

# Common survey issues in UX research

## Hands on workshop



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### Is a web survey the appropriate method to answer your research questions?

Web survey

Log analysis

Experiment

Diary study

Interviews

Focus group

Usability testing

Field study

Other methods...

## Three types of web surveys platforms determine the number and complexity of questions you can ask

### **In product surveys**

Showed in product either on desktop on on mobile and apps

### **Email based**

Generally used when you have a list of users / customers

### **Third party**

- Online panels
- Other methods to recruit and survey

3

## Do I have the numbers?

### **In product surveys**

How much traffic?

Response rates

### **Email based**

% of opt in- rate

Email response rates

### **Online panels**

Incidence rate

Cost

Timing

4

## Two ways to write a questionnaire

  
Jump on a doc

**Follow the  
steps in this  
presentation**

5

## Before writing the questionnaire: 3 steps

1. Assemble a team
  - a. Researcher(s)
  - b. Subject matter expert (e.g. PM, Director, UXR domain knowledge expert)
  - c. Stakeholders
  - d. Other teams (e.g. Marketing, Sales)
2. Write the research questions you want to answer
3. Agree with the team about the research questions BEFORE you write the questionnaire

6

## Research questions table

Research questions	Survey question(s)	Logs	Other method
Research Question 1	Survey Question 1 Survey Question 2		
Research Question 2		Log1	
Research Question 3	Survey Question 3	Log2	
Research Question 4			Qual research ...

Only a survey question(s) answers your research question

Only logs answers your research question

Both survey question and logs answer your research question

Research question 4 is answered with qual research

7

## Literature review: when and how?

- Internal research depositories
- Internal UX and Marketing mailing lists
- Journals
- Web sites
  
- **Look at the questionnaires AFTER you wrote your research questions**

8

## 10 top issues/problems found in reviewing surveys

### 1. Less important questions placed early in the survey

Start with engaging questions and place the most important questions at the beginning of the survey to get the most considerate answer (less respondent fatigue) and get more answers for these questions

### 2. Demographics questions placed at the beginning of the questionnaire

Demographic questions, unless they are needed to screen our respondents, are not engaging and also a little personal

Better to place them at the end of the questionnaire

### 3. Open ended questions placed at the beginning of a questionnaire

Open ended questions generate the highest amount of break-offs. Try to use the sparingly and definitely not at the beginning of a survey.

9

## 10 top issues/problems found in reviewing surveys

### 4. Questions made mandatory

Respect the user

No question should be mandatory. You can use a function depending on your survey platform to provide a *soft prompt* but still allow respondents to skip

If you have survey logic find an acceptable route if the respondent skips that routing question (you will need to work harder and sometimes it will be impossible)

### 5. Survey is too long

How long is too long?

10

## How long is too long?

### When do we start seeing a substantial rate of survey breakoffs?

SurveyMonkey: “After 7-8 minutes completion rates dropped from 5 to 20%”

Qualtrics: “Surveys longer than 12 minutes (and 9 minutes on mobile) start to see substantial levels of respondent break-off.”

[https://www.surveymonkey.com/curiosity/survey\\_completion\\_times/](https://www.surveymonkey.com/curiosity/survey_completion_times/)  
<https://www.qualtrics.com/support/survey-platform/survey-module/survey-checker/survey-methodology-compliance-best-practices/>

### Rule of thumb:

30 questions (English language) will take approximately 10 minutes to be answered<sup>1</sup>

By question, we mean separate question, not grids, tables, or blocks, which are actually more than one question

<sup>1</sup> Both SurveyMonkey and Qualtrics report this estimate based on analyzing their massive volume of surveys handled by their platforms

11

Proprietary + Confidential

## 10 top issues found in reviewing surveys

### 6. Open ended questions asked to everybody in a survey

Very often we do not need to ask open ended questions to everybody in a survey. Generally after 300 usable open ended answers we can see themes emerging.

Ask open-ended questions to a random subset of respondents making everybody (including yourself) to save time!

