

Tips For Writing Survey Questions

The best time for conducting survey research on library markets is rapidly approaching – January through March – when vacations, conferences, and management retreats are at a lull. To be ready for a January survey, you should begin thinking about and planning the survey effort now.

Whether the survey will be carried out by mail questionnaires, personal interviews, telephone interviews, or focus groups, you must create the questions ahead of time. Of all the different survey research techniques, the mail questionnaire requires the greatest care in constructing questions and laying out the final survey format. Survey techniques that rely on some sort of personal interaction allow you to explain some questions. But the mail questionnaire has to stand on its own merit – you won't be able to stand by and explain what you were *really* asking.

Before beginning to create your survey questions, you must first identify the objectives for the research effort. Objectives should clearly indicate the kind of information needed. Do you want to know how people use your library? How they locate information? What they know about your services? What they think about the library products? What they think about library services? Are you looking for enhancement ideas? Arriving at a set of objectives is the critical first step for creating survey questions. You should have only two or three objectives for a short, 25-question survey. With more objectives you will need to conduct a longer survey with many more questions.

With the statements of your objectives in hand, you can begin the process of creating the questions. There are two basic types of questions: open-ended questions, which the respondents can freely answer in their own words, and close-ended questions, which provide a set selection of responses.

Both types of questions have advantages and disadvantages. Open-ended questions such as, "What changes to the article reprint service would you like to see instituted?" allow free responses, without the constraints of prespecified categories. People can use their own words to explain their opinions. However, when it comes time to tabulate the responses, you'll have to code each unique

response and tally up common responses. Because open-ended questions encourage individual descriptions, there won't be much similarity among responses, so the application of statistical measures will be difficult. In fact, when organizations employ surveys with open-ended questions, they normally list actual responses in an appendix to the survey report so that readers can review the responses themselves.

The primary advantage to an open-ended question is that it does permit creative responses. This is particularly important for surveys that have exploratory objectives that seek verbatim responses to give the flavor of people's ideas, and that use questions for which the list of possible answers is so numerous that it's impossible to foresee all possible responses. For instance, "What are some of the reasons that you decided to request an online computer search?" There are so many possible responses that it is best to let respondents answer in their own words. Of course, the respondent's ability to clearly articulate their responses and their willingness to compose a written answer will affect the contribution of the response to the survey's objectives. Hence the reason why, when asked to list services they would like to see the library offer, most respondents will skip the question. People don't want to spend a lot of time completing a survey, and besides, they don't know what the library can offer – it's the librarian's job to offer suggestions for the respondent's reaction in a survey.

Overall, the disadvantages of open-ended questions - time consuming tabulation and lack of statistical accuracy - outweigh the advantages, and it is advisable to close up as many questions as possible. Close-ended questions come in a variety of forms, but they share a common feature – the person taking the survey is given a choice of responses. There are three types of close-ended questions:

- 1.) Questions that ask for a single response to be selected from a list of responses:

Do you remember seeing this announcement in the lobby last week?

Yes No Not sure, I may have.

Pearls of Wisdom

If your local office supply store doesn't seem to stock the graphic supplies you know must exist somewhere, then there is a perfect catalog for you. It's got a little bit of everything, including kits for making marble paper! To receive a catalog, write to FLAX Art & Design, 1699 Market Street, P.O. Box 7216, San Francisco, CA 94120.

Recycled paper is a hot resource. A free, 12-page resource guide entitled "Recycled Paper," provides answers to common questions about recycled paper and is now available from Craig Jolley, Zellerbach, 3131 Newark Drive, Miamisburg, OH 45342, or call 513/495-6000.

If you don't already receive the Upstart catalog, you may want to get your name on the mailing list. The catalog concentrates on slogans and library materials suitable for children's displays, but it usually includes a promotion item or two that could be used in an organizational library setting. The catalog is free. Write to Upstart at 32 East Avenue, Hagerstown, MD 21740, or call 800/448-4887.

