

Checklist to Evaluate the Quality of Questions

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To get usable and accurate data from questionnaires and interviews, it is critical that you develop questions that are easily understood by the respondent. The Question Appraisal System (QAS-99) is a method for identifying and fixing miscommunication and other types of problems with questions. Use QAS-99 before formal field testing of your questions. The QAS-99 includes a checklist composed of eight steps. Within each step, you can determine whether specific problems with a question exist, and, if so, check the “YES” box associated with the particular problem. Go to the QAS-99 user’s manual for more information on how to code the problems noted in each question and suggestions for correcting the problems. You can find the user’s manual at <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259812768> [Question Appraisal System QAS 99 Manual](#).

Below is the QAS-99 checklist. Although the QAS-99 was designed for reviewing telephone interviews, you can use the checklist for questionnaires, with the exception of Step 1.

Questionnaire Appraisal System

STEP 1 – READING:	
Determine if it is difficult for the interviewers to read the question uniformly to all respondents.	
1a. WHAT TO READ: Interviewer may have difficulty determining what parts of the question should be read.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
1b. MISSING INFORMATION: Information the interviewer needs to administer the question is not contained in the question.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
1c. HOW TO READ: Question is not fully scripted and therefore difficult to read.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
STEP 2 – INSTRUCTIONS:	
Look for problems with any introductions, instructions, or explanations from the respondent’s point of view.	
2a. CONFLICTING OR INACCURATE INSTRUCTIONS: introductions, or explanations.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
2b. COMPLICATED INSTRUCTIONS: introductions, or explanations.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
STEP 3 – CLARITY:	
Identify problems related to communicating the intent or meaning of the question to the respondent.	
3a. WORDING: Question is lengthy, awkward, ungrammatical, or contains complicated syntax.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
3b. TECHNICAL TERM(S) are undefined, unclear, or complex.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
3c. VAGUE: There are multiple ways to interpret the question or to decide what is to be included or excluded.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
3d. REFERENCE PERIODS (e.g., “during the past month”) are missing, not well specified, or in conflict.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO





STEP 4 – ASSUMPTIONS:

Determine whether there are problems with assumptions made or the underlying logic.

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| 4a. INAPPROPRIATE ASSUMPTIONS are made about the respondent or about his/her living situation. | <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 4b. ASSUMES CONSTANT BEHAVIOR or experience for situations that vary. | <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 4c. DOUBLE-BARRELED: Contains more than one implicit question. | <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |

STEP 5 – KNOWLEDGE/MEMORY:

Check whether respondents are likely to not know or have trouble remembering information.

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| 5a. KNOWLEDGE may not exist: Respondent is unlikely to know the answer to a factual question. | <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 5b. ATTITUDE may not exist: Respondent is unlikely to have formed the attitude being asked about. | <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 5c. RECALL failure: Respondent may not remember the information asked for. | <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 5d. COMPUTATION PROBLEM: The question requires a difficult mental calculation. | <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |

STEP 6 – SENSITIVITY/BIAS:

Assess questions for sensitive nature or wording, and for bias.

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| 6a. SENSITIVE CONTENT (general): The question asks about a topic that is embarrassing, very private, or that involves illegal behavior. | <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 6b. SENSITIVE WORDING (specific): Given that the general topic is sensitive, the wording should be improved to minimize sensitivity. | <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 6c. SOCIALLY ACCEPTABLE response is implied by the question. | <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |

STEP 7 – RESPONSE CATEGORIES:

Assess the adequacy of the range of responses to be recorded.

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| 7a. OPEN-ENDED QUESTION that is inappropriate or difficult. | <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 7b. MISMATCH between question and response categories. | <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 7c. TECHNICAL TERM(S) are undefined, unclear, or complex. | <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 7d. VAGUE response categories are subject to multiple interpretations. | <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 7e. OVERLAPPING response categories. | <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 7f. MISSING eligible responses in response categories. | <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
| 7g. ILLOGICAL ORDER of response categories. | <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |

STEP 8 – OTHER PROBLEMS:

Look for problems not identified in Steps 1-7.

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| 8. OTHER PROBLEMS not previously identified. | <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |
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