



Evaluating Sources of Information

Specialists and agents often struggle to create a question that requests two types of information: first, multiple answers and second, a rating or assessment for *each* answer. How can this dual agenda be accomplished while minimizing any loss of data?

This problem occurs in *many* needs assessments and evaluations.

Here's a typical example all extension staff know well: suppose you want to know what sources of information your program or target audience has drawn on in the past year for a particular issue and what the audience thinks of each information source.

Step one is easy. Create a question asking which sources they consulted, providing an array of answer categories gleaned from *talking with* your audience. (Don't just rely on what you and your colleague down the hall think.)

Step two is prone to error. One typical error is to create a second question asking for an assessment of the sources identified above. A single answer to this type of question provides an evaluation of *all* the identified sources. You end up with murky, confounded, and worthless data.

Another typical error is to ask the respondent to write down the sources they identified in the first question and then to give a rating for each. What usually happens is that the respondent leaves out this part of the question, or, only writes down some sources identified above. You end up with missing data!

A more reliable solution is to create a second question but to integrate it with the first question with the help of formatting and computer graphics. Note in the extension satellite example given below how your eye is drawn to the second question yet the spaces for the answers appear across from the items in the first question, making it more likely you will get an answer to the second question for all items identified by the respondent. Additionally you utilize otherwise empty space.

1. *How did you become familiar with the extension satellite conference on On-Farm Problem Solving? Was it through a (circle all numbers that apply)*

Circle

1. VETERINARIAN
2. SANITARIAN
3. FARM DEALER/SUPPLIER
4. BANKER/FINANCIAL REP
5. EXTENSION NEWSLETTER
6. NEWSPAPER
7. EXTENSION WEBSITE
8. RADIO/TV
9. OTHER _____

Rating

2. *Opposite each source you identified, indicate in the Rating column above whether you received a positive (+), negative (–), or mixed view (M) of the Satellite Conference.*

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