

43 THINGS THAT SURVEY EXPERTS NEED TO KNOW



Learn how to avoid the big traps even experts fall into with quant research.



Pollfish

Introduction

Designing effective surveys is a critical skill for gathering accurate and meaningful data. This guide is tailored for Pollfish users who aim to master the art of survey design. By understanding and addressing common pitfalls, you can ensure that your surveys yield reliable insights that drive informed decision-making.

Whether you're refining your existing skills or seeking advanced techniques, this guide provides the tools and knowledge needed to enhance your survey design process.

Get the insights you need, with survey responses starting at \$0.95.

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43 Things Survey Experts Need To Know (Critical Mistakes to Avoid)

1. Double-Barreled Questions (completely destroys results) 🗨️

Double-barreled questions, which combine two separate issues into one query, can completely destroy the validity of survey results. When respondents are asked to answer a question that addresses multiple topics, their responses become ambiguous and unreliable. This leads to data that cannot be accurately interpreted, as it's impossible to discern which part of the question the respondent was addressing. To ensure clarity and accuracy, each question should focus on a single issue.

2. Ambiguous Question Wording (dilutes clarity of insights) 💬

Ambiguous question wording significantly dilutes the clarity of insights gathered from a survey. When questions are not clearly defined or are open to multiple interpretations, respondents may misinterpret them, leading to inconsistent and unreliable answers. Clear, concise, and specific language is crucial for obtaining precise and actionable data, ensuring that all respondents understand and answer questions in the same way.

3. Excessive Survey Length (leads to respondent exhaustion) 📄

Excessive survey length is a common issue that leads to respondent exhaustion, which can result in lower completion rates and less reliable data. When surveys are too long, respondents may become fatigued or lose interest, leading to rushed or incomplete answers. Keeping surveys concise and to the point helps maintain engagement and ensures higher quality and more accurate responses.

4. Leading Questions (introduces biases in responses) →

Leading questions, which suggest a particular answer or viewpoint, introduce biases in responses and compromise the integrity of the survey data. By framing questions in a way that influences respondents' answers, researchers risk obtaining skewed results that reflect the question's bias rather than the respondents' true opinions. Neutral, unbiased phrasing is essential for collecting genuine and representative data.

5. Vague Response Options (creates uncertainty in answers) ?

Vague response options create uncertainty in answers and undermine the reliability of survey data. When respondents are presented with unclear or non-specific choices, they may struggle to select the option that best reflects their views, leading to inconsistent and imprecise responses. Providing well-defined and distinct response options ensures that data collected is accurate and meaningful.

6. Limited Answer Choices (constrains respondent feedback) ⚡

Limited answer choices constrain respondent feedback and fail to capture the full spectrum of opinions and experiences. When respondents are forced to choose from a narrow set of options, they may not be able to provide answers that accurately reflect their views. Offering a broader range of choices, including an "Other" option with space for elaboration, allows for more comprehensive and representative data collection.

7. Technical Jargon (alienates non-specialist participants) 🧩

Technical jargon in survey questions can alienate non-specialist participants, leading to confusion and inaccurate responses. When complex or specialized language is used, respondents who are not familiar with the terminology may misinterpret questions or provide incorrect answers. Using simple, everyday language ensures that all participants can understand and respond accurately, regardless of their background.

8. Undefined Survey Purpose (renders findings insignificant) 🎯

An undefined survey purpose renders the findings insignificant, as it becomes unclear what the survey aims to achieve or measure. Without a clear objective, the questions may lack focus and fail to gather relevant data. Clearly defining the survey's purpose helps guide the development of questions and ensures that the collected data is meaningful and actionable.

9. Inconsistent Scales (complicates comparative analysis) ⚖️

Inconsistent rating scales complicate comparative analysis and can lead to confusion among respondents. When different questions use varying scales (e.g., 1-5 for one question and 1-10 for another), it becomes difficult to compare responses and draw meaningful conclusions. Standardizing rating scales throughout the survey helps maintain consistency and simplifies data analysis.