The American Library Association is offering a new brochure on academic libraries to acquaint academic markets with the variety of services and sources available to them at the campus library. The brochure is available in 50 copy packets for \$10 (Item #A130) from ALA Graphics, 50 East Huron Street, Chicago, IL 60611-2795.

If your suggestion box looks a little tattered, or if you want to replace the shoe box that has seen its best days, the G. Neil Company offers some attractive alternatives. For descriptive information write to G. Neil Company, 3285 S.W. 11th Avenue, P. O. Box 350630, Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33335, or phone 800/999-9111.

It's the holiday season again, and time to send holiday greetings to your information center customers. If the thought of sending out greetings at a time when everyone is overwhelmed with "Best Wishes" is too much to take, consider sending out birthday cards instead. A birthday wish is personal and easy to manage. Your personnel department should be able to provide a list of birthdays for the entire company. Use a computer-based database program or appointment schedule to keep track of dates. Buy the birthday cards in large numbers and have them pre-signed by library staff members so the cards are ready to go. You'll be pleasantly surprised at the good will and visibility a birthday card creates for your library. Consider including a small promotion "gift" with the card.

Here's a promotion idea that can help introduce a personal sales campaign for a new or existing information service. Print on a piece of paper a large letter of the alphabet with the word "month" after it. Print it on bright paper, and

**L
MONTH**

accompany it with copy that teases the reader. "L Month. What is it? When is it? For the answers to these and other questions . . ." You can finish the statement with a phone number to call for an appointment or with a date and time for a presentation. You might want to select a

letter for the month that ties into the library service or product that you want to promote.

Putting together an annual report and want samples of different papers to consider? Phone 800/338-6077 (in Canada 404/594-0357) for the name of your local Neenah paper representative who can supply you with Neenah's annual report sample booklet, "Paper Guide to Uncoated Success". The sample includes Neenah's recycled paper line, Environment.

Speaking of annual reports, the 1988 Annual Report of the Liverpool Public Library gets your editor's vote for the most creative and most interesting report ever! Presented and written in the format of the typical popular news tabloid, the report captures attention with headlines like, "I was used by 415,279 People - An Exposé," and employs upbeat text that mimics the best advertising clichés along with pictures. The report is photocopied - but who cares, it's great reading! And it communicates what the library offers to its marketplace. For your copy, write to The Liverpool Public Library, 310 Tulip Street, Liverpool, NY 13088-4997, or phone 315/457-0310.

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Back issues and samples are available at \$9.00 for U.S. and Canada. Overseas orders add \$1.50. Cost of sample issues will be applied to first subscription order. Additional binders are available at \$4.50 per binder.

Missing issues must be reported within 3 months of issue date. Missing issue requested after this time will be supplied at the regular back issue price.

Survey Questions . . . continued from page 1

2.) Close-ended questions that allow multiple responses:

Please check any of the following if you feel they describe the library facility.

- Quiet Relaxing
 Messy Intimidating

3.) Questions that rely on a rating scale:

How interested are you in attending lunchtime sessions that review software programs?

- Very interested
 Somewhat interested
 Not interested

While closed-ended questions are easier to answer, tabulate, and analyze, they are more difficult to develop. It is advisable to do exploratory work to be sure that all potentially important response alternatives are offered. And you must make sure that questions are well written so that everyone arrives at the same interpretation. Here are a few guidelines to keep in mind:

1. KISS (Keep It Simple Stupid) This blunt reminder tells it like it should be. Don't write complicated questions. Survey questions should be easy to understand. The instructions should also be easy to follow and they should tell people how to indicate their responses.

2. Keep *and* and *or* out of the questions. If a question uses either of these two conjunctions, you won't be able to determine to which part of the question the person was responding. For instance, "Do you use the library for reading and research?" Break such double questions into single questions so you'll be able to utilize the resulting data.

3. Always construct positive questions. Negatives are very difficult for people to decipher. Questions such as "Do you never use the library for research?" will yield fewer accurate responses than will the question "Do you use the library for research?"

