How to write a survey

Objective: to identify how to design a good survey.

What is a survey?
Questions for finding out about people’s behaviour and opinions.

What are surveys useful for?
Many things! For example, a school council might use one to decide how to spend its budget. An MP might use one to find out which issues his/her constituents really care about.

Imagine that this survey was sent to students in another school.

What is your favourite food?
A - Soup
B - Spinach
C - Fish
D - Carrots

What might have been done better?
The survey asked an open question then offered limited choices. What if students don’t like any of those foods?

Imagine that you want to find out about students’ recycling habits.

What do you recycle?

You have received the following responses:
1 student said ‘glass, paper, metal and food waste’.
7 students said ‘glass bottles and newspapers’.
3 students said ‘paper and glass’.
2 students said ‘nothing’.

Does this information tell you what you wanted to know?

What could you have asked instead?

Imagine that you asked this question:

What is your favourite food?

Other examples:
Which politician do you most respect? ___________________
What is your favourite charity? _________________________
What recent news story has concerned you the most? _________________________

It allows an open answer - students have the chance to write any kind of food.

Imagine that you want to find out about students’ recycling habits.

The aim is to find out if students recycle any of these things:
• cans
• glass bottles
• plastic bottles
• paper.

What question could you ask to find out this information?

Imagine that you asked this question:

What is your favourite food?

Would it have been better to write the question like this?

Other (please explain) _________________________
You are now going to design a survey.

Remember to be really clear about what information you want. Otherwise you might end up with information that is not at all useful!

You might find it helpful to consider these questions:

• Who am I going to ask?
• What exactly do I want to know?
• Why do I want this information?
• When, where and how will I ask the questions?

(Will I send the survey? Will I interview people face-to-face ...?)

Design a survey which contains at least five questions.

Choose one of the following themes:

• smoking and drugs
• recycling
• being British
• public transport.

You might like to start your questions with a phrase such as:

• What is your favourite ...
• How often do you ...
• Who do you think is the best ...
• Where is your nearest ...
• What do you think is the most important ...

Check for teething problems now, before you actually conduct your survey.

Try it out on another group. What improvements do they suggest?

Do your questions gather all of the information that you need?