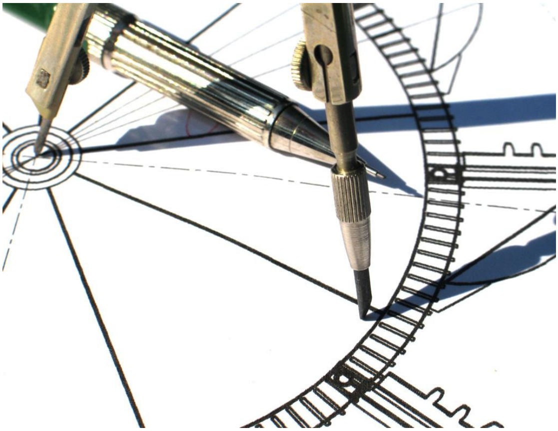
CHAPTER 8

THE LAYOUT OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE



A questionnaire is a *working* document. It presents the questions as well as the place and space to record the answers. Thought needs to be given to making sure that the layout of the questions and the questionnaire enables it to work.

Formalities on every questionnaire

Every questionnaire should have a title which enables it to be readily identified. Some market research companies give each job a number or code and this too may be recorded on the questionnaire. And, to state the obvious, the place for the title is at the top of the page. Within my own company the top of each questionnaire has a number of boxes for department heads to say that they have seen and approved the questionnaire. In the header, PM stands for Project Manager, DP for data processing, and SM for show material.

At the foot of the page is a declaration for the interviewer to sign and confirm that the interview has been carried out within the Market Research Society's Code of Practice. This template is only shown by way of example and every researcher should decide what is necessary and relevant for their company.

Questionnaires should also have provision to record the name and address of the respondent, the date of the interview and the name of the interviewer. This data can be recorded at the beginning or at the end of the questionnaire depending on preference and circumstances. In the case of business-to-business interviews it is normal to have the name and address at the front of the questionnaire so that when all the interviews are completed, a company can easily be located by looking through the top sheets. In street interviews the respondent's name and address is usually the last thing to be asked and so this is positioned at the end of the questionnaire.

The following is typical of a ‘boilerplate' for an industrial questionnaire.

STRUCTURAL STEELWORK STUDY

Project Number: 087 92/I

Name of company: ______________________________

Address: ______________________________

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Telephone Number: ______________________________

Contact - Name: ______________________________

Contact - Position: ______________________________

Interviewer: ______________________________

Date: ______________________________

Making the layout suitable for field

Space is at a premium in a questionnaire and should be used wisely. If the questionnaire is too cramped it will be hard to read and difficult to write down the answers. If space is used too freely the questionnaire will grow and become book-like, unwieldy and expensive to print.

If ever there is a conflict between laying out a questionnaire for the convenience of data processing, the finance department or the field interviewers, it is the latter who should win every time. They have to make the questionnaire work.

Make sure that the size of the type is large enough to be read in the conditions where the interview may have to be administered - at worst a murky street in winter, a door step with poor lighting or at best an office floodlit with fluorescent lights.

There should be sufficient space for the interviewer to record the answers and this is especially important for open ended questions. It should also be borne in mind that the number of lines for the answer is some indication to the interviewer of the length of response which is expected. The next example has been taken from a self completion questionnaire completed by fleet buyers who took part in a `clinic'. It is clear from there being just one line for each factor that a word or two is all that is called for.

Q Now, taking into consideration those factors you have just rated, but also pulling in any others feel may be relevant, what are the three most important things you look for in a fleet car?

Number 1 in importance:____________________________________

Number 2 in importance:____________________________________

Number 3 in importance:____________________________________

And in an administered questionnaire on the subject of banking, the interviewer was able to gauge the depth of response from the space allowed for the answer.

Q Just so that I am clear, what was the single most important factor which resulted in you choosing your principal bank? **PROBE.**

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Using grids

The researcher should become accustomed to thinking about efficient ways of recording the answers. Sometimes grids can be helpful. A grid lays out the responses across and down as is shown in the sample questionnaire in Chapter 1.

Layout for data processing

A questionnaire which is part of a large sample will require data processing and it will be necessary to think of how to record the answers to save time and costs at the analysis stage. The researcher should discuss the layout of the questionnaire with data processing staff at the outset. Most data processing packages use column numbers for recording the individual responses and these would typically be laid out in a manner similar to the many examples which have been used so far. The column numbers in the following self-completion example, have been placed at the head of the column.

This section asks for some details on yourself which will help us classify your answers.

