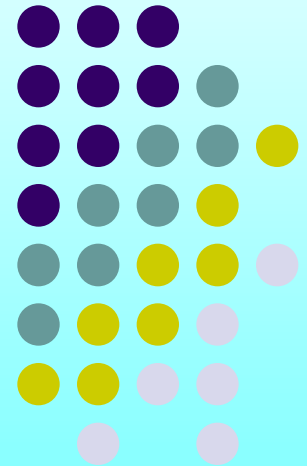


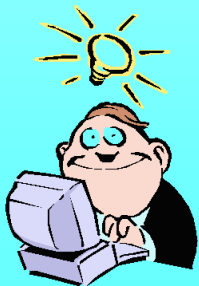
Dillman's Principles to Create Survey Items

Walter Leite, PhD
Assistant Professor
Research Evaluation & Methodology



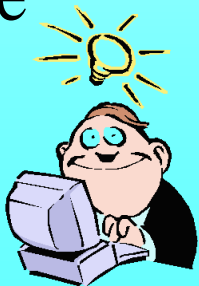
Question writing principle 1:

- *Choose simple over specialized words.*
- Poor example: Please indicate how many occupants of this household operate a vehicle on a daily basis:
- Improvement: From the people who live in this house, how many drive a car every day?



Question writing principle 2:

- *Choose as few words as possible to pose the question.*
- Poor example: Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with standardized testing being required for all elementary school grades in the state of Florida?
- Improvement: To what extent do you agree or disagree with requiring standardized testing for all elementary school grades?



Question writing principle 3:

- Use complete sentences to ask questions.

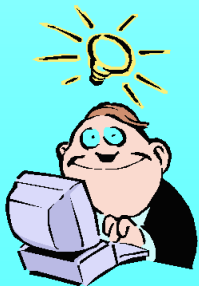
- Poor example:

Years teaching science : _____

- Improvement:

- For how many years have you taught science?

Number of years _____



Question writing principle 4:

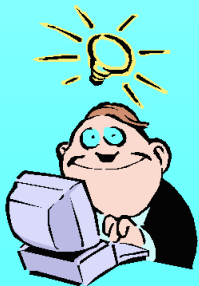
- *Avoid vague quantifiers when more precise estimates can be obtained.*
- How often did you attend religious services during the past year?

Poor example:

- Never
- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Regularly

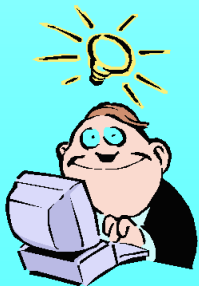
Improvement:

- Not at all
- A few times
- About once a month
- Two to three times a month
- About once a week
- More than once a week



Question writing principle 5:

- *Avoid specificity that exceeds the respondent's potential for having an accurate, ready-made answer*
- Poor example:
 - Please indicate the number of times you visited a park during the spring semester:
_____ Number of visits to a park



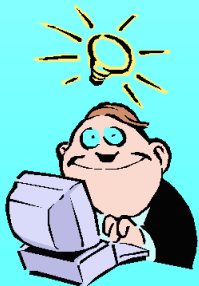
Question writing principle 6:

- *Use equal numbers of positive and negative categories for scalar questions.*

- Poor example:

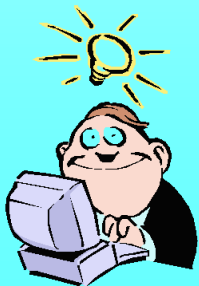
How satisfied are you with your graduate program?

- Completely satisfied
- Mostly satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied



Question writing principle 7:

- *Distinguish undecided from neutral by placement of the Undecided or No opinion at the end of the scale*
- Example of adequate placement:
 - ❑ Strongly agree
 - ❑ Somewhat agree
 - ❑ Neither agree nor disagree
 - ❑ Somewhat disagree
 - ❑ Strongly disagree
 - ❑ Undecided

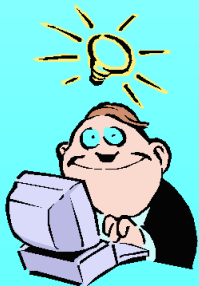


Question writing principle 8:

- *Avoid bias from unequal comparison*
- Poor example:

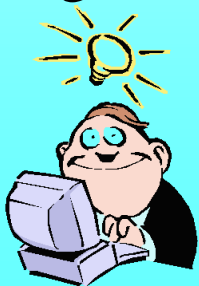
Which group plays a major role on student success on standardized tests?

- School
- Family
- Community
- Well-trained teachers



Question writing principle 9:

- *State both sides of attitude scales in the question items.*
- Poor example:
 - To what extent do you agree with requiring Ph.D. students to learn statistics?
- Improvement:
 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with requiring Ph.D. students to learn statistics?

