



Useful Answer Categories

Can you provide answer categories for questions in surveys that are useful? TIPS:

- Research among dairy farmers in Pennsylvania reveals that they prefer words rather than numbers or boxes. Perhaps your target audiences do too.
- Repeat the same set of answer categories a number of times. It helps the respondent. Avoid repeating the same set of answer categories too often so the respondent does not get lulled to sleep.
- Type answers in bold and ‘small caps.’ Research has shown that these characteristics work well in a survey.
- In most cases use at least four categories not counting answers like “not sure.”

1 If you want to find out how often something occurs, ask for the exact number of times, or use these answers with a question.

NEVER	ALMOST NEVER	NEVER
RARELY	OCCASIONALLY	RARELY
OCCASIONALLY	SOMETIMES	SOMETIMES
REGULARLY	OFTEN	OFTEN
DON'T KNOW	DON'T KNOW	DON'T KNOW
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HARDLY EVER	NONE AT ALL	NEVER
RARELY	SOME (LITTLE)	ALMOST NEVER
SOMETIMES	A LOT	SOMETIMES
OFTEN	A GREAT DEAL	FAIRLY OFTEN
VERY OFTEN		VERY OFTEN

2a If you want to find out the degree of people’s feelings, their attitude, strength, or belief, ask “to what extent...” and choose from the following categories.

NOT VERY EFFECTIVE	DEFINITELY NO	VERY GENERAL
SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE	PROBABLY NO	SOMEWHAT GENERAL
MODERATELY EFFECTIVE	PROBABLY YES	SOMEWHAT DETAILED
VERY EFFECTIVE	DEFINITELY YES	VERY DETAILED
NOT SURE		NOT SURE
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NOT A PROBLEM	STRONGLY DISAGREE	VERY DISSATISFIED
SOMEWHAT OF A PROBLEM	DISAGREE	FAIRLY DISSATISFIED
A MODERATE PROBLEM	NO OPINION	FAIRLY SATISFIED
SERIOUS PROBLEM	AGREE	VERY SATISFIED
NEVER THOUGHT ABOUT IT	STRONGLY AGREE	
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NOT VERY PREPARED	NOT IMPORTANT	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT
SOMEWHAT PREPARED	RELATIVELY UNIMPORTANT	SATISFACTORY
MODERATELY PREPARED	MODERATELY IMPORTANT	GOOD
WELL PREPARED	HIGHLY IMPORTANT	
	DON'T KNOW	
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DEFINITELY FALSE	A GREAT DEAL LOWER	NOT AT ALL
FALSE	SOMEWHAT LOWER	SLIGHTLY (OR SPARINGLY)
NOT SURE	ABOUT THE SAME	MODERATELY
TRUE	SOMEWHAT HIGHER	EXTREMELY
DEFINITELY TRUE	A GREAT DEAL HIGHER	
	NOT SURE	



2a (Continued)

POOR	POOR	NON EXISTENT	NEEDS WORK
NOT SO GOOD	FAIR	MINIMAL	GOOD
SATISFACTORY	ACCEPTABLE	MODERATE	EXCELLENT
VERY GOOD	GOOD	CONSIDERABLE	
OUTSTANDING	EXCELLENT		

NOT VERY HELPFUL	NOT VERY USEFUL	NO EXTENT	NOT USEFUL AT ALL	NOT A PROBLEM
SOMEWHAT HELPFUL	SOMEWHAT USEFUL	SOME EXTENT	OF VERY LITTLE USE	A MINOR PROBLEM
MODERATELY HELPFUL	MODERATELY USEFUL	MODERATE EXTENT	SOMEWHAT USEFUL	A MAJOR PROBLEM
VERY HELPFUL	VERY USEFUL	GREAT EXTENT	FAIRLY USEFUL	
NOT REALLY SURE	NOT REALLY SURE	VERY GREAT EXTENT	VERY USEFUL	
		NO BASIS TO JUDGE/ NOT SURE		

2b If you want to ask how important something is, you could also say: “How important do you consider each of the following” and use these answer categories:

NOT AT ALL CRITICAL
SLIGHTLY CRITICAL
SOMEWHAT CRITICAL
VERY CRITICAL
ABSOLUTELY CRITICAL

3a If you want to find out people’s intentions or aspirations ask, “do you expect to...” and ask them to choose from the following categories.

DEFINITELY YES	DEFINITELY NO
PROBABLY YES	PROBABLY NO
POSSIBLY YES	PROBABLY YES
UNCERTAIN	DEFINITELY YES
POSSIBLY NO	
PROBABLY NO	
DEFINITELY NO	

3b Even more preferable in wanting to ask peoples’ intentions, is to ask, “How willing are you to.....” in the next six months?

NOT WILLING
RELUCTANT
SOMEWHAT WILLING
MODERATELY WILLING
VERY WILLING

4 A significant percentage of people often do not have an answer. It is more valuable to you and scientific to find that out. Always consider the need for the following in your answers.

NEVER THOUGHT ABOUT IT
NOT SURE
DON'T KNOW
NO OPINION
NONE (AT THE TOP OF A LIST)
NONE OF THE ABOVE (BOTTOM OF LIST)
NO OPINION

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The reference citation for this Tipsheet is: Kiernan, Nancy Ellen (2004). Useful Answer Categories: Tipsheet #44, University Park, PA: Penn State Cooperative Extension. Available at: <http://www.extension.psu.edu/evaluation/pdf/TS44.pdf>

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