Survey Response Scales

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The response formats used in surveys vary depending on the type of question being asked. Responses can be as simple as a choice between "Yes" or "No" or as complex as choosing an answer among seven response options.

The response options for each question in your survey may include a dichotomous, a three-point, a five-point, a seven-point or a semantic differential scale. Each of these response scales has its own advantages and disadvantages, but the rule of thumb is that the best response scale to use is the one which can be easily understood by respondents and interpreted by the researcher.

Dichotomous Scales

A dichotomous scale is a two-point scale which presents options that are absolutely opposite each other. This type of response scale does not give the respondent an opportunity to be neutral on his answer in a question.

Examples:
- Yes - No
- True - False
- Fair - Unfair
- Agree - Disagree

Rating Scales

Three-point, five-point, and seven-point scales are all included in the umbrella term "rating scale". A rating scale provides more than two options, in which the respondent can answer in neutrality over a question being asked.

Examples:
1. Three-point Scales
   - Good - Fair - Poor
   - Agree - Undecided - Disagree
   - Extremely - Moderately - Not at all
   - Too much - About right - Too little
2. Five-point Scales (e.g. Likert Scale)
   - Strongly Agree - Agree - Undecided - Disagree - Strongly Disagree
   - Always - Often - Sometimes - Seldom - Never
   - Extremely - Very - Moderately - Slightly - Not at all
   - Excellent - Above Average - Average - Below Average - Very Poor
3. Seven-point Scales
   - Exceptional - Excellent - Very Good - Good - Fair - Poor - Very Poor
   - Very satisfied - Moderately satisfied - Slightly satisfied - Neutral - Slightly dissatisfied - Moderately Dissatisfied - Very dissatisfied

Semantic Differential Scales

A semantic differential scale is only used in specialist surveys in order to gather data and interpret based on the connotative meaning of the respondent's answer. It uses a pair of clearly opposite words, and can either be marked or unmarked.

Examples:
1. Marked Semantic Differential Scale
   - Inexpensive
   - Effective
   - Useful
   - Reliable
   - __________ | __________

2. Unmarked Semantic Differential Scale
   - The central line serves as the neutral point:
   - Inexpensive __________________|__________________ Expensive
   - Effective __________________|__________________ Ineffective
   - Useful __________________|__________________ Useless
   - Reliable __________________|__________________ Unreliable