

Survey Design Tips for Assessment

Getting useful answers from surveys of students, users, and alumni

Surveys are the most common **indirect** measure. They're quick to run but easy to get wrong. These tips can help you write a survey whose results you can actually use.

Start from the outcome

- Write down the outcome first, then ask only the questions that give evidence about it.
- For each question, ask: **what would I do differently depending on the answer?** If nothing, cut it.
- Keep it short. Five to ten focused questions usually get better response rates than a long survey.

Writing good questions

Avoid	Example	Better
Double-barreled questions	"The workshop was helpful and well organized."	Ask about helpfulness and organization separately.
Leading wording	"How much did our excellent staff help you?"	"How helpful was the staff member you worked with?"
Vague time frames	"Do you use the library often?"	"In the past month, how many times did you visit the library?"
Jargon	"Rate the efficacy of the co-curricular intervention."	"How useful was this program to you?"

Response scales

- Use the same scale throughout when you can (for example, a five-point agreement scale).
- Label every point, not just the ends.
- Include "not applicable" when some people genuinely can't answer.
- Add one or two open-ended questions; they often explain the numbers.

Getting responses

- Survey people soon after the experience, while it's fresh.
- Tell people why you're asking and how long it will take.
- Send one or two reminders.
- Report the response rate alongside the results, and note who might be missing.

Before you launch

1. Have two or three people outside your office take the survey and tell you what confused them.
2. Decide whether responses are anonymous or confidential, and say so.

3. If you might publish or present the results beyond campus, check with Berea's Institutional Review Board before you collect data.

Berea uses Qualtrics for surveys. Contact the Office of Academic Affairs if you need help getting started.

Created in collaboration with Claude AI.