

Structured Questionnaire Exercise

Due: Tuesday November 21 in class.

Reading

Schaeffer and Presser, "The Science of Asking Questions," and lecture notes on survey design.

Introduction

Your task for this exercise is to develop and pretest a set of questions that could be used to test a simple bivariate hypothesis. Your pretest will involve administering the questions to a minimum of 20 people (a minimum of 10 per group member), checking the inter-item correlations to be sure it is appropriate to sum them in a composite index, and then testing your bivariate hypothesis with your index.

About Teams

You are required to collect your data in teams of 2 or more people. The only disadvantage of a team is scheduling, but this will be outweighed by the advantages unless you have a very complex schedule. Developing good questions is a task better done by several heads than one; teams can collect more data and can divide the labor in coding and preparing tables. Team members will normally write a group report plus an individual evaluation, and this is what I strongly prefer. If individual reports are submitted, you must include a statement indicating who worked together or consulted how much on what sections.

Questionnaire Development – Steps in Execution

Notes

1. As stated on the syllabus, each team should submit a rough draft of your questions to me for comments as soon as possible. Submit all the ideas if you disagree. In general, if you agree on what concept to measure but disagree about which are the best questions, you can usually solve the problem by including all the possible questions in your questionnaire and let the statistical analysis tell you which are the good ones. I will be available during class periods and office hours to give groups individual assistance on this.
2. The instructions below assume that your multiple-item index is dependent and everything else is independent. It will actually work out fine if your multiple-item index is independent and you have a simple attitude or behavior for your dependent variable; you would still include a few additional independent background factors as possible control variables. This would require minor changes in the organization of the write-up. See me for details if you get into this.

I. Develop Your Questionnaire

1. Pick a Dependent Variable

Pick a relatively general attitude, belief, or behavioral pattern – one that could be measured in a variety of ways. This concept must be at least ordinal: that is, there must be some single dimension which you can have more or less of. All concepts fulfill this criterion, so it is not likely to be a problem for you, but ask if you are not sure. Your task is to develop a variety of closed-ended questions which can be summed to form an Likkert-scale or index which measures this concept with less error than the individual items would have. About 90% of your effort in writing questions should go into these multiple measures of the dependent variable. Additionally, you will write 1-2 general open-ended questions to capture the person's opinion in his or her own words; we will use this question as a validity check.

- A. *Closed-ended questions.* There should be 6-10 closed-ended questions to measure different aspects of the same dependent variable. **One** of them should be a straightforward general question to capture the main idea of what you are interested in. **The others** should ask about different dimensions or themes relevant to your attitude. Unless this is impossible, some of these items should be worded positively so that agreeing means a person is at the high end of your concept, while others should be worded negatively so that disagreeing means a person is at the high end of your concept.

The response categories for the questions should be ranked to express more or less of the attitude you are measuring. They should be printed in rank order on the questionnaire. You should generally have four to seven response categories for each question, although there are exceptions.

To Check Yourself: You will end up wanting to add up these items, so it has to make sense to do this. All the different questions measuring the dependent variable should give you a score of high, medium, or low on your underlying attitude or belief variable; + items will yield a high score for agreeing, while - items will yield a high score for disagreeing. If you have difficulty deciding whether a particular item should be a + or a -, the question is likely going to be a problem and you should consider changing it. If you have difficulty with most of the items, either they or your concept (or your understanding) have more serious problems, and you should see me.

- B. *Open-ended question.* Include in your questionnaire one or two general and straightforward open-ended questions that ask people to use their own words to tell you what they think about the issue that is the subject of the dependent variable. You will categorize the answers thematically according to people's general attitudes; this will provide useful information for evaluating your closed-ended questions.

2. Pick Independent Variables

Select a few (2-5) independent variables for which it is easy to write simple closed-ended questions. Prepare these simple questions and include them in your questionnaire.

Choose one independent variable that you really believe affects your dependent variable; this variable will be the one you want to use for your hypothesis. It may be a basic background variable, or may itself be an attitude or behaviour that you can measure with one or two items. The other independent variables are additional background factors you suspect will make a difference in your dependent variable. These are to give you the possibility of having additional information if you need it.

These independent variables can be nominal, ordinal, or interval.

3. Pick Optional Additional Variables

You may choose to create more than one index, either for a different dependent variable, or for a more complex independent variable. These are created in the same way as the instructions say for the basic dependent variable.

4. Refine your Questions

Following the principles described in the readings and in class, refine your questions to make them as good as you can, both in their content and in the physical structure of your questionnaire or interview schedule. All questions should meet formal criteria such as:

- A. Unbiased; if biased items are used, they should be balanced.
- B. Clear, unambiguous, single-barrelled, grammatical.
- C. Closed-ended categories are exhaustive, mutually exclusive, reasonable in range and precision, and fit with the stem of the question.
- D. Legible, logical physical presentation.