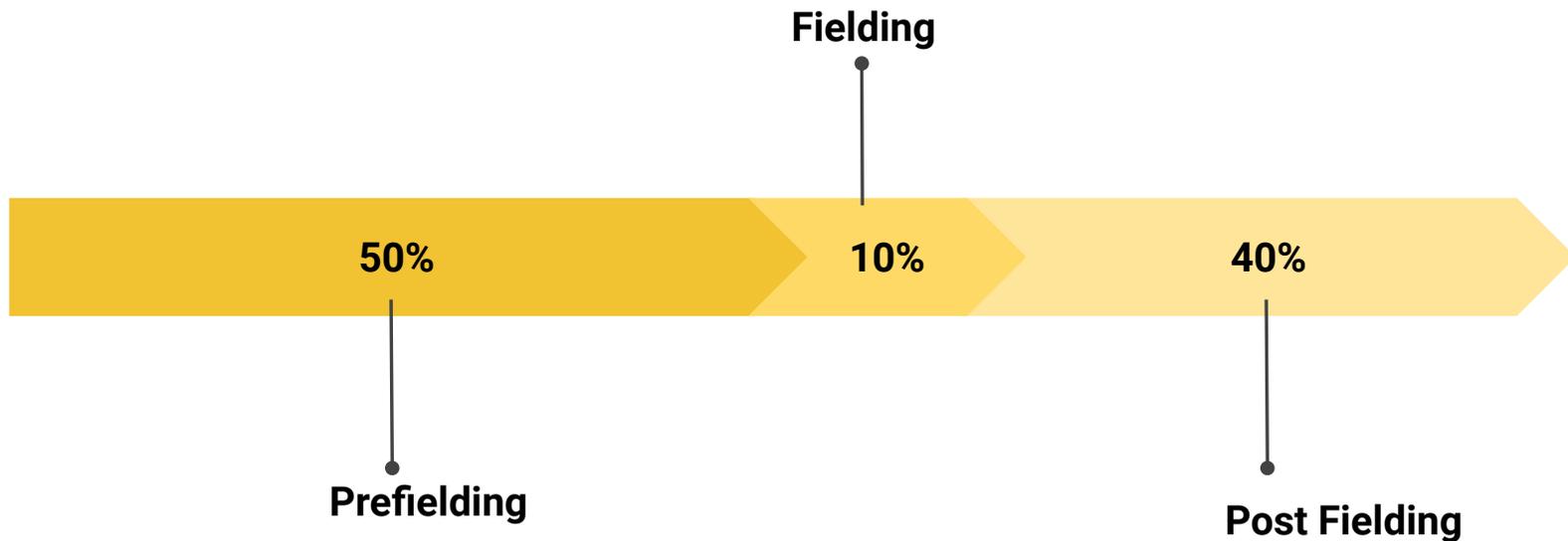
### 7. Too little time spent in writing the questionnaire

In order for a survey to be effective, a questionnaire should be extremely well crafted otherwise you won't get the results you want from the study

How should we allocate time for a survey project?