10. Frequent Open-Ends (overburdens respondents) 🖋️

Frequent open-ended questions can overburden respondents, leading to survey fatigue and incomplete answers. While open-ended questions provide rich qualitative data, they require more time and effort to answer. Balancing open-ended questions with closed-ended ones helps maintain respondent engagement and ensures a higher completion rate.

11. Unclear Instructions (causes participant frustration) 🙄

Unclear instructions cause participant frustration and can result in inaccurate responses or survey abandonment. When respondents do not understand how to complete a survey or interpret its questions, they may provide incorrect answers or give up altogether. Providing clear, concise instructions at the beginning and throughout the survey helps guide respondents and improves data quality.

12. Absolute Wording in Questions (limits nuanced feedback) ✓

Absolute wording in questions, such as "always" or "never," limits nuanced feedback and can skew results. Respondents may struggle to answer such definitive questions

accurately, as their experiences and opinions are often more nuanced. Using more flexible wording allows for a broader range of responses and captures the complexity of respondents' views.

13. Large Matrix Structures (overwhelms respondents)

Large matrix structures can overwhelm respondents, making it difficult to provide thoughtful and accurate answers. When surveys present extensive grids with numerous items and scales, respondents may become fatigued or confused, leading to lower quality data. Simplifying matrix questions and breaking them into smaller, more manageable sections can help maintain respondent engagement and data integrity.

14. Absence of Neutral Responses (biases results)

The absence of neutral responses can bias survey results by forcing respondents to choose a side, even when they have no strong opinion. This can lead to inaccurate data that does not accurately reflect the true sentiments of the respondents. Including a neutral option, such as "Neither agree nor disagree," allows for a more accurate representation of respondent views.

15. Cultural Insensitivity (offends diverse participants)

Culturally insensitive content can offend diverse participants and result in disengagement or skewed responses. Questions that fail to consider cultural differences or include biased language can alienate respondents from different backgrounds. Ensuring cultural sensitivity in survey design helps to create an inclusive environment and gather accurate, representative data from all participants.

16. Disregarded Logic Sequence (disrupts flow and results)

Disregarding survey logic sequence disrupts the flow and results of the survey, leading to confusion and incomplete data. Logical sequencing ensures that questions are presented in a coherent order, allowing respondents to provide

consistent and relevant answers. Proper survey logic enhances respondent understanding and improves the quality of the collected data.

17. Missing Survey Objectives (leads to unclear outcomes) ❌

Missing survey objectives lead to unclear outcomes, as the survey lacks direction and focus. Without well-defined objectives, it becomes difficult to design questions that gather relevant data or to interpret the results meaningfully. Clearly outlining the survey's goals helps ensure that the collected data is useful and aligns with the intended purpose.

18. No Time Estimates (increases dropout rates) ⌚

The absence of time estimates increases dropout rates, as respondents are unaware of how long the survey will take to complete. Providing an estimated completion time at the beginning of the survey helps set expectations and encourages respondents to commit to finishing it. Clear time estimates can improve completion rates and the reliability of the collected data.

19. Vague Time Frames in Queries (confuses respondents) 🕒

Vague time frames in queries confuse respondents and lead to inconsistent answers. When questions reference unclear periods, such as "recently" or "often," respondents may interpret these terms differently, resulting in varied responses. Using specific time frames, like "in the past month" or "weekly," ensures that all respondents understand the question in the same way.

20. Poor Response Categories (interpretative challenges) 😞

Poorly defined response categories create interpretative challenges for respondents, leading to unreliable data. When response options are not clearly distinct or overlap, respondents may struggle to choose the most accurate answer. Providing well-defined and mutually exclusive categories ensures clarity and improves the accuracy of the responses.

21. Dictionary Words (professionalism ruins authenticity) 📖

Using overly formal or dictionary words can ruin the authenticity of a survey, making it feel impersonal and detached. Respondents may find such language intimidating or difficult to understand, leading to disengagement or incorrect answers. Using conversational and relatable language helps create a more approachable survey and encourages genuine responses.