4. Recognize potentially embarrassing questions and keep them out of the survey. Questions that solicit responses that are based on what is socially acceptable behavior rather than on the truth are not going to add anything to your survey results. For instance, asking if people use the card catalog to locate books will yield the socially acceptable answer of *yes* - because since kindergarten we've been taught to look up books through the card catalog.

5. Ask questions that yield information that can't be gotten somewhere else. If you want to know how many people finished high school, ask the personnel department. Use your survey to collect unique information that will contribute to research objectives.

6. Refrain from asking a question just because you are interested in what the response will be. If the question doesn't contribute to an objective, then drop it. When people can determine a survey's purpose, they are more apt to respond. Random questions diminish a survey's respectability, and the result can be a lower response rate.

7. Remove all library jargon from the survey questions. While you may understand what "reference service" is, many people do not. In fact, you may want to conduct preliminary research to learn the terminology being used by the targeted survey group. How does this group commonly refer to the information service? Do they recognize what an "SDI service" is, or would a "computerized tracking alert service" be a better description to use in your question?

8. If you must ask questions whose answers rely on memory, keep the timeframe to the recent past. Do you remember what you ate for dinner three weeks ago? Probably not. And so it follows that most people will not be able to recall the number of times they have used the library during the last six months.

9. Be aware that not all respondents may qualify to answer certain questions. Yet many people will try to answer questions even though they don't qualify. The solution is to create filter questions that separate respondents into groups; those who qualify to respond, and those who should be directed to skip ahead to the next applicable question.

When constructing multiple-choice questions, the number and type of response categories can affect the outcome of the survey, especially the results of rating scale questions. There are two schools of thought about the number of responses that should be included for rating scale questions. One school says to have an even number of responses. An even number eliminates people who always choose the middle response. It forces people to make a choice. Of course, there are people who, rather than make a choice, will skip the question. The other school of thought recommends an odd number of responses, so people who don't feel strongly have a neutral

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position to select. This approach assures you that the respondent read the question - but they simply don't have strong feelings one way or the other. Personally, your editor has found that keeping the number of responses in a rating scale question to the odd number of five yields the best results. Five categories cover all the bases: strongly agree, probably agree, probably disagree, strongly disagree, and no opinion.

The five categories just used are an example of a Likert Scale. This scale allows respondents to indicate attitudes toward complex issues, such as library services, that have many facets. A Likert Scale uses statements to indicate degrees of agreement and is composed of evenly balanced number of negative and positive statements complemented by a neutral position. Constructing Likert Scale responses can be tricky, but most research books have lists of scales that you can use. Just be sure that you select a scale with terms that correspond to the question.

There are people who answer surveys from the last page forward, so be sure that each question stands on its own merit. Do not assume that questions will be read in order. Also, you may want put the easiest questions in the beginning of the survey. Easy-to-answer questions builds confidence that the survey will be quick and easy to complete. (Of course it won't matter for people who start from the back!)

The physical layout of a mail questionnaire can make or break its success in gathering information. If the questionnaire looks dense because questions are for example, in small type, it will probably be trashed. Arrange the questions so that all them will be recognized and answered. And beware of the lower left corner. Your editor knows of a survey that had to invalidate one question because the question appeared in the lower left corner of the first page - where many people place their thumb when holding a piece of paper in their left hand.

Regardless of how carefully you prepare your survey questions or how little time you have to administer the survey, always **pretest** survey questions in their final format. Ask several people who represent the targeted survey group to complete the survey questions. See how long it takes them to complete the questions and note whether they interpret everything the way you intended. Use their comments to refine the survey and to eliminate ambiguities, jargon, and non-essential questions.

Your editor realizes that the most difficult part of conducting a survey is creating the questions. There's no list of ready-made questions from which you can generate

your survey. The suggestions in this article however, should help you create the best survey for your research needs. Oh, and remember, formal survey research is not the only way to collect information. Asking for feedback on a daily basis can help you monitor how you, your staff, and the library are doing.

Inside Scoop . . .

