

Basic Tips for Choosing Scales

Whenever possible, rely on established items. Creating survey items can be a difficult task which should include pilot testing and analysis. Instead of creating items from scratch, identify questions that already exist and have been tested for validity and reliability. Validity examines whether or not an instrument “measures what it is supposed to measure” and “a reliable instrument is one that gives consistent results.” Valid and reliable questions are often found in journals, literature reviews, or in national studies. Whenever using established items, be sure to check both the copyright and the population in which these items have been validated.

Choose stems carefully. The stems of questions and the scales should match. Good stems often start with:

- ™ How would you rate the following... (use a quality scale)
- ™ How would you rate your (e.g., satisfaction, agreement, etc.) with the following...
- ™ To what extent do/ have/has...
- ™ Over the past (e.g., two weeks), how often have you... (use a frequency scale)

Reverse word some of the items. Reverse wording is useful when a set of items are measured using the same scale. Typically the items have a neutral or positive tone (e.g., If I had to do it over again, I would choose CWRU). Reverse wording is simply including a few items with a negative tone (e.g., I do not feel comfortable at CWRU). Reverse wording ensures that respondents pay closer attention to the survey and it helps minimize response bias.

Use the same scales each time data is collected.

Frequency Scales

Scales that measure the extent to which a person participates in an activity increase incrementally and do not need to be balanced or include a neutral option. These scales depend on the duration of the activity