22. Disorganized Question Order (confounds respondents) ↻

Disorganized question order confounds respondents and disrupts the logical flow of the survey. When questions are presented in a haphazard sequence, respondents may become confused or provide inconsistent answers. Structuring questions in a logical, coherent order helps maintain respondent engagement and ensures that the data collected is reliable and meaningful.

23. Predictable Screening (vulnerable to manipulation) 🔍

Predictable screening questions are vulnerable to manipulation, as respondents can easily identify and respond strategically to qualify for the survey. This can lead to biased samples and unreliable data. Designing screening questions that are less predictable and varied helps ensure that only genuinely qualified respondents participate, improving the quality of the data.

24. Forced Rankings (not suitable in some contexts) 🏆

Forced rankings require respondents to rank items in a specific order, which may not be suitable for all contexts. This question type can be difficult and time-consuming, leading to frustration and unreliable data. In cases where ranking is inappropriate, using rating scales or other formats may provide more accurate and meaningful insights.

25. Excessive Capitalization (can be off-putting) 📄

Excessive capitalization in survey questions can be off-putting to respondents, as it may come across as shouting or overly aggressive. This can negatively impact

respondent engagement and the overall survey experience. Using standard capitalization practices helps create a more pleasant and approachable survey, encouraging respondents to provide thoughtful and accurate answers.

26. Lack of Progress Indicators (leads to disengagement)

A lack of progress indicators can lead to participant disengagement, as respondents may become frustrated or uncertain about how much of the survey remains. Progress indicators provide a visual representation of completion status, helping respondents gauge their progress and encouraging them to continue. Including clear progress indicators improves completion rates and data quality.

27. Non-Random Answer Sequencing (can skew result)

Non-random answer sequencing can taint survey results, as it may introduce order bias or lead respondents to choose certain options based on their position. Randomizing answer choices helps mitigate this bias and ensures that responses are not influenced by the order in which options are presented. This practice enhances the reliability and validity of the data collected.

28. Biased Imagery/Graphics (can influence responses)

Biased imagery or graphics in surveys can influence respondents' answers by subtly suggesting a preferred response. Visual elements that depict certain opinions or behaviors in a favorable or unfavorable light can lead to skewed data. Using neutral and unbiased visuals helps ensure that responses are based on the content of the questions rather than the influence of accompanying graphics.

29. Inconsistent Terminology (creates confusion)

Inconsistent terminology throughout a survey creates confusion and can lead to misinterpretation of questions. When different terms are used to refer to the same concept, respondents may become unsure about the meaning of the questions, resulting in inconsistent answers. Maintaining consistent terminology ensures clarity and improves the accuracy of the responses.

30. Overestimated Expertise (misalignment with audience) 🧠

Overestimating the expertise of survey respondents can misalign questions with the audience's knowledge level, leading to confusion and inaccurate data. When questions assume a higher level of understanding than respondents possess, they may struggle to provide meaningful answers. Tailoring questions to the appropriate expertise level ensures that all respondents can accurately and confidently participate.

31. Insufficient Open-End Guidelines (vague responses) 📝

Insufficient guidelines for open-ended questions can lead to vague or irrelevant responses, making it difficult to extract meaningful insights. Providing clear instructions and examples helps respondents understand what type of information is being sought, leading to more detailed and useful answers. Clear guidelines enhance the quality and richness of qualitative data.

32. Ambiguity in Interpretation (results in varied answers) ?

Ambiguity in question interpretation results in varied and inconsistent answers, compromising the reliability of survey data. When questions are open to multiple interpretations, respondents may understand and answer them differently. Ensuring that questions are clear and unambiguous helps collect accurate and comparable responses, leading to more reliable insights.

33. Assumed Linear Attitude Progression (oversimplifies truth)



Assuming linear attitude progression oversimplifies the complexity of respondents' views and experiences. People's opinions and behaviors often do not follow a straightforward path, and forcing them into a linear framework can lead to inaccurate representations. Recognizing and accommodating the non-linear nature of attitudes ensures a more accurate and nuanced understanding of the data.