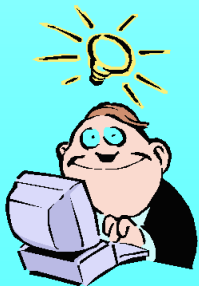


Question writing principle 10:

- *Eliminate check-all-that apply question formats to reduce primacy effects.*
- Poor example:

Please indicate which type of music you prefer to listen at work (mark all that apply):

- Blues
- Rock
- Jazz
- Salsa
- Hip hop
- Country



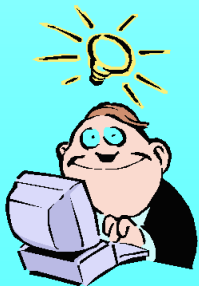
Question writing principle 11:

- *Develop response categories that are mutually exclusive.*

- Poor example:

From which one of these sources did you first learn about the wild fires?

- Radio
- Television
- Someone at work
- While at home
- While traveling to work



Question writing principle 12:

- *Use cognitive design techniques to improve recall*

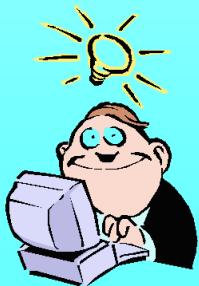
- Good examples:

When was the last time you had an accident?

How serious was it?

How long did the emergency response system take to send a person to assist you?

The researcher is most interested in the last question, but uses the others to improve recall.



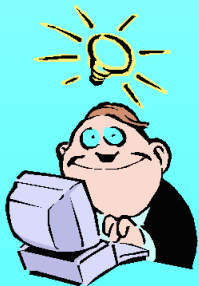
Question writing principle 13:

- *Provide appropriate time referents.* Can people accurately recall and report past behaviors? Problems happen with events that are either too far in the past or too regular.

Poor example:

How many times have you visited the library during the Spring semester?

_____ Number of visits to the library



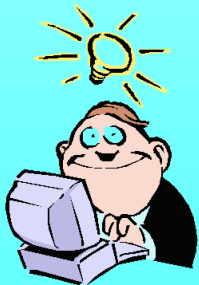
Question writing principle 14:

- *Be sure questions are technically accurate.*

Poor example:

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with requiring that all students who plan to develop a scale for their doctoral dissertations take the survey methods class.

- strongly agree
- agree
- disagree
- strongly disagree



Question writing principle 15:

- *Choose question words that allows comparison with previously collected data.*

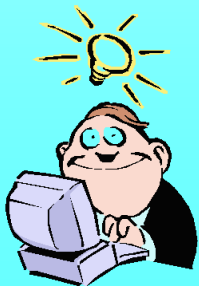
- Poor example:

Time 1:

- How often do you read to your child?

Time 2:

- How often do you read stories to your child?

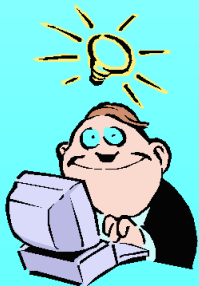


Question writing principle 16:

- *Avoid asking respondents to say yes in order to mean no.*
- Poor example:
- Do you favor or oppose not allowing the state to raise taxes without approval of 60% of the voters?

Favor

Oppose



Question writing principle 17:

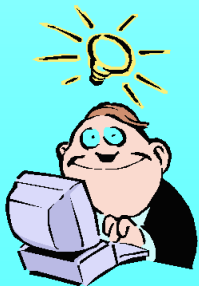
- *Avoid double barreled questions.*

- Poor example:

Do you agree or disagree with creating an Office of Statistical Support at UF and charging students a fee to use it?

Agree

Disagree

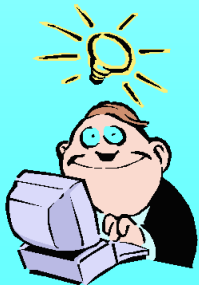


Question writing principle 18:

- *Soften the impact of potentially objectionable questions.* Individuals may not be willing to reveal the requested information.
- Poor example:

Please indicate how frequently you have thoughts about leaving your current graduate program?

- Daily
- At least once a week
- At least once a month
- At least once a semester
- Never

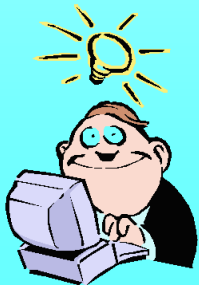


Question writing principle 19:

- *Avoid asking respondents to make unnecessary calculations.*
- Poor example:

During the last academic year, what percentage of your income was spent with mortgage payments?

Percentage: _____ %



Question writing principle 20

Make sure the question requires an answer.

Poor example:

When assigning group projects to your students, do you allow them to choose the project's topic?

Yes

No

