



When the Answer is Zero, Zilch or 0

How can I increase the response to questions *within* a survey?

Non-response to survey questions takes many forms. One recurring problem, but one that is easy to prevent, occurs when the question asks for a precise quantity such as:

How many veterinarians in your practice besides yourself?

_____ VETERINARIANS

The problem? Respondents who want to answer none or zero will *too often* leave the answer blank. The missing answer leaves you in the unenviable position of trying to figure out why the blank exists: is it because the respondent skipped the question or because the answer was a zero.

The result, irrespective of the reason, leaves you without data. Missing data makes your overall sample less representative of your population and opens your subgroup samples to question because their Ns are even smaller. Such data loss can be serious.

To reduce the likelihood of missing data from this type of question, insert an explicit direction to deal with the problem such as:

How many veterinarians in your practice besides yourself? (If none, write 0.)

_____ VETERINARIANS

Nancy Ellen Kiernan, Ph.D., Program Evaluator, nekiernan@psu.edu

The reference citation for this Tipsheet is: Kiernan, Nancy Ellen (2001). When the Answer is Zero, Zilch or 0: Tipsheet #19, University Park, PA: Penn State Cooperative Extension.
Available at: <http://www.extension.psu.edu/evaluation/pdf/TS19.pdf>

This Web site is copyrighted by The Pennsylvania State University. The information may be used for educational purposes but not sold for profit.