II. Data Collection (Teams do this part together)

1. Make copies of your team's questionnaire. Each team must collect data from a minimum of 20 people, and each person must do a minimum of 10. (i.e. 1 and 2 person teams must do a minimum of 20, a 3 person team must do a minimum of 30, and a 4 person team must do a minimum of 40. It is actually not much harder to do more, but a total team sample size of 50 is plenty for the statistics and as much data-entry as we want to handle.)

2. Do convenience sampling, but purposively try to get as much variation as possible on the variables you are studying. That is, try to get people you expect to have different opinions on your dependent variables and to differ on your independent variables. Do not just ask your friends, and do not get whole groups of people to fill them out together, as any chance for people to talk to each other while writing their answers is likely to produce error and bias.

- a. As you collect the data, record any information that might be relevant to understanding people's answers, or that might alert you to problems with the questions.
- b. You may ask the questions orally or let people write their own answers; just say which you did.
- c. Ask people to tell you or to write in the margins if there is anything they find offensive, difficult to answer, unclear, etc.

- d. Watch and listen to the respondents for signs of difficulty or confusion, irritation at questions, hesitation in answering an item, giving the form back to you blank, changing answers, laughing, explaining the answer, etc. Take notes about these observations on the form itself, or on a separate paper you later staple to the questionnaires.
- e. Put a unique number on each questionnaire, right on the actual paper used for data collection. **Use these same numbers on your datasheet (see below).** Note that partners' questionnaires must all have different numbers (you cannot have two 9's, for example). One way to do this is to use three-digit numbers, where the first digit indicates the team member. In this system, 104 is partner #1's 4th questionnaire, 203 is partner #2's 3rd questionnaire, etc. It is useful to use some numbering system that makes it easy to know who collected the data. Please use numbers not letters because that makes data entry easier.

III. Data Organization

1. Follow the example and instructions in the lecture notes for preparing your code sheet for computer analysis.
2. Go over the questionnaires or summary sheets, discussing them and writing notes on them about problems or inconsistencies which can be seen within one person's answers. If you have the questionnaires, you can write these notes on them, or on a separate sheet of paper, whichever seems better. Write notes on questionnaires where the pattern of answers seems odd, and keep track of this information for later use.
3. Check each other's work and be sure everyone is doing things the same way. This is extremely important. If one team member deviates from the rest, everyone's data will be garbage, no matter who is "right." If in doubt about how to follow the instructions, consult with me.

IV. Computer Analysis of Data

1. Create a Datasheet and do Statistical Analysis. We will spend two days in class learning how to create a datasheet in the statistics program SPSS, and learning how to create statistical output. Your final statistical printouts should include the following types of tables:

1. univariate frequency distributions for all variables;
2. correlations among all the measures of the dependent variable;
3. reliability analysis for your proposed index.

2. Inspect Your Data

1. **Frequency distributions.** There are several useful things to inspect the frequencies for.
 - A. Problems of low variability. If 80% or more of the cases are in one category of a variable, the variability of that variable is so low that statistical results with that variable are extremely problematic with small samples. Results from such variables cannot be trusted, and they are often simply discarded.
 - B. Lesser problems of low variability, where 60% or more of the cases are in one category, or where 80% or more of the cases are in two adjacent categories (of a variable with more

than three categories). These may just indicate a skew in the population, but might also indicate a biased sample or a biased question.

- C. Comparisons across the different questions measuring the dependent variable, to see which items elicit the most favorable responses, and which the least favorable.
 - D. Information about the distribution of attitudes in the population. Because your samples are non-random, you have to interpret these results very cautiously, but it is still interesting to find out what people said.
2. ***Bivariate relations*** between your various questions measuring the dependent variable and your general closed-ended dependent variable question or your coded open-ended question. If either your general question or your coded open-ended question is good, this will give you a quick check on the validity of the other questions.
3. ***Correlations and reliability analysis*** among the questions measuring the dependent variable. Ideally all are moderately large and positive; negative correlations are definitely bad. The reliability analysis should show a coefficient alpha that is pretty high (above .7, say) and should show that removing any item from the scale lowers the alpha. If you don't have the ideal, there are several possible patterns to check for:
- A. One or two questions account for all the negative correlations and most of the small positive ones; these same questions have low item-total correlations and may even show an alpha that goes UP when they are removed. This probably means those questions are "bad" and the others are OK. You discard the bad questions and get a revised index using only the good ones.
 - B. There are subsets of questions which have moderate or strong positive correlations with each other but negative or weak correlations with the others. This pattern can make the whole reliability analysis look bad. This means the questions seem to be tapping two different conceptual variables. You try to see which set most captures what you had in mind and use those for your index. You will usually want to re-run the reliability analysis for each set separately. Occasionally, you decide that both sets are interesting, and create two indices, one for each.
 - C. Most correlations are moderately or strongly positive, there are no negative correlations and only a light scattering of weak positive ones. This probably means there's no particular trouble at all, and the reliability analysis will look good.
 - D. Most correlations in the table are close to zero, and negative ones are scattered across different questions. This means that none of the items are properly related to any of the others, that there really is no single concept that your questions measure. The reliability analysis will show a low coefficient alpha. This is the worst situation to be in, but it is rare. I try to give you enough help in writing the questions to avoid this. Most often, this turns out to be due to mistakes in coding the data, usually when partners code their data separately and turn out to be doing it differently. If you have data like this and you have checked for and ruled out coding errors, you definitely need to see me.
 - E. There are a lot of strong negative correlations for one or two variables. This usually means that you have forgotten to "reverse score" a question, or that subjects read the opposite meaning into a question than you intended. See me.