34. Non-Adaptive Language (fails to cater to diverse groups)

Non-adaptive language in surveys fails to cater to the diverse backgrounds and experiences of respondents, leading to misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Using inclusive and adaptable language ensures that questions are accessible and relevant to all participants, regardless of their cultural or linguistic background. This practice enhances the accuracy and representativeness of survey data.

35. Inadequate Sample Size (reduces statistical significance)

An inadequate sample size reduces the statistical significance of survey findings, making it difficult to draw reliable conclusions. Small sample sizes may not accurately represent the broader population, leading to results that are less generalizable. Ensuring a sufficiently large sample size improves the robustness and credibility of the survey data, allowing for more confident decision-making.

36. Insufficient Subgroup Sizes (limits segment analysis)

Insufficient subgroup sizes limit the ability to conduct meaningful segment analysis and draw insights about specific populations. When subgroups are too small, it becomes challenging to detect significant differences or trends within those groups. Ensuring adequate representation of all relevant subgroups enables more detailed and accurate analysis, providing deeper insights into the data.

37. Culturally Specific References (not universal)

Culturally specific references in survey questions may not resonate universally, leading to confusion or disengagement among respondents from different backgrounds. Such references can alienate participants who are unfamiliar with the context, resulting in inaccurate or irrelevant responses. Using culturally neutral language and examples helps ensure that questions are understood and relevant to all respondents.

38. Undefined Detail Expectations (inconsistent depth) 🔍

Undefined expectations for response detail lead to inconsistent depth and quality in answers, particularly for open-ended questions. Without clear guidance, respondents may provide overly brief or excessively detailed responses, making it difficult to analyze and compare data. Providing specific instructions on the desired level of detail helps ensure more consistent and useful responses.

39. Ignored Question Order Impact (influences response bias) 🤖

Ignoring the impact of question order can influence response bias and affect the reliability of survey data. The sequence in which questions are presented can shape respondents' perceptions and answers, leading to unintended biases. Carefully considering and structuring the order of questions helps mitigate these effects and ensures more accurate and unbiased data collection.

40. Survey-Objective Misalignment (irrelevant data) 🎯

Survey-objective misalignment leads to the collection of irrelevant data, as questions fail to address the core goals of the research. When the survey content does not align with its intended purpose, the resulting data may be unhelpful or misleading. Clearly defining objectives and ensuring that questions are directly related to these goals improves the relevance and usefulness of the survey findings.

41. Premature Data Analysis (before data cleansing) 📊

Premature data analysis, conducted before proper data cleansing, can lead to incorrect conclusions and unreliable insights. Raw survey data often contains errors, inconsistencies, and outliers that need to be addressed before analysis. Ensuring thorough data cleaning and validation processes before analysis helps produce accurate and credible results.

42. Logical Inconsistencies (undermines reliability) 🛠️

Unchecked logical inconsistencies in survey design or responses undermine the reliability of the data. Logical flaws in question sequencing or contradictory answers

from respondents can indicate issues that need resolution. Implementing thorough checks and validations to identify and address these inconsistencies helps ensure the integrity and reliability of the survey results.

43. Lack of team communication (misses perspectives)

Conducting surveys in a silo can result in missing valuable perspectives and insights from different team members. This lack of collaboration can lead to a narrow understanding of the data, reduced innovation, and potentially flawed conclusions. By fostering open communication and teamwork, diverse viewpoints can be incorporated, enriching the overall survey process and outcomes.

Conclusion

By applying the principles and best practices outlined in this guide, you can significantly improve the quality and reliability of your surveys on Pollfish. Avoiding common pitfalls and refining your survey design techniques will lead to more accurate data and actionable insights. Continually evolving your approach to survey design ensures that your research remains relevant, reliable, and impactful. Keep these strategies in mind as you create and analyze surveys to achieve the best possible results.

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