If you're trying to build your customer base and want examples of what other libraries use to promote their information services, plan on attending the SLA Library Management Division's Marketing Swap & Shop at the SLA San Antonio 1991 annual conference. The format has been redesigned from last year so that a large number of attendees will be able to comfortably attend without pandemonium. The Swap & Shop will be held on Tuesday, June 11th, from 1 to 5 p.m., and will be a low-cost ticketed event. Each attendee will receive a packet of sample marketing materials at the door. All materials submitted to the session will be displayed with contact information. For the Swap and Shop to be successful, it must receive samples from YOU! Send at least 100 copies of your promotion materials to SLA Marketing Swap and Shop, Kathy Hubbard, Brown and Root, Information Resource Center, 4100 Clinton Drive, Houston, TX 77020.

Promoting your library involves projecting an image of confidence and success. The Marketing Section of the SLA Library Management Division has arranged for Dr. Adele Scheele, career expert on the cable television channel, CNBC, and author of the national best-seller "Skills for Success," and the monthly "Career Strategies" column for *Working Woman* magazine, to present a success clinic for information professionals at the 1991 annual conference in June.

Call for Library Guide Samples

The March issue of *Marketing Treasures* will feature tips for writing and producing "user friendly" library/information center guides - just in time for April's National Library Week. If you would like to share your guide with *Marketing Treasures'* readers, or if you would like ideas on how to improve your guide, send a copy of your guide to the *Marketing Treasures'* office (address on page 2), c/o March Guide Issue.

Worth Its Weight in Gold

This issue of *Marketing Treasures* includes your new Cut & Paste clip-art sheet. The sheet includes original artwork in camera-ready form. If you would like previously published clip-art sheets, ask for the Cut & Paste Clip-Art Order Form. It shows all the clip-art sheets that have appeared in *Marketing Treasures*.

Say Goodbye . . . If your library staff supports personal file management software, then this graphic will help to advertise your expertise.

Announcing A New Arrival. Here's an image that can be used to enhance your new acquisition list .

A Message to Top Management. . . This may look a little plain, but it gets the message across. Try enlarging the entire block of text so it takes up most of an 8 1/2" x 11" sheet of paper. Don't put anything else on the paper except the library's phone number. This is designed to be a teaser advertising flyer. If you put additional information around the message, it will lose the impact and wind up looking cluttered. Print copies on brightly colored paper (remember you want visual impact - so avoid light pastels) to insert into your newsletter, information packages, book loans, article reprints, competitive intelligence reports . . . any products that top management may happen to see. Be prepared to supply additional information about your services over the phone or in a auxiliary handout.

Business Runs On Information. This slogan could be the focus of an awareness campaign. The analogy of information to gasoline offers many possibilities . . . "Run Out of Gas . . . Fill Up At The Library . . . Tune-up Your Reports With Info From the Library." It's easy to think of related slogans for a campaign; just scan gas company ads for ideas. For a couple of stand-up gas pump displays, photocopy and paste the clip-art gas pump onto a piece of cardboard. Put an easel flap on the back (so it will stand up) and use some magic markers to place accent color on the gas pump.

Information Packaged With Pride. So many times the support staff of the library never get the credit due them. Here's an image that can be easily photocopied, signed, and inserted into library service products.

The Librarian's In . . . The Library Provides Referral Services. The text can be used on either graphic image. Enlarge the clip-art to make signs or posters.

Promotion Gems

Recycled paper is gaining popularity as people become more concerned with environmental issues. But the term "recycled" covers a broad spectrum of definitions based on EPA standards and individual paper mill standards. Here are some common definitions to watch for when you are working with recycled papers.

Post-consumer waste refers to any product that has been used for its intended purpose and then discarded. This includes office paper and curbside newspaper collections. Paper made entirely from post-consumer waste is not currently available for every use. Paper mills often mix post-consumer was with other types of waste paper and/or virgin pulp. Recycled papers will carry a statement indicating the percentage of post-consumer waste used in making the paper.

De-inked grade paper includes any paper waste that was printed, discarded, and collected for recycling. This may include printed waste from published or unsold books. In the recycling process the ink has been removed with chemicals. There are papers available that do not go through the de-inking process. These papers will display little blue fibers in the finished paper surface.

