The Pros and Cons of Open and Closed Questions
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Adapted from: http://environment.uwaterloo.ca/research/watgreen/projects/library/1020/ocq.html

Closed Questions Usually Start With

• Can
• Did
• Will
• Have

Advantages of Closed Questions

• Sometimes they’re easier and quicker for people to answer
• The answers of different respondents are easier to compare
• Peoples’ answers are easier to analyze
• Response choices can clarify the question’s meaning for respondents
• People are more likely to answer about sensitive topics
• They inspire fewer irrelevant or clouded answers
• Less articulate or less literate respondents are not at a disadvantage
• Replication is easier
• They allow the interpreter to assess guests’ prior knowledge base and feelings

Disadvantages of Closed Ended

• They can evoke ideas that the respondent would not otherwise have
• Respondents with no opinion or no prior knowledge may not answer
• Peoples can be frustrated because their desired answer is not a choice or because they may not know the right answer
• It becomes confusing if many response choices are offered
• Misinterpretation of a question can go unnoticed
• Distinctions between people’s answers may be blurred
• Giving the wrong answer is possible and often probable
• They force people to give simplistic responses to complex issues
• They compel people to make choices they would not otherwise make
Open Questions Usually Start With

- How
- Why
- What
- When
- Where

Advantages of Open Questions

- They facilitate an unlimited number of possible answers
- They allow respondents to answer in detail and qualify, and clarify responses
- Unanticipated conclusions can be discovered
- They allow adequate answers to complex issues
- They inspire creativity, self-expression, and richness of detail
- They reveal a respondent’s logic, thinking process, and frame of reference
- Because there is often no right or wrong answer, respondents feel more comfortable answering

Disadvantages of Open Questions

- Different people give different degrees of detail when answering
- Answers may be unconnected or lost in insignificant detail
- Answers may be difficult to compare or statistical analyze
- People who are articulate and highly literate have an advantage
- Questions may be too general for some respondents who then lose direction
- A greater amount of response time, thought, and effort is necessary
- Some people can be intimidated by these questions
- The answers take up a lot of time

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<tr>
<th>Closed Questions</th>
<th>Open Questions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Limited response and point of view</td>
<td>• Cannot be answered with yes or no</td>
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<td>• Requires prior knowledge</td>
<td>• Usually requires a sentence to answer</td>
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<td>• Answer is either right or wrong</td>
<td>• Allows the respondent to express point of view</td>
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<td>• Quick require little time to answer</td>
<td>• Can be time consuming.</td>
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<td>• Can be irritating and threatening</td>
<td>• Builds trust and allows unrestrained response</td>
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<td>• May lead to unnecessary comments</td>
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Clarifying Questions

• **Examples**
  • Did I understand you when you said....?
  • Did I paraphrase what you said correctly?
  • What’s another way you might....?
  • Did I hear you correctly when you said.....?

Probing Questions

• Ask the speaker for additional information.
• Not all questions will be effective, and that’s ok.
• Effective probing is nonthreatening and flows with what has previously been said.
• Avoids challenging questions that will put the speaker on the defensive.
• **Examples**
  • What do you think would happen if....?
  • How did you
    • decide?
    • conclude?
    • determine?
  • What sort of impact do think.....?
  • What are you most concerned about?
  • How does it make you feel?