12

## Recommended time to invest in each step of the survey process



13

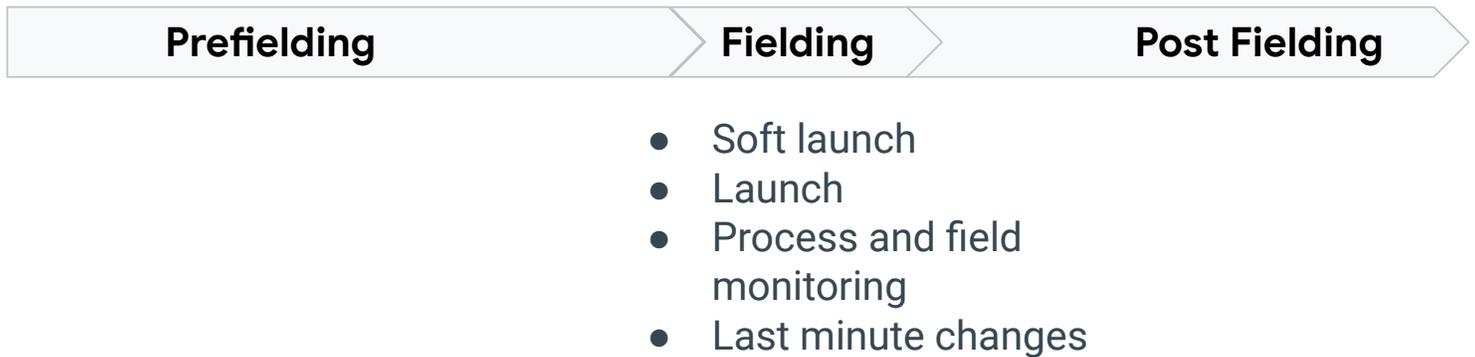
## The survey life cycle: Prefielding



- Lit review/desk research
- Sampling
- Data collection mode decision
- Questionnaire design
- Questionnaire pretesting
- Questionnaire approval (PR, lawyer...)
- Questionnaire programming
- Translation and quality checks
- Nonresponse strategy
- Data analysis strategy and minimum subgroup size (see sampling)
- Project management

14

## The survey life cycle: Fielding



Modified from Callegaro, Lozar-Manfreda and Vehovar, (2015, p. 11)

15

## The survey life cycle: Post-fielding



Modified from Callegaro, Lozar-Manfreda and Vehovar, (2015, p. 11)

16

# 10 top issues found in reviewing surveys

## 8. Survey launched without any pretest

Even the most experience researchers cannot write a perfect questionnaire

Always pretest your questionnaire before fielding a study

17

# Classification of survey pretesting methods

## Small scale

### 10-50 subjects

- Questionnaire appraisal system (QAS)
- Expert review
- Cognitive interviews
- Focus groups
- Eye tracking
- Usability testing

## Medium

### 100-500 subjects

- Pilot test - Pretest (Soft launch)
- Paradata analysis (Survey logs)

## Large scale

### 500+ subjects

- Randomized experiments (also called split-ballot)
- Statistical modelling

18

## 10 top issues found in reviewing surveys

### 9. Stakeholders asked to comment on the questionnaire

If you do that, you will probably end up in a situation when one or more stakeholders propose/write and rewrite questions their own way

This generally leads to poorly written questions as 99.9% of stakeholders are NOT survey experts

Provide stakeholders with topics you are going to ask in the survey, rather the whole questionnaire. The goal is to align on the research questions.

### 10. Sweepstakes/lotteries or raffles used to increase response rates

Sweepstakes/lotteries or raffles are highly regulated in most countries. If you plan to use them you will spend more time with your lawyers than actually conducting the study

On top of that, the evidence that they increase the response rate is weak and the successful positive effect rather small

Finally mentioning the keywords sweepstakes, lotteries and raffles generally increase the chances that that email invitation will end up in spam

19

## 4 more issues found in reviewing surveys

### 11. Asking for things people struggle to remember

Asking users how many time they unlock their phone is not something a survey should ask

For precise behaviors, do not ask, but use logs if possible

### 12. Asking people for predictions of future behavior or hypotheticals

It is very hard to make predictions about future use for surveys respondents (us)

### 12. Using agree-disagree questions because they're easy to write

There is more and more evidence that agree disagree questions have many problems.

Yes there are easy to write but hard to answer because they suffer from these biases:

- Agreement bias
- Straightlining
- Incoherent answers

Reference: Dykema et al. (2022)

Link to open access [PDF](#)

20

## 4 more issues found in reviewing surveys

### 14. Writing overly complicated questions or questions with jargon/acronyms in them

This is common in UX as we are very familiar with technical jargon and we spend time talking to engineers, product managers and designers

Our users, however, are generally not like us so please pretest your questionnaires and avoid jargon as much as possible

21

## Thanks and some references

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22