

TEN QUESTIONS THE SRC SUGGESTS YOU ASK YOURSELF WHEN DEVELOPING A QUESTIONNAIRE:

1. What is the fundamental thing or things that you expect/want to learn from the survey?
2. Are the questions you have asked likely to generate the information you need to answer the question(s) of interest?
3. Are you being parsimonious - asking only the the things you need to ask? To help with this, ask yourself, is the answer to this question something I need to know to get at the fundamental things I need to learn from the survey or is it just something nice to know? You are asking for a person's most precious resource (their time), be respectful of it and don't ask for any more of it than you absolutely need.
4. Are you asking about things that are "actionable?" Will the answer to the question enable you to do something (e.g. improve a policy, make a strategic decision for your organization, etc.)?
5. Are you asking about things that the survey recipient can reasonably be expected to be able to answer? If this is a survey of the general public, this means asking about things that don't require technical or arcane knowledge. It might help to think about whether or not your mother/your next-door-neighbor/your plumber could be reasonably expected to be able to answer the question.
6. Are you asking things in as neutral a way as possible? Don't use phrases that are likely to suggest that you would appreciate it if the respondent answered in a particular way.
7. Are you asking about one thing per question? If you ask about multiple things in one question, the interpretation becomes difficult. For instance, if you ask, "How important is it to protect ground and surface water from pollution?" Does the response you get back refer to both ground and surface water? Is this an average over the two types of water? Does it refer to the one about which they feel most strongly?
8. How good/representative is your sample? Do you have or can you get access to an accurate, up-to-date contact list (mailing address, email, phone) for the population(s) of interest to you?
9. Can your data be validated? Have you structured your questionnaire/survey process in such a way that you can increase the likelihood that the responses you get back really represent the population you are studying. Have you included demographic information that can be compared to the census? Will you try multiple contacts to build the sample size and permit statistical validation tests?
10. Have you given the respondents a means of telling you things you haven't thought of? Open-ended questions are more expensive to include in a questionnaire (they take longer to enter and are more difficult to analyze) but can provide very useful context to the numeric answers and raise issues you hadn't previously identified.