Developing a Questionnaire

By: Ejaz Ashraf

Using Questionnaires in Survey Research

- Construction is key to valid and reliable research

- Well written and manageable questions
  - Manageable interviews

- Consider why use survey methods?

Issues to consider

- Getting clear response

- Limiting response

- Length

- Intrusive
    - personal questions and private thoughts

Procedure for Development

- Specify what information will be sought

- Determine the type of questionnaire and method of administration

- Determine the content of individual questions

- Determine the form of response to each question

- Determine the wording of each question

Forms

- Self-administered surveys

- Face-to-face interviews

- Telephone surveys

- Computer assisted and Web-based

- E-mail

Self-Administered

- Respondents complete on their own

- Best designed for
  - Measuring variables with numerous values or response categories
  - Investigating attitudes and opinions not usually observable
  - Describing characteristics of a large population
  - Studying 'private' or 'difficult' behaviors

Self-Administered

- Response rates tend to be lowest for mailed questionnaires
  - As low as 20 – 30%
  - Low response rate affects generalizability

- More standardization of the questions

- An increased reliability over other qualitative methods
  - Response patterns can vary

Self-Administered

- Closed-ended items limit the researcher
  - Adjust for differences in respondents
  - Clarify misunderstood items
  - Explain ambiguity

- Not suitable for all audiences
  - Young children
  - Visually impaired
  - Learning/reading disabilities

Computer Assisted and Web-Based

- Way to create and administer self-administered questionnaires

- Marketing researchers find response rates increase
    – This is not across the board

- Questionnaires (especially short ones) can be sent via email
    – Or provide internet link to site which hosts survey

Web-Based Surveys

- Create own web page or hire a commercial company
  - www.hostedsurvey.com

- Allow for instant data coding

- Need to be able to write code or use software

- Maybe less time and costs

- Access is a huge issue (affecting generalizability)
  - Variation in computer ownership and usage
  - Internet access

Interviews

- Reading questionnaire items in a face-to-face or telephone situation

- Unstructured or in-depth
  - Suited for exploratory research
  - Either with one person or in focus groups
  - Open-ended items
  - Cannot standardize
  - Good for complex situations

Interviews

- ## Structured
  - Consider role of interviewer
    - Style
    - Personal characteristics
  - Influenced by the process
  - Training is critical
  - Follow wording
  - Record responses

- Example: General Social Survey (GSS)

Interviews

- Response rates tend to be highest with face-to-face interviews
  - Excluding 'street corner' technique

- Issues
  - More time
  - Smaller samples
  - Higher cost

Telephone

- Most popular
  - Less costly
  - Less time
  - Less subjective to interviewer
    - As compared to face-to-face

- Often conducted with computers

- Can probe for information/clarification

- Threshold about 20 minutes

Constructions

- Regardless of survey type, construct in a way

  – Allows for candid answers

  – Accurately

  – Consistently

  – Addresses goals, hypotheses, research questions

Conceptualizing the Task

- List the set of research questions, hypotheses
  - Consider how others have measured
  - At least one questionnaire item for each variable
  - Operationalize the concept

- Outline what you want to cover
  - Consider the following categories
    - Attitudes: feelings and opinions
    - Behaviors: what they actually do
    - Demographics: who they are

Measuring Behavior

- Translate opinions into action

- Useful in
  - Making policy
  - Improving working conditions
  - Evaluation of programs

- Measure of what they say they do

Demographics

- Need to know how opinions and behaviors vary across different categories of people

- Such things as
  - Age, income, education
  - Political beliefs, sexual orientation

- Put at end of instrument
  - Easy to answer

Instructions

- Beginning of each section, should include clear instructions

- Disclose needed information for respondents to decide whether to complete the survey

- Consider phrasing – Don't alienate

- Tell whether
  - **Anonymous**: no names or IDs
  - **Confidential**: names or IDs, not attached responses

