

Some Tips for Data Analysis and Reporting

Scales

- Use descriptive scales on surveys whenever possible. Numeric scales could bias responses.

Pre-testing

- Pretest surveys before they are administered to respondents. Ideally, pre-testing should be done with a group that is similar to the one in your survey. However, if you have time constraints, you can give surveys to your colleagues, staff assistants, etc. Encourage them to complete the survey and report any difficulties or ambiguities they experience with the survey.

Coding

- Codebook should be prepared before the survey is mailed/conducted if possible.
- Adjust coding of survey after pretest if necessary.
- Screen returned surveys and edit surveys before data are entered.
- Adjust codes based on the first 50 responses.
- Assign codes for open-ended responses based on the first 50 responses.
- Communicate with graduate students/data entry person to resolve confusing responses. Encourage these individuals to refer any unclear responses on surveys to you.

Data Cleaning

Invest some time and effort in data cleaning. This should include the following:

- Run frequencies and scan the data to determine if there are problems, such as out of range and confusing responses that need to be corrected before further analysis.
- Perform a “gut test”—review data for things that do not fit with what you know about the group. An example is a “3” in a dichotomous variable such as “male” “female”.
- When there are confusing or missing responses, re-contact the respondent if possible.
- Go back to the returned surveys for verification when in doubt.
- Seek help from colleagues and others to decode and decipher handwriting for open-ended questions. You may re-contact respondent if the information is important enough.
- Write full names for acronyms of associations etc. whenever possible.

ID Codes on Surveys

- Decide how important it is for you that the surveys be numbered. No evidence has been uncovered to indicate that numbering surveys reduces response rates. However, it is possible that coded surveys could create a perception of a loss of anonymity.
- Consider how sensitive the data to be collected are and decide whether or not numbering will hurt.
- Numbering surveys can help identify respondents to re-contact as well as eliminate those who have returned their surveys from being contacted again.

Data Analysis Plan

- It is advisable to prepare a data analysis plan before a survey is mailed out. This could be done after pre-testing the survey instrument. Preparing a data analysis plan ahead of time will enable you to change how response categories are assigned if you realize the original ones will not lend themselves to the analyses you want to perform.
- Even though some researchers share the plan with their clients, it is not imperative that you do so. Use it as your own guide and share it only if you think it is appropriate to do so.

Reporting Likert Scales

- It is recommended that scales such as “Very Interested” and “Somewhat Interested” not be collapsed in tables.
- Whenever possible, avoid reporting the top two together in the text and other parts of your report (especially the executive summary).

Presentations

- Use more graphics in presenting both oral and written reports.
- Adapt your presentation to suit the client and the complexity of the project.
- Include a description of the population in your methodology section of reports.
- Include the following two scenarios in your executive summary whenever possible:
 - The impact on bottom line if recommendation is followed.
 - The impact on bottom line if recommendation is not followed.