visits the home or workplace of the respondent. The advantage of this method is that the respondent is in a comfortable and natural environment, and in-depth data can be collected. The disadvantage though, is that it is expensive and slow to conduct.
- **Mail Questionnaire:** Mail questionnaires are starting to be obsolete but are still being used in some market research studies. This method involves a researcher sending a physical data collection questionnaire request to a respondent that can be filled in and sent back. The advantage of this method is that respondents can complete this on their own time to answer truthfully and entirely. The disadvantage is that this method is expensive and time-consuming. There is also a high risk of not being able to collect enough responses to make actionable insights from the data

Steps Involved in Questionnaire Design

1. Identify what you want to cover in a research questionnaire: Think about what your questionnaire is going to include before you start designing the look of it. Clarity of the topic is of utmost importance as this is the primary step in designing the questionnaire. Once you are clear on the purpose of the questionnaire, you can begin the design process.

2. Keep words simple and straightforward: The words or phrases you use while writing the questionnaire must be easy to understand. If the questions are unclear, the respondents may simply choose any answer and skew the data you collect.

3. Ask only one question at a time: At times, a researcher may be tempted to add two similar questions as one. This might seem like a good way to consolidate answers to similar questions, but it can actually confuse your respondents or lead to inaccurate data. If any of your questions contain the word “and,” take another look. This question likely has two parts, which can affect the quality of your data.

4. Be flexible with your options: While designing, the survey creator needs to be flexible in terms of “option choice” for the respondents. Sometimes the respondents may not necessarily want to choose from the answer options provided by the survey creator. An “other” option often helps keep respondents engaged in the survey.

5. Open-ended or closed-ended question, it’s a tough choice: The survey creator might end up in a situation where they need to make distinct choices between open or close-ended questions. The question type should be carefully chosen as it defines the tone and importance of asking the question in the first place.

If the questionnaire requires the respondents to elaborate on their thoughts, an open-ended question is the best choice. If the surveyor wants a specific response, then close-ended questions should be their primary choice. The key to asking closed-ended questions is to generate data that is easy to analyze and spot trends.

6. It is important to know your audience: A researcher should know their target audience. For example, if the target audience speaks mostly Spanish, sending the questionnaire in any other language would lower the response rate and accuracy of data. Something that may seem clear to you may be confusing to your respondents. Use simple language and terminology that your respondents will understand, and avoid technical jargon and industry-specific language that might confuse or frustrate your respondents.

To carry out market research, researchers need a representative sample that can be collected using one of the many sampling techniques. It is very important to plan and define these target respondents based on the demographics required.

7. Choosing the right tool is important: QuestionPro is a simple yet advanced survey software platform that the surveyors can use to create a questionnaire or choose from the already existing 300+ questionnaire templates.

Always save personal questions for last. Sensitive questions may cause respondents to drop off before completing. If these questions are at the end, the respondent has had time to become more comfortable with the interview and are more likely to answer personal or demographic questions.



Differences between a Questionnaire and a Survey

Still don't understand the difference between survey and a questionnaire?

	Questionnaire	Survey
Meaning	A questionnaire can is a research instrument that consists of a set of questions to collect information from a respondent.	A survey is a research method used for collecting data from a pre-defined group of respondents to gain information and insights on various topics of interest.
What is it?	Instrument of data collection	Process of collecting and analyzing that data
Characteristic	Subset of survey	Consists of questionnaire and survey design, logic and data collection
Time and Cost	Fast and cost-effective	Much slower and expensive
Use	Conducted on the target audience	Distributed or conducted on respondents
Questions	Close-ended and very rarely open-ended	Close-ended and open-ended
Answers	Objective	Subjective or objective

Derived from: <https://www.questionpro.com/blog/what-is-a-questionnaire/>