

Designing a Questionnaire for ESL Studies

I. What Is a Questionnaire in ESL Research?

A **questionnaire** is a structured tool used to gather information from participants by asking them a series of questions, often in written form. In ESL studies, questionnaires are commonly used to investigate:

- Language learning strategies
- Student attitudes
- Teacher perceptions
- Technology use in language learning

Why use a questionnaire?

- It's efficient and cost-effective.
- It can collect data from a large group.
- It allows both **quantitative** (e.g., Likert scales) and **qualitative** (e.g., open comments) data collection.

Reference:

Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methodologies*. Oxford University Press.

II. Basic Structure of a Good Questionnaire

1. Title and Introduction

- Give the questionnaire a **clear, descriptive title**.
- Write a short **introductory paragraph**:
 - Purpose of the study
 - Time it takes to complete
 - Confidentiality statement

2. Demographic Information

- Age, gender, level of English, educational background—only what's **relevant** to your study.

3. Core Questions

Organize questions by **topic or theme**. Use a mix of:

- **Closed-ended questions** (e.g., multiple choice, Likert scale)
- **Open-ended questions** (to gain detailed opinions)

4. Closing Question and Thank You Note

- Ask if participants have additional comments.
- Add a polite thank you message.

Reference:

Dörnyei & Taguchi (2009). *Questionnaires in Second Language Research: Construction, Administration, and Processing*. Routledge.

III. Types of Questions with Examples

1. Closed-ended questions

These questions can be answered with one word, like “yes” or “no” or can include a list of answer options that survey participants can choose from. The answers to this type of question are easy to analyze, as respondents can be segmented into the different answers they have given.

Do you have any children in your household?

Yes

No

[Skip](#)

2. Open-ended questions

Open-ended questions give respondents the option to answer with their own words.

For this reason, this type of question is great if you want to gather insights from your respondents and want to get more meaningful answers. That said, it can be tough to analyze the results of such questions – even if participants are giving similar answers, it takes time to segment users into groups.

We would love to hear if you have some feedback on why you chose that rating:

[OK](#)

[Skip](#)

3. Multiple choice survey questions

This type of survey question is the most popular one. With multiple-choice questions, you are giving respondents different options they can choose from. This type of question is easy to understand, requires little efforts from respondents and will give you easy-to-analyze answers.

It is good practice to include “Other” as an answer option. This way, if respondents do not find a suitable answer option for them, they can always choose “other” instead of randomly choosing an answer and affecting the accuracy of your results.

What is your current employment status?

- Employed
- Currently unemployed
- Retired, pensioner
- Housewife / househusband
- Student
- Other

Skip

4. Rating survey questions

Rating questions comes with a scale of answer options where participants can select the number/word that represents their opinion. With rating questions, it is recommended to give the survey participants some context and explain to them the meaning of the different ratings on the scale. For example, let’ say you are asking respondents “How much do you like travelling”: in this case, you would specify that 0 means “I don’t like travelling at all” while 10 means “I absolutely love travelling”. If you do not explain this, the participants may find that the numbers on your scale do not make much sense.

The following question is a great example of rating question, where users are asked how likely they are to recommend a company to their friends and colleagues on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is “not likely” and 10 is “very likely”:

How likely is it that you would recommend us to a friend or colleague? Where 0 is not likely and 10 is very likely:

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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5. Likert scale survey questions

When you wish to measure perceptions and opinions, you may choose the Likert scale.

A Likert scale is a question which is a five or seven-point scale. The options on the scale range from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” and this allows you to gain an understanding of your respondents’ opinion. The scale was invented in [1932 by Rensis Liker](#), an organizational psychologist and it is nowadays widely used in many different fields.

Reference:

Taken from <https://userreport.com/>

IV. Common Mistakes to Avoid

1. Leading Questions:

Leading questions are questions that suggest or "lead" the respondent toward a particular answer. They often reflect the researcher’s own assumptions or preferences and can introduce bias into your data.

Example of a Leading Question:

"Don't you think learning English through games is the best method?"

This question implies that:

- The respondent should agree.
- Games are better than other methods.

Better (Neutral) Version:

"What is your preferred method for learning English, and why?"

or

"How helpful do you find learning English through games?"

- Not helpful
- Slightly helpful
- Moderately helpful
- Very helpful
- Extremely helpful

2. Double-Barreled Questions:

Double-barreled questions are questions that **ask about two different things at the same time**, but only allow **one response**. This makes it unclear which part the respondent is answering.

Why Avoid Double-Barreled Questions?

- They confuse participants.
- They collect **unclear or invalid data**.
- They **combine multiple ideas**, making it hard to interpret the results.

Example of a Double-Barreled Question:

"Do you enjoy reading and writing in English?"

The participant might enjoy reading but not writing — or vice versa. There's no way to tell which one they're referring to.

Better (Split) Version:

"Do you enjoy reading in English?"

"Do you enjoy writing in English?"

Each idea is now **clearly addressed** with its own question, making it easier to analyze and more reliable.

Reference:

Mackey, A., & Gass, S. M. (2015). *Second Language Research: Methodology and Design*. Routledge.