Instructions
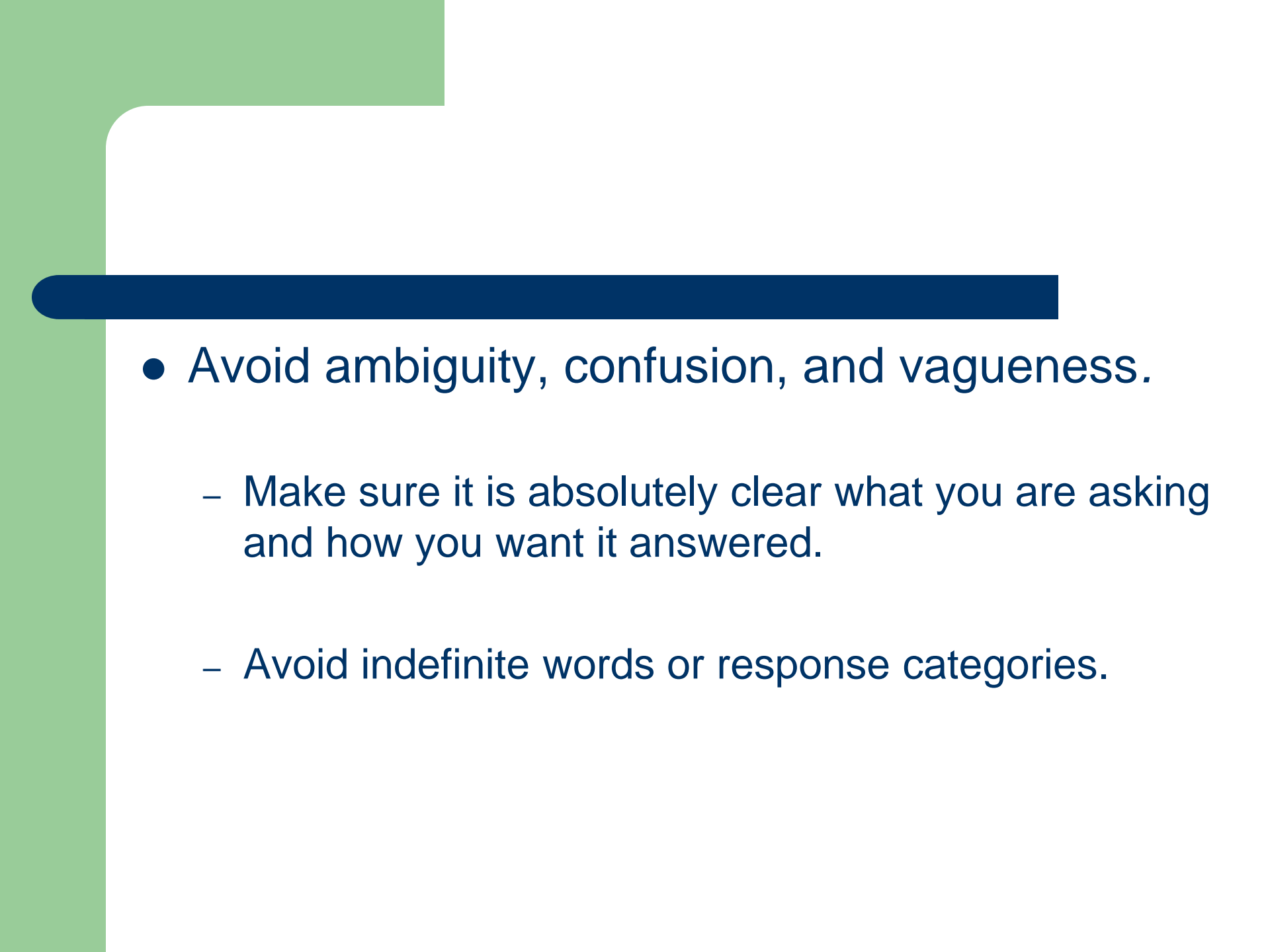
- Information about due date
  - General time line is a good idea

- Information on submitting

- Be consistent with instructions and format
  - A little variation might break up 'routine'

Conceptualizing

- Brainstorm

- Reduce your list to items that are connected to your 'research' variables

- Be creative and make an engaging survey

- Length of questionnaire
  - Time to construct
  - Time for respondents to complete
  - Cost of construction and dissemination
  - # of variables/concepts

- Font, spacing, and format
