

Resource 2.5.: Rules for formulating meaningful questions

Requirements	Explanations	Examples
Simple	Formulate the question as simple and straightforward as possible.	<p>yes: “How much do you think that washing hands with soap before eating is time-consuming or not time-consuming?”</p> <p>no: “How much do you think that if you wash your hands with soap before you eat that this consumes much time or consumes not much time?”</p>
Short	<p>While the meaning of the first two questions is essentially the same, the first includes additional aspects or information which is not necessary but lengthens the question.</p> <p>If you have to ask a long, complex question (see third and fourth questions), to increase comprehension try to break it into several sentences (as in the fourth question).</p>	<p>no: “How much do you think that it may be disgusting or not disgusting if you drink untreated water which you had fetched from an unsafe water source?”</p> <p>Yes: “How disgusting is drinking untreated water to you?”</p> <p>No: “How confident or unconfident are you to start washing hands with soap before handling food again after you had stopped to wash hands for several days, for example because there was no water or soap for handwashing?”</p> <p>Yes: “Imagine you have stopped washing hands with soap before handling food for several days, for example because there was no water or soap for handwashing. How confident are you to start washing hands with soap and water before handling food again?”</p>
Concrete	<p>With the first question, we only gain information on whether the participant washes hands or not. However, no information is gained with regard to the handwashing agent or with regard to the key time.</p> <p>With the second question, we gain information on whether hands are washed with a specific agent at a specific key time.</p>	<p>No: “Do you wash your hands?”</p> <p>Yes: “Do you wash your hands with soap and water before eating?”</p>
Unidimensional, without “and” or	The question contains two separate ratings, one regarding the temperature and one regarding the color of the water. A	No: “How much do you like the temperature and the color of the water?”

“or”	response may represent a weighting of the two aspects or the rating of that one aspect which is more important to the participant.	
Without expressions unfamiliar to the target population	Depending on the sample, participants may or may not be familiar with the term <i>abdominal typhus</i> . In the latter case, the disease would first have to be explained to the participant.	No: “Have you ever suffered from abdominal typhus?”
Not suggestive	The first question implies that drinking untreated water is disgusting. The second question (1) emphasizes the subjectivity of the rating, and (2) leaves open whether it is disgusting or not.	No: “Do you agree that drinking untreated water is disgusting?” Yes: “How much do you think that drinking untreated water is disgusting?”
Careful regarding sensitive topics	Often the question is not so much whether it is possible to talk about a sensitive topic at all but rather which words are appropriate to use. Which topics are sensitive and which words are appropriate depend on the specific local context. In one context, for example, it is more appropriate to ask about “defecation”, while in another the appropriate word may be “pooping”.	“Where do you go to defecate?” “Where do you go to poop?”
In line with the response options	While the question is formulated as a yes-no question, the response option is a rating scale.	No: “Do you like the temperature of the water?” 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 <input type="radio"/> 5 <input type="radio"/> Not at all A little Quite Much Very much