

User Research

#7: The Craft of Questions

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The craft of questions



You have to know what your questions mean—*what decisions they inform*—before you ask them.

—Erika Hall

Questions to gather context

Sequence	What do you do when you select a delivery option? Then, what do you do next?
Quantity	How many options are too many?
Specific examples	What was the purchase you made?
Complete list	What are all the different types of deliveries you have used?
Relationships	How do you go about buying for someone else?
Organisational structure	Is your team part of a greater department?

Questions to uncover the unsaid

Clarification	When you refer to 'that', what do you mean?
Code words / native language	Why do you call it ...?
Emotional cues	Why did you laugh when you opened the door?
Why	Why do you think you found it difficult?
Probe delicately	You mentioned that it was tricky. Can you tell me more?
Probe without presuming	Some people really don't like using that functionality. What are your thoughts?

Questions to uncover mental models

Compare processes	What's the difference between buying online and buying in a shop?
Compare to others	Is it the same in another shop?
Compare across time	How different do you think it will be 5 years from now?

Quantitative variables

Continuous	Discrete	Categorical
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Temperature• A train's top speed• Typing speed• Intelligence• Level of anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of goals scored in a football match• Number of reported issues on a piece of software• Number of people you meet while at a cafe• Attendances at a concert	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gender• Occupation• Favourite Colour• Type of restaurant

Adapted from Dancey and Reidy, J, "Statistics without Maths for Psychology", 7th ed. (2017)

Discrete variables

1. How many pizzas do you eat in a month?

- 0 — I don't eat pizzas
- 1 to 5
- 6 to 10
- More than 10

Continuous variable

2. How hot or cold do you like to eat your pizza?

Cold from the
fridge

Piping hot from
the oven

N/A — I never eat
pizzas.



A horizontal scale with seven radio buttons. The scale is a light gray bar with seven white circles (radio buttons) spaced evenly along it. The first radio button is on the far left, and the last is on the far right.

Categorical variable

3. What do you like to have on your pizza?

Mozzarella

Tomato sauce

Mushrooms

Olives

Other (please specify)

Anchovies

Artichokes

Salami

Prosciutto

Open fields

4. Tell me about the worst pizza you've ever had.

5. What's the best pizza you've ever had?

What are the problems in this survey?

Problems with survey

1. How many pizzas do you eat in a month?

- 0 – I don't eat pizzas
- 1 to 5
- 6 to 10
- More than 10

It's better to have a qualifying question in the beginning:

“Do you eat pizza?”

2. How hot or cold do you like to eat your pizza?

Cold from the
fridge

Piping hot from
the oven

N/A – I never eat
pizzas.

Problems with survey

Minimise the number of open field questions.

Some of these may be better *interview* questions rather than survey questions.

Example interview questions

- Tell me about the last time you bought a pizza.
 - How many pizzas did you buy?
 - Were you sharing? Who were you sharing it with?
- How did you order your pizzas?
- What happened when you made the order?

Some rules of thumb

In a survey:

- Questions need to be clear and unambiguous. (*Hint: it's always best to test your questions before releasing it.*)
- Surveys perform best with "closed" questions.
- Use open fields sparingly.

In an interview:

- Keep your interview questions "open" (why, when, how).
- Use "closed" questions only for validation.

Back to our startup...

You've just been employed by a new startup. The CEO is focused on **minimising single-use plastic bottles**, and they are **open to developing new products, or services to support their vision.**

You will also have to think about **how this product/service generates revenue** for the company.



Exercise:

What's out there?

Take 10 minutes to:

1. List a few competitors, or other inspirations.
2. Go to their websites see what they offer.
3. Think about your own past experiences, confer with your team and colleagues.
4. How would you decide on what might offer value to potential customers?

Work alone. (10 mins)

Exercise:

Draft a survey

Work alone. (10 mins)

Imagine one of the methods you are employing for your research is a survey.

Draft a 5-10 question survey.

Review (10 mins)

Exercise:

Draft an interview discussion guide

Work in alone (10 mins), then in groups (10 mins)

Imagine one of the methods you are employing for your research is a remote interview.

Draft your questions individually (10 minutes), then harmonise the questions within your group (10 minutes).

Note: Agree with your team who's going to use which virtual 'Post-It' note colour, so you can more easily distinguish your notes when you put them together.

Open-ended interview: Drafting a basic discussion guide

1. Intro: how will you set the scene?
2. Background: who are they? what do they do?
3. Get specific: are there specific stories they can tell you?
4. Get comparisons: what's been good? what's bad?
5. Dream question: imagine if, what if...?
6. Wrap-up: how will you close the interview?
7. What observations to take note of?
8. What sort of timing would you plan for?

Exercise:

Interview Practice

Work with someone from a different group. (20 mins)

Using your harmonised questions, conduct an interview with someone from another group. (10 mins)

After 10 mins, swap and let them interview you.

Important:

- Take your own notes of the conversation.
- Add your notes to Miro, one point of information per virtual 'Post-It' note.
E.g. "Bought 3 water bottles in the past" belongs to one Post-It note

Next:

Analysing Data