

Designing a Survey—Response Methods

Designing a survey requires careful consideration. Think about what information you need and how to capture it in a manner that allows for data aggregation and analysis. It is important to consider how the respondent will answer the question. Three response methods are described below.

Rank Order

In this case, the respondent labels the answers in order of preference, where 1=first choice, 2=second choice, and so on. The advantage to this approach is that more information is gained than from a simple yes or no response. For example, a Head Start program might ask current and eligible Head Start parents which preschool options they prefer, instructing them to rank their answers in order of preference. In addition to surveying parents, Head Start programs can ask staff their opinion about which preschool options would be most helpful to families with whom they work. The responses from families and staff may guide decision-making about Head Start program options, partnering with other child care programs, or using additional funding streams to meet families' needs.

Rating Scale

Sometimes referred to as a Likert scale, this three-, four-, or five-point scale is frequently used in surveys. Typical answer options on a Likert scale might be:

1. Very satisfied
2. Satisfied
3. Neutral or not sure
4. Dissatisfied
5. Very dissatisfied

Rating scales can be used to gather opinions about the quality of the Head Start services. For example, a program might ask enrolled families to express their opinions about a variety of different services in order to assess where they need to improve.

Root and Contingency

With this method, a respondent is asked a general question (the “root”). They are then asked to answer follow-up questions based on the initial response (the “contingencies”). For example, a program survey may ask respondents whether their family has needed or used health or human services assistance and if they experienced barriers in finding help. First, respondents answer the root question about whether their family needed a service in the past year. If yes, they are asked to answer three related questions, such as whether they had transportation to access the needed service, if the help they sought felt comfortable, and whether they used the services they found.

ACTIVITY

Write the name of the response method for each of the following survey sections.

1. What type of program calendar would best meet your needs?

Instructions: Rate your choices on a scale of 1–5.

PRESCHOOL OPTIONS	RATING
Full-day/part-year (six hours or more, M–F, Sept. to May)	
Half-day (four hours in the morning, M–F, Sept. to May)	
Half-day (four hours in the afternoon, M–F, Sept. to May)	
Full-day/full-year (six to 10 hours, M–F, year round)	

Response method: Rank Order

2. Has your family needed any of the following services?

Instructions: Review the types of services in the left-hand column and read question A. If your answer to question A is yes, please respond to the next three questions (B, C, and D). If your answer is no, leave questions B, C, and D unchecked.

	A In the past year, have you or anyone in your family needed...		B If you found help, did you have transportation to get to it?		C If you found help, did it feel comfortable?		D If you found help, did you use the services you found?	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Please check the correct box.								
Income assistance (e.g., Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or unemployment insurance)								
Legal assistance (e.g., immigration or child custody)								

Response method: Root and Contingency

3. How satisfied were you with the Head Start services you received?

Instructions: Check the appropriate box for each topic on the left.

	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Satisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Service Not Used
Information about my child or children's progress						
Classroom program						
Health services						
Special needs/support services						
Family literacy activities						
Transportation						
Meal services						

Response method: [Rating Scale](#)

