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Quick Tips

Don't Average Words

When you ask respondents to answer an evaluation question by choosing one word from a set of words, report your results by using those words and not numbers you may have assigned to those words in order to process the data in a computer program.

The numbers you are using really represent words and the way you display results should be true to the essential characteristics of the data you collected. The appropriate way to handle this data would be to report the count received for each category and the percentage of overall responses that each category received. You can not make an average out of something that is a word and not a number and report it in an accurate and meaningful way that is useful to readers.

EXAMPLE

Question 1: Please circle the answer that best describes you.

Today, I learned a technique that will help me improve my relationship with my child.

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

You are asking for answers that are words. Another name for data that are words or text is nominal data. The appropriate way to analyze nominal data is with counts and percentages.

EXAMPLE

Results for Question 1: (Workshop of 20 participants)

Response	**Number of respondents**
Strongly agree	10
Agree	0
Neutral	0
Disagree	0
Strongly disagree	10

Findings

50 percent (10 Participants) "Strongly agree"
50 percent (10 participants) "Strongly disagree"

If you had converted your nominal data into numbers in order to use a computerized data processing program and then not reported out using words, you would both analyze and communicate inaccuracies about your program.

EXAMPLE

(Misleading) Results for Question 1:

Code in processing program	**Number of respondents**	**Value**
Strongly agree = 1	10	10
Agree = 2	0	0
Neutral = 3	0	0
Disagree = 4	0	0
Strongly disagree =5	10	50

(Misleading) findings

The average for Question 1 is: 3.0 (60/20 = 3.0)

What does 3.0 mean when the possible responses range from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree?" Not only does it not make sense considering the response items you offered, it also masks the fact that half of your respondents "strongly disagree" and half "strongly agree."

Wallgren, et al. (1996). *Graphing Statistics and Data: Creating Better Charts.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

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