Many white papers go through a bleaching process to achieve their brightness. Because some bleaching processes cause the formation of toxic compounds, many paper mills footnote their recycled-paper statements to say that the bright white papers are not environmentally friendly.

Paper mills that offer recycled papers include the following. Contact them for the name of their local representative so you can get samples of their recycled papers.

James River 145 James Way Southampton, PA 18966	Cross Pointe Paper Corp. South Smith Street West Carrollton, OH 45449
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Neenah Paper Neenah, WI 54956 (see <i>Pearls</i> , page 2, for the phone number)	Conservatree Paper Company 10 Lombard Street, Ste. 250 San Francisco, CA 94111 (They developed the recycled- paper ranking system)
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And in case you're wondering, the 3M Company does have recycled versions of their "Post-it Notes." Contact 3M Commercial Office Supply Div., Dept CS89-02C, P.O. 33600, St. Paul, MN 55133 (612/736-0874) for more information.

Sparkling Reviews

Desktop Publishing By Design. Ronnie Shushan and Don Wright. Microsoft Press, Redmond, Washington, 1989. ISBN: 1-555615-134-9 \$24.95

Owning a computer system capable of generating graphics and publications doesn't ensure that the operator will produce stunning visual communication pieces. In fact, your editor has witnessed such systems help people produce more ill-inspired promotional pieces faster. If you have a background in graphics, an eye for detail, and experience in a desktop publishing program, owning this book will be a waste. For the rest of us, it's a must.

The contents can be summarized as three primary sections: elements of design, a desktop publishing portfolio, and hands-on projects. It's true that all the examples and tips use PageMaker 3.0, but the notation on the cover, "Aldus PageMaker Edition," leads your editor to believe that other editions are available that use different software packages in the examples. If this a wrong assumption, and you don't use PageMaker, this book is still worth the money.

In the first section, the authors take the reader through a series of questions and considerations. The reader is encouraged to decide the type of communication piece that needs to be created. Identifying the audience, infor-

mation to be included, and the image to be projected helps to establish a baseline for the design and layout of the final piece.

The next several chapters walk the reader through the principles of design; typography, page layout using a grid system, and planning and creating the final piece. Sprinkled through the section are examples of printed materials that demonstrate the points being made.

Everything you need to understand about composing effective communication materials is here in black and white. The only thing missing is the secret to creativity, and here the authors try to overcome that deficiency by supplying a healthy selection of examples with short annotations about the graphics and design points. Communication pieces include flyers, posters, folders, brochures, and newsletters. The last section of the book includes a number of progressively difficult "now-it's-your-turn" projects. This part of the book may be of limited value if you don't use PageMaker.

Owning a desktop publishing computer system is only the first step toward producing attractive, readable communication pieces. The second step is learning how design elements work together – and here this book will help you. The third step is possessing the creative ability to apply design elements – sorry, for this step, there is no book!

The Crystal Ball

December 1 "The Information Broker's Seminar." Program offered by Sue Ruge in Seattle, Washington. Contact: 415/649-9743.

December 12 "The Basics of Design Using Desktop Publishing." A Padgett & Thompson seminar in Washington, D.C. Contact: 800/255-4141.

January 10, 1991 "Focus Groups: An Introduction." A Burke Institute seminar in New York. Contact: 800/544-7373.

January 20 "Fee-Based Service for the Information Entrepreneur." Seminar by Alice Warner. "Maximizing Client Satisfaction" by Arlene Sirkin. Both half

day workshops will be at the Special Libraries Association (SLA) Winter Education Conference in Washington, D.C. Contact: Joy Lerner 202/234-4700.

January 21 "Mainstreaming the Library." Seminar by Alice Warner. "Budgeting Strategies." Seminar by Barbara Robinson. "How to Maximize Resources Through Marketing Planning." Seminar by Arlene Sirkin. At the SLA Winter Education Conference in Washington, D.C. Contact: Joy Lerner 202/234-4700.

