

Creating Effective Questions

Tip Sheet

Adult Learning Certificate Program



Individual Interview and Focus Group Questions

Whether you are creating questions for individual interviews or focus group interviews, there are six key characteristics of effective questions.

| Characteristic | Evaluation Criteria |
|------------------|--|
| <i>Purpose</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly relate questions to the goals of the interview |
| <i>Clarity</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use explicit, specific language Use vocabulary familiar to the respondents |
| <i>Length</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sufficient length — too long tends to confuse respondents and too brief may be ambiguous Typically, one to three short sentences |
| <i>Scope</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proper scope — overly broad may yield unusable responses and overly narrow may be too limiting Opening and closing questions appropriately control scope |
| <i>Bias</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain objectivity and do not suggest a correct answer Use neutral words |
| <i>Structure</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appropriate to the goals of the interview <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open-ended style is used for exploration Closed-ended style is used to cover more ground quickly |



Observation Questions

To guide the creation of an observation tool or rating tool, ask yourself, or others involved, these types of questions:

When considering a product or procedure evaluation, ask yourself...

Why is observation necessary?

Have you narrowed down the performance to a few tasks closely linked to business goals?

Do the tasks result in a tangible output or product, such as report?

Will you need to evaluate a procedure?

If you are evaluating work products, what format can you use to make evaluations reliable?

If you are evaluating a procedure, is there an existing tool or document you can use?



Survey Questions

Here are eight important guidelines for writing effective survey questions:

- 1** *Express one idea per question—avoid using ‘and’ to link ideas.*
- 2** *Use clear, simple language that is understandable to the respondents.*
- 3** *Keep questions short and to the point.*
- 4** *Use direct language—avoid using double negatives.*
- 5** *Use explicit phrases—avoid several, mostly, or usually.*
- 6** *Focus on behavioral observations—avoid asking for the respondent’s perceptions.*
- 7** *Use neutral words to avoid question bias.*
- 8** *Focus on topics on which respondents are likely to have adequate information.*