

CAN THE PERSON ANSWER THE QUESTION?

When creating a list of possible responses, always put yourself in the shoes of the person completing the survey and imagine if there's at least one answer that every person can truthfully provide. If that's not the case, include more answers in your list, add an "other" option, or provide an opt-out (eg: not applicable/none of the above).

There are many reasons why someone might not be able to answer a question:

Person knows they don't know. For example: "What is the speed of the internet connection to your home?" is a question that many people do not know the answer to. Don't know should be a response option.

Question is inconvenient to answer. For example: "How many tins of food do you have in your home?" would normally require that people be at home while they do the survey and be willing and able to go to the relevant room(s) to find out how many tins they had.

Person does not know their own motivations. For example: "How important is taste versus convenience versus price to you when buying tinned fruit?" This sort of question usually requires an indirect method of questioning such as conjoint analysis or regression to estimate someone's motivational structures.

Question is very personal. If you're asking sensitive or personal questions, explain why and consider including a "prefer not to say" response option if you think people will leave the survey because of the question. You can also help people save face by giving response options that allow them to feel positive about themselves after responding.

Time frame is challenging to answer. For example: "how many times did you purchase coffee at Starbucks in the past 6 months?" is not an easy question to answer. Make sure time frame is easy to calculate or reference.

Person's answer is not in the list. Consider the different answer options; make sure you give responders the right amount of choices. For example, in some cases Yes/No may not be enough but it may be necessary to include "not sure". This also applies to scales where we have to make sure we don't leave gaps. For "other" options, try to include a specify text box where appropriate. This will give people a chance to be specific and give you more robust data.

Answer options are double barreled. For example: Was the flight attendant service fast and friendly? The service could have been friendly but not fast or vice versa.