1.Your age:

(7)

20 or under	1	
21 - 24	2	
Over 25	3	

2.And what is your sex:

(8)

Male	1
Female	2

3.Your faculty:

(9)

Art & Design	1
Comm studies & Ed	2
Hollings	3
Human, Law & Soc Sci	4
Mangmt & Business	5
Science & Engineering	6
Other	7

4.Your home before coming to the college:

(10)

North West	1
South West	2
Yorkshire & Humberside	3
London & South East	4
West Midlands	5
East Midlands	6
Elsewhere in UK	7
Europe (not UK)	8
Africa	9
Far East	10
Elsewhere in the world	11

5.The qualification for which you are studying:

(11)

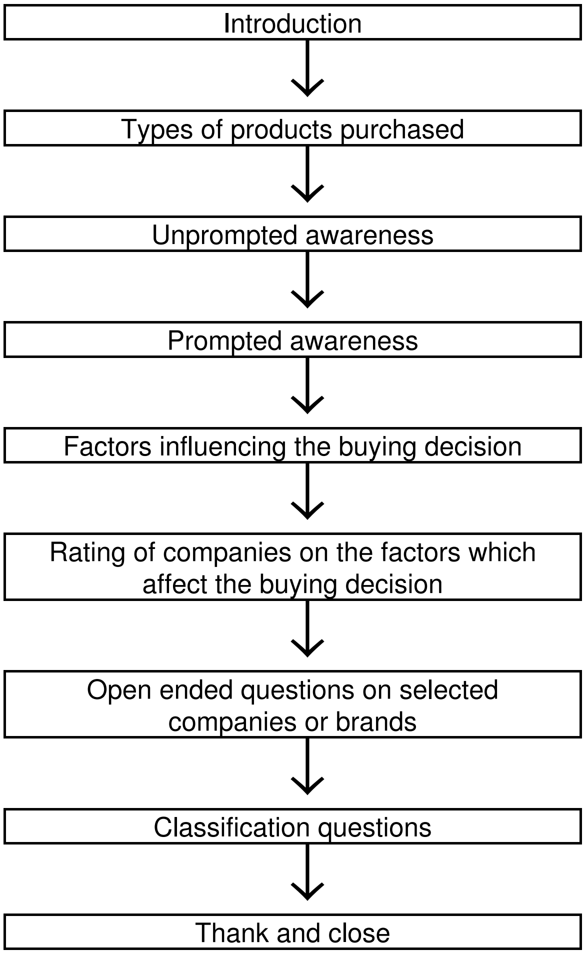
Degree	1
Post Graduate	2
Diploma in Higher Education	3
HND	4
Higher & Research	5
Professional/other	6

Sometimes data processing departments appreciate a column set aside for writing numbers and codes at the time the questionnaires are processed. This may look as follows:

Subject flow

The importance of `flow' in the questionnaire has already been stressed a number of times. Achieving good flow means grouping questions into blocks which relate to a subject before moving on to another subject which is closely connected. It means moving in a logical sequence from one subject to another, from broad issues to narrower ones and from open ended questioning to prompted questioning. In broad terms the following sequence would be sensible for a study testing the use of and attitudes to a product.

Grouping Questions Into Blocks Which Flow



The use of bridging statements

It can sometimes help the continuity of a questionnaire if there are links between the groups of questions. Examples of bridging statements are:

- Thank you, I would now like to move on to the subject of ...
- That was helpful. We now turn to ...
- I have a complete change of subject for you now ...

It can assist the flow to include encouraging statements in the questions themselves with the caveat that they should not be overused, abused or made to sound patronising. They are simple courtesies which make the interview a little more `user friendly'.

- You are doing fine.
- Thank you for your patience.
- Just a few more questions now.
- We'll soon be finished.

Towards the end of the interview there will be the need to ask classification questions. The relevance of these may not be apparent to the respondent and yet there is no time for a full explanation as to why they are needed. It can ease the way in by saying:

We are nearly at the end now. In order that we can classify the answers you have given us I wonder if you tell me some details about you and your family. Can I start with ...

Show cards

A show card (sometimes called a prompt card) is used to present a list of words, statements, names or concepts to a respondent as an aid to the questioning. The show card is so called because of the instruction which is placed on the questionnaire which says "SHOW CARD" and tells the interviewer when to use it. They are frequently used in face-to-face consumer interviews in the street and home. They can also be used in business-to-business telephone interviews if an initial call confirms co-operation after which the show cards are mailed or faxed to the respondent, ready for the follow up call.

The information on the card acts as a reminder so that scales, or long phrases or lists of names do not need reading out or repeating. Cards are useful for communicating pictures of products, banner headings of newspapers, logos of companies - images which would be difficult to describe verbally or which would somehow be lacking if they were not shown in total.

Show cards can be useful for controlling the interviewing. The words on the cards can be rotated with each interviewer having a different version and so removing this task from their responsibility.

If a number of cards are to be used, they can be kept in order by being tied in the corner by string or comb bound into a small book.

Completing the interview

When the interview is finished it must be closed down in a courteous and professional manner. It may be appropriate to restate the promise of confidentiality which was made at the beginning or to give an assurance of the fact that the interview was for market research purposes only.

An example of a conclusion to a telephone interview is:

> "Thank you for your help. It is much appreciated. Can I remind you that this was a bona fide market research interview and we are Business & Market Research based in Stockport."

Market research agencies can subscribe to a service operated by the Market Research Society[1] which allows them to refer the respondent to a freephone number where the details of the agency can be confirmed.

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[1]The Market Research Society, 15 Northburgh Street, London EC1V 0JR; 0207-490 4911