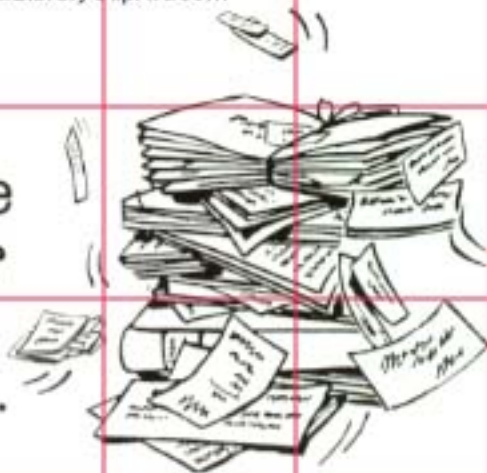
January 22 "Intrapreneuring." Seminar by Alice Warner at SLA Winter Education Conference in Washington, D.C. Contact: Joy Lerner 202/234-4700.

March 5 "Questionnaire Construction Workshop." A Burke Institute seminar in Chicago. Contact: 800/544-7373.

March 8 "Mainstreaming the Special Library." Seminar by Alice Warner for SLA in Kansas City, Missouri. Contact: Joy Lerner 202/234-4700.

March 20-23 Public Library Association National Conference in San Diego. Program topics include "Retailing in Libraries," "Marketing for Beginners," and "Cost Finding." Contact: 800/545-2433 ext. 5PLA.

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about personal file
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24 & 16 pt. Am. Typewriter

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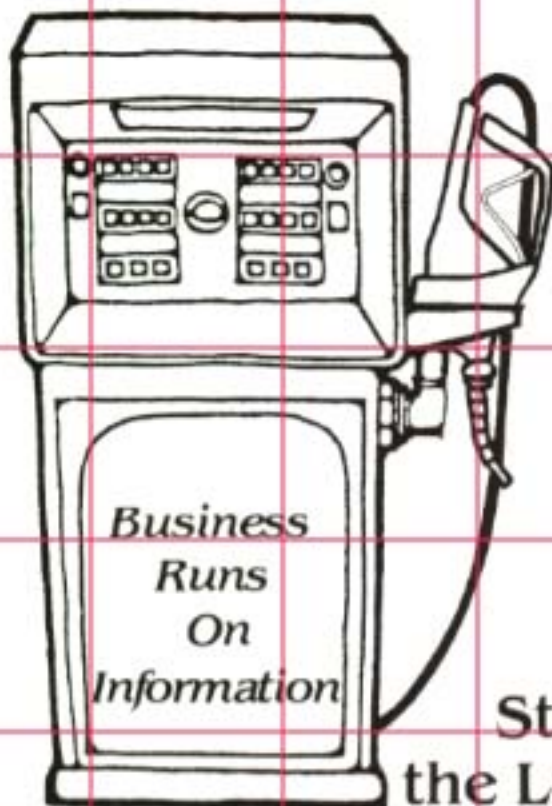
A New Arrival . . .

20 pt. Century Italic Expanded

**A Message To
Top Management
Concerned With
The Bottom Line**

The Information Center
Can Locate the
Information
You Need . . . TODAY!

20 pt. Bockman Med. 18 pt. Avant Garde Med.

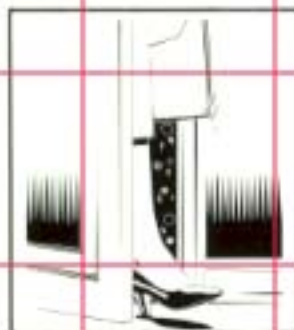


18 pt. Benquet Italic
24 pt. Benquet Med.

**Stop by
the Library
For Premium**

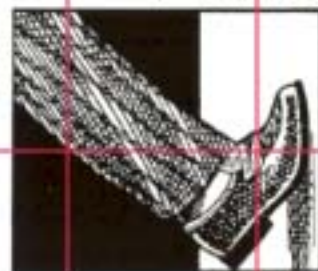


14 pt. Times Bold Italic



18 pt. Friz Quadrata

**The
Librarian's In**



16 pt. Computer

**The Library
Provides
Referral
Services**