V. Write up Your Report

About Truthfulness

Science depends on researchers telling the truth about what really happened in their research, not what they wish had happened. At the same time, students worry that they will be graded down if they tell the truth. So, for each question, I insist that you tell the truth about what really happened in the research, but then follow it with an opportunity to explain what you now think you should have done. If there was a mistake and your self-criticism gives a correct statement about what you should have done, you will receive full credit as if you had done things right in the first place.

Report Guidelines

Please use single-spaced, 12 pt Times New Roman Font, and one-inch margins. Put a double space between paragraphs. **Follow the format described below exactly.**

Important Stylistic Note #1

Give each question a short phrase that describes its content. This is usually related to the name, but is often somewhat longer, as many questions cannot be captured in eight letters. Use these descriptive phrases as labels in all tables and in writing about the questions, not question numbers or cryptic computer names. Be consistent, so that the reader can easily work between the tables, the text, and the questionnaire. That is, call the same variable the same thing everywhere.

Important Stylistic Note #2

Tables may be embedded in the text or prepared on separate pages which can be interleaved with the text or attached together at the end. Each table should have a number and a title; everything should have meaningful labels. Discussions in the text should refer to tables by number and should use the same variable names as appear in the tables. Cut-up computer printouts are not adequate tables. Part of writing a statistical report is arranging the results into readable tables. It is OK to prepare the tables by hand, as typing them is extremely difficult unless you have a word processor with tables options.

Paper Outline

1. Title page

Title of report, author(s), date. Put partner's name in parentheses at the bottom of the page if you worked with someone but wrote reports separately.

2. Abstract

Write one paragraph which summarizes your hypothesis, data collection procedures, and findings. You may include this on the title page if you wish.

3. Body of paper

1. **Introduction.** Write a paragraph stating your bivariate hypothesis and why it is worth researching. On this assignment, you will usually want to talk about why your dependent variable is interesting to you. (Note: Citations to readings are not needed, but do it here if something you read went into your thinking on this project.)
2. **Methods of research** (Note: To aid grading, number each section of this discussion as it is numbered here.)
 - A. *Sampling*
 - a. Describe your sampling procedures including when, where, and how you selected your subjects. Although rigorous sampling is not required, try to think analytically about the coverage and biases of your sample. Describe the kinds of people you got into your sample, given your procedures. Be sure to discuss any differences among team members in this.
 - b. Tell the reader in a couple of sentences what to think about the external validity of this paper. We know you do not have a probability sample, so strictly speaking, your external validity is low. But less strictly speaking, do you feel that you probably have a good representation of the population of interest, or do you feel there are clear biases? Explain a little.
 - c. Evaluation: why you think your sampling was good, given your resources and limitations, or what you now believe should have been done differently. Please note, this evaluation is in terms of what was actually possible in this assignment, and is not about the standards you believe professionals should adhere to.
 - B. *Independent Variables.*
 - a. Most of these variables are simple and unproblematic. Just list them, noting anything that would not be obvious. (Example: the categories of sex are obvious, but the categories of religion are not, so you should say which you used.) If you have a more complicated independent variable, state the question(s) you used to measure it, and anything you did in the way of recoding or forming an index. See instructions for dependent variable for information about how to write about an index.
 - b. Either assure me that there were no problems in these, or describe any problems that turned up.
 - c. Briefly evaluate your measures, stating any changes that should be made. (Note: relation to dependent variable goes elsewhere, as does discussion of wishing you had included other variables. This is just evaluation of the measures of the independent variables.)
 - C. *Dependent variable*
 - a. Briefly discuss how you defined and revised your concept, and what thinking led into the specific questions you used to measure it; briefly list the items or refer to the questionnaire copy.
 - b. Discuss your open-ended question. Did it seem to "work" in giving you an overall idea of the person's opinion on the subject? Were you able to group subjects into two to five categories according to their answers? Did the content or reasons in people's answers reflect the ideas you had in thinking up your closed-ended questions? Or, did the content suggest themes or issues you had not considered?

- c. Based on your own second thoughts or the comments of your subjects, evaluate the items in terms of their clarity and lack of bias. Are they OK, or should some be revised? (If questions seem problematic here, keep that in mind later if you are deciding which to discard in forming an index.)

3. **Validity of Index**

(Note: You must have at least one index in your paper, usually for the dependent variable. This can be either your means or your inter-item correlations. Put your tables either in the text or in the appendix.)

- A. *Refer to the frequency distribution tables* (which should be included).
 - a. Either discuss any variability problems evident in these tables, or explain why there are none. Do not discuss every number or every question. Explain the problem with the problematic variables or, if none have problems, pick the question with the lowest variability and explain why it varies enough not to be a problem.
 - b. Summarize what these tables show about the distribution of attitudes in your sample. To summarize is to paint a verbal picture in two to five sentences; it is not to quote all the numbers.
- B. *Discuss the categorization of your open-ended question.* What did it reveal about the distribution of attitudes in your sample?
- C. *Using either or both of your general closed-ended question or your coded open-ended question as a criterion,* discuss your first check on the validity of the closed ended questions. You are asking whether each question has the expected positive relation to the criterion. This is normally based on a difference of means table for the open-ended question, and the correlation for the general closed-ended question.
- D. *Discuss the matrix of correlations and the reliability analysis* among the closed-ended questions measuring your dependent variable. Exactly what you say will depend on what the numbers look like. You'll either be explaining why all the items seem pretty good, or why you think some are not so good. You should not (!!!) discuss every single number in the table, but you should let me know what you are looking at in the table. The original full table of correlations among all questions intended to measure the dependent variable should be presented along with the reliability analysis information, including the corrected item-total correlations and the coefficient alpha. If you drop a number of questions from your index, or perform other operations, you should present a revised reliability analysis of the new index. Conclude with a positive summary of the content of the index you end up using.

4. **Results**

- A. Talk to me about the overall picture of your items. Which ones worked well? Which ones didn't? Why was this the case? Talk about your sample, your questionnaire, and perhaps how the two interacted.
- B. Hypothesis testing:
 - 1. Prepare a bivariate statistical table to show the relationship between your independent variable(s) and dependent variable. In practice, this means you will make either a difference of means table, or a correlation matrix.

2. Write a paragraph discussing your statistical results saying what they show and whether your hypothesis is confirmed, disconfirmed or whether the results are inconclusive.

5. Discussion

(**Note:** Write at least two paragraphs. Give at least some answer to every question. You do not have to give long answers for all four questions, but do give a serious and thoughtful answer to at least one. If your study interested you, discuss that the most. If your study seemed boring, discuss the "side" issues more.)

- A. Imagine this is a pretest for a larger study. Does it seem worthwhile to pursue this research? What changes should be made to your item? Or, do you now think this is a dead end?
- B. What did you learn from the process of doing this study? Does it change your opinion of survey research? Would you like to do this kind of research again?
- C. Is there anything else that came up while doing the research that seems interesting or worthy of discussion or criticism?

6. **Group process report.** Pick the category that applies to you and answer the relevant questions.

- A. *Had partner, wrote separate papers.*
 - a. Compare you and your partner in the effort you put into the project.
 - b. Compare you and your partner in the extent to which you studied course materials and knew what to do for the assignment.
 - c. Who developed the questions?
 - d. Who prepared the tables from the printout?
 - e. Who figured out how to interpret the statistical results?
 - f. Did you start trying to work together before deciding to write separate papers? How far did you get?
 - g. Were there some things you found necessary to discuss in preparation for writing your papers? What?
 - h. How did the group process work out? Was it a positive or negative experience? Would you do things differently in the future?
 - i. Tell me anything else I should know that might affect your grade or your partner's, or that I should know to be fair in grading your work.
- B. *Wrote joint paper.*
 - a. Do you stand by the paper as written, or is there something you feel should have been said differently? Any corrections you offer at this point will be factored into your grade.
 - b. Compare you and your partner in the effort you put into the project. Compare you and your partner in the extent to which you studied course materials and knew what to do for the assignment.
 - c. Who developed the questions?

- d. Who prepared the tables from the printout?
- e. Who figured out how to interpret the statistical results?
- f. How did you go about getting the writing done?
- g. How did the group process work out? Was it a positive or negative experience? Would you do things differently in the future?
- h. Tell me anything else I should know that might affect your grade or your partner's, or that I should know to be fair in grading your work.

7. Appendices

1. Attach to the report a blank copy of your questionnaire that shows variable names and information about coding.
2. Submit all the completed questionnaires when you submit the assignment. Make sure there are code numbers on each questionnaire to correspond to the identification numbers on the data sheet.
3. If they are not included in the text, make sure the statistical tables from your results are attached.