

CONDUCTING EFFECTIVE SURVEYS

Please use this handout in conjunction with the Survey PowerPoint when designing your survey (found at <http://www.rhsgt.com>).

Designing the Survey or Questionnaire

- Write a series of effective questions, keeping the questionnaire as brief as possible. Effective questions...
 - Relate to the research question.
 - Avoid assumptions and biased questions (i.e. What strategies have you tried to quit smoking? – assumes respondent wants to and has tried to quit).
 - Use simple, clear, and concise language.
- Provide clear instructions.
- Provide the purpose of the questionnaire.
- Place most important questions in the first half of the questionnaire.
- Begin with non-threatening items.
- Determine how data will be analyzed (scanner, electronically, by hand).
- Display information in an attractive, professional manner.
- Vary the types of questions to maintain respondent interest.
- Test the questionnaire with a pilot audience.

Implementing the Survey or Questionnaire

- Include a brief cover letter that persuades the respondent to complete the survey. (see below)
- Consider online survey tools, such as *Google Forms*, *SurveyMonkey* and *Zoomerang*. (see below)
- Consider the timing. Avoid holidays and particularly busy times of the year.
- Make returning the questionnaire convenient with a self-addressed, stamped envelope.
- Recognize that mailed questionnaires typically have lower return rates than those administered to a gathered group. Therefore, additional questionnaires will need to be sent to account for the lower return rate.

Survey Cover Letters

The cover letter is an essential part of the survey. To a large degree, the cover letter will affect whether or not the respondent completes the questionnaire. It is important to maintain a friendly tone and keep it as short as possible. The

importance of the cover letter should not be underestimated. It provides an opportunity to persuade the respondent to complete the survey.

Items that should always be included in the cover letter:

1. Describe why the study is being done (briefly) and identify the course.
2. Mention the incentive. (This could be access to the results.)
3. Mention the means of returning the survey. (If mailed, you should include a stamped, self-addressed return envelope.)
4. Encourage prompt response without using deadlines, but you may put a reasonable deadline.
5. Describe your "confidentiality/anonymity" policy.
6. Give the contact information of someone they can contact with questions.

Sample Cover Letter

In the sample on the next page, please note that anywhere you see "xxx" these are places that you should add your personal information; if you see words in brackets or italics, you may decide whether to include that statement or alter it.

Dear Respondent,

I am inviting you participate in a research project to study xxxx, as part of my Independent Research class. Along with this letter is a short questionnaire that asks a variety of questions about xxxx. I am asking you to look over the questionnaire and, if you choose to do so, complete it and send [or give] it back to me.

The results of this project will be [say what it's for]. Through your participation I hope to understand xxxx. I hope that the results of the survey will be useful for [xxxx] and I hope to share my results by [publishing them in a scientific journal, presenting them on the web where students all over the world can use them, etc.]

There are no known risks to you if you decide to participate in this survey and I guarantee that your responses will not be identified with you personally [or make

some statement about confidentiality.] I promise not to share any information that identifies you with anyone outside my research group which consists of me [and xxxx]. [You should not put your name on the questionnaire.] If you do not feel comfortable handing in your survey to me (or your teacher), you may also . . . [put option here, e.g., mail it to the following address, drop it off at X office]

The survey should take you about xxxx minutes to complete. I hope you will take the time to complete this questionnaire and return it. Your participation is voluntary *[and there is no penalty if you do not participate]*. Regardless of whether you choose to participate, please let me know if you would like a summary of my findings. To receive a summary, xxxx.

If you have any questions or concerns about completing the questionnaire or about being in this study, you may contact me at xxxx. This project has been approved by my teacher, Dr. Kiehl, and *[our principal, Dr. Kauffman.]*

Sincerely,
Your Name

Online Survey Tools

Google's survey option is the easiest online tool and is free.

- Go to Google docs - <http://docs.google.com>
 - If you don't have a Google log in, create one.
- Choose the "Create New" button.
- Click on "Form."
 - You'll see the beginnings of a survey.
- You can change the question type, add additional questions, change the background theme, and send the form out using the URL at the bottom of the page.
- When you wish to view the results, open the form in Google Docs. You can see the responses as a spreadsheet or a summary.