



JOINT PROGRAM IN SURVEY METHODOLOGY

WRITING QUESTIONS FOR SURVEYS

March 11 - 13 2025

Joint Program in Survey Methodology

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University of Wisconsin-Madison

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Introduce a structural analysis of parts of a survey question
- Introduce cognitive interviewing as a method for testing survey questions
- Describe guidelines for diagnosing problems in survey questions and writing new survey questions
- Focus on the structure and wording of individual survey questions, whether for interviewer-administered or self-administered instruments
- Provide an opportunity to apply the guidelines and principles during in-class exercises
- Focus on improving individual questions and sets of questions
- Summarize research that underlies key decisions in writing survey questions

WHO SHOULD ATTEND

Individuals who will be writing or reviewing survey questions or survey instruments or analyzing survey data. This course gives practical guidance to those who have written survey questions but who are not familiar with research on question design, those who are just beginning to design survey instruments, and those who use survey data but do not themselves design survey instruments.

SUGGESTED READING

Schaeffer NC, Presser S. 2003. "The science of asking questions", *Annual Review of Sociology* 29: 65–88. <http://arjournals.annualreviews.org/eprint/rU4UOoizjrXROhijkRIS/full/10.1146/annurev.soc.29.110702.110112>

Schaeffer NC, Dykema J. 2011. "Questions for Surveys: Current Trends and Future Directions." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 75, 5: 919-961. <http://poq.oxfordjournals.org/content/75/5/909.full.pdf+html>

Schaeffer, Nora Cate and Jennifer Dykema. 2020. "Advances in the Science of Asking Questions." *Annual Review of Sociology*. 46:37-60. <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev-soc-121919-054544>. (or <http://www.annualreviews.org/eprint/NYXQK3SSPS9EWKEJG6RN/full/10.1146/annurev-soc-121919-054544>).

THE INSTRUCTOR

Nora Cate Schaeffer is Sewell Bascom Professor of Sociology, Emerita, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. From 2003 through 2020 she served as Faculty Director of the University of Wisconsin Survey Center (UWSC), and from 2019–2020 she was Interim Associate Vice Chancellor for Research for the Social Sciences. She has over thirty years of experience in survey methodology and questionnaire design and has taught about writing survey questions at the University of Michigan's Summer Institute in Survey Research and JPSM for many years. Her research has been published in *American Sociological Review*, *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *Sociological Methods and Research*, and *Sociological Methodology*. She is co-editor (with Douglas W. Maynard, Hanneke Houtkoop-Steenstra, and Johannes van der Zouwen) of *Standardization and Tacit Knowledge: Interaction and Practice in the Survey Interview*. She was named Fellow of the American Statistical Association in 2010 and Fellow of the Midwest Association for Public Opinion Research in 2015. She was elected President of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) for 2019-2020. <https://sociology.wisc.edu/staff/schaeffer-nora-cate-2/>.



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Class Structure and Course Concept

The class consists of online lectures and in-class exercises. To prepare for the class, participants complete a questionnaire in advance that includes some of the examples in the course. Some of the exercises will be done by participants individually, and some will be completed in small groups (if the online platform cooperates!).

We cover a lot of material, so reading the articles linked above – or even skimming them – will help in absorbing the material.

Mandatory Daily Online Meetings

Class meets daily from 8-12:30 CT, 9-1:30 ET. There will be one or two breaks each day.

Given the length of the sessions, you may wish to have a snack close by!

Class Schedule

Tuesday, March 11, 2025

Central Time	Eastern Time	
8:00 – 10:00	9:00-11:00	Introduction Fundamentals: Parts of a Survey Question, Question Forms Cognitive Interviewing to Test Survey Questions
10:00-10:15	11:00-11:15	Break
10:15-12:30	11:15-1:30	Introduction (continued) General Guidelines for Writing Questions

Wednesday, March 12, 2025

8:00 – 10:00	9:00-11:00	General Guidelines for Writing Questions (continued)
10:00-10:15	11:00-11:15	Break
10:15-12:30	11:15-1:30	Guidelines for Questions about Events and Behaviors

Thursday, March 13, 2025

8:00 – 10:00	9:00-11:00	Guidelines for Questions about Events and Behaviors
10:00-10:15	11:00-11:15	Break
10:15-11:00	11:15-12:00	Guidelines for Questions about Subjective Things