

# **Designing a questionnaire resource**

Fieldwork and investigations often involve conducting a survey or questionnaire. You may have to do this for other subjects, not only geography, and you may have to do it as part of your coursework. It's worth learning how to do it properly!

This resource will help you to design, develop and test a suitable questionnaire for your study on sustainable shopping.

## **Aim**

You need to make sure you know what your questionnaire is aiming to achieve or find out. Otherwise, you'll have no idea where to start and the sort of questions you might want to be asking!

In this case, you are aiming to investigate consumer awareness of, and people's opinions of sustainable shopping. In other words, you want to know what customers know and think about things like packaging, recycling, eco-friendly and Fairtrade products etc., and whether it affects where / how they shop.

## **Designing the questions**

Ok, so you've got your aim and you know broadly what you want to find out. Now's the time to start thinking about what questions to ask, in what order, and how to ask them.

## **Getting started**

It's a good idea to start off with a few general, easy questions – it helps to put people 'at ease'. You might want to ask them things like how far they have travelled to get to the supermarket, or how they travelled there.

## **Personal or sensitive questions**

You may want to ask them how old they are – it may be interesting to analyse whether different age groups have different opinions about fair trade or recycling for example. Age is tricky though – some people are sensitive about their age. The best thing to do is to use categories, e.g. under 20, 21-30, 31-40 and so on. That way, people don't have to give their exact age, and can just point to the right category.

Names and addresses are usually not important, and aren't relevant to your study, so leave them out!

Don't put in embarrassing or irrelevant questions, like 'how often do you have a bath?'

## **Open and closed questions**

Open questions are those which don't have a choice of answers, and people are free to say what they like in response. For example, questions which ask for an opinion, like 'What do you think about packaging of fruit and vegetables?' The trouble with this type of question is that it will produce many different types of answer and will be very difficult to analyse.

Closed questions are those which have a set choice of 'answer options' for people to choose from. For example, you could ask 'What do you think about packaging of fruit and vegetables? - choose the statement which most applies to you...

- a) I like it to be pre-packaged
- b) It's too much / unnecessary
- c) Don't know / not bothered

People have to choose one of the options (make this clear), and this makes it a lot easier to analyse the results.

## **'Leading' questions**

It is easy to phrase a question so that it 'leads' the respondent towards a certain response. For example, 'Do you think that excess and unnecessary packaging of fruit and vegetables is wrong?' People are 'led' towards saying 'yes' because of the way the question is worded and phrased. This makes the results biased, and you must therefore think carefully about how you phrase questions.

## **'Double' questions**

Avoid asking 'two in one' questions, like 'Do you think that supermarkets should cut down on the packaging they use, and sell more Fairtrade products? What about the person who thinks that supermarkets should cut down on packaging, but isn't really bothered about Fairtrade?'

## **Length of questionnaire and sample size / make-up**

**Length** – You need to find out certain things, but a clear, well-designed questionnaire with unambiguous closed questions shouldn't take up too much of peoples' time. Aim to get what you need to know in 10 – 15 questions.

**Sample size** – Too few and it won't be representative, too many and it's unrealistic – try to strike a happy balance. 10 -15 people at each supermarket should give a fairly valid result. It's important to try to ask about the same number at each – if you only ask 3 at Asda but 15 at Tesco, then your results may be biased and unreliable.

The **make-up** of the sample is an important consideration too. It may be tempting to ask only your friends or people your age (or you may avoid them, and go for

only older people!) but it's important to ask a cross-section of the 'population' available.

## **Layout**

If you are going to actually give questionnaires to people to take away and fill in, it's a good idea to write questions and answer options out clearly on the left-hand side, with boxes to tick on the right-hand side of the paper.

If you're going to stand and ask the questions and gather responses as you go, it is worth developing a 'data collection table' so that you can fill in tally marks for people's responses as you go. This saves photocopying or printing multiple sheets, is easier to manage and will also be easier to compare and analyse later.

## **Pilot study**

Once you've designed your questionnaire, try it out on a couple of people. Ask them to tell you if any questions are unclear, leading or biased, sensitive, or if you've missed anything. Think about how easy it will be for you to analyse the results. Make any changes you need to and you're ready to go!

## **Carrying it out**

Start each questionnaire by introducing yourself, saying where you're from and that you are doing a geography investigation into supermarkets and people's shopping habits. Ask them politely if they could spare a few moments to answer your short questionnaire.

While you're asking your questions, remember to...

- Listen to what they're saying!
- Look interested
- Respond to comments and be prepared to explain if they don't understand
- Ask for clarification if you don't understand something they've said
- Not be offended or get cross if people don't want to stop and answer your questionnaire – people are busy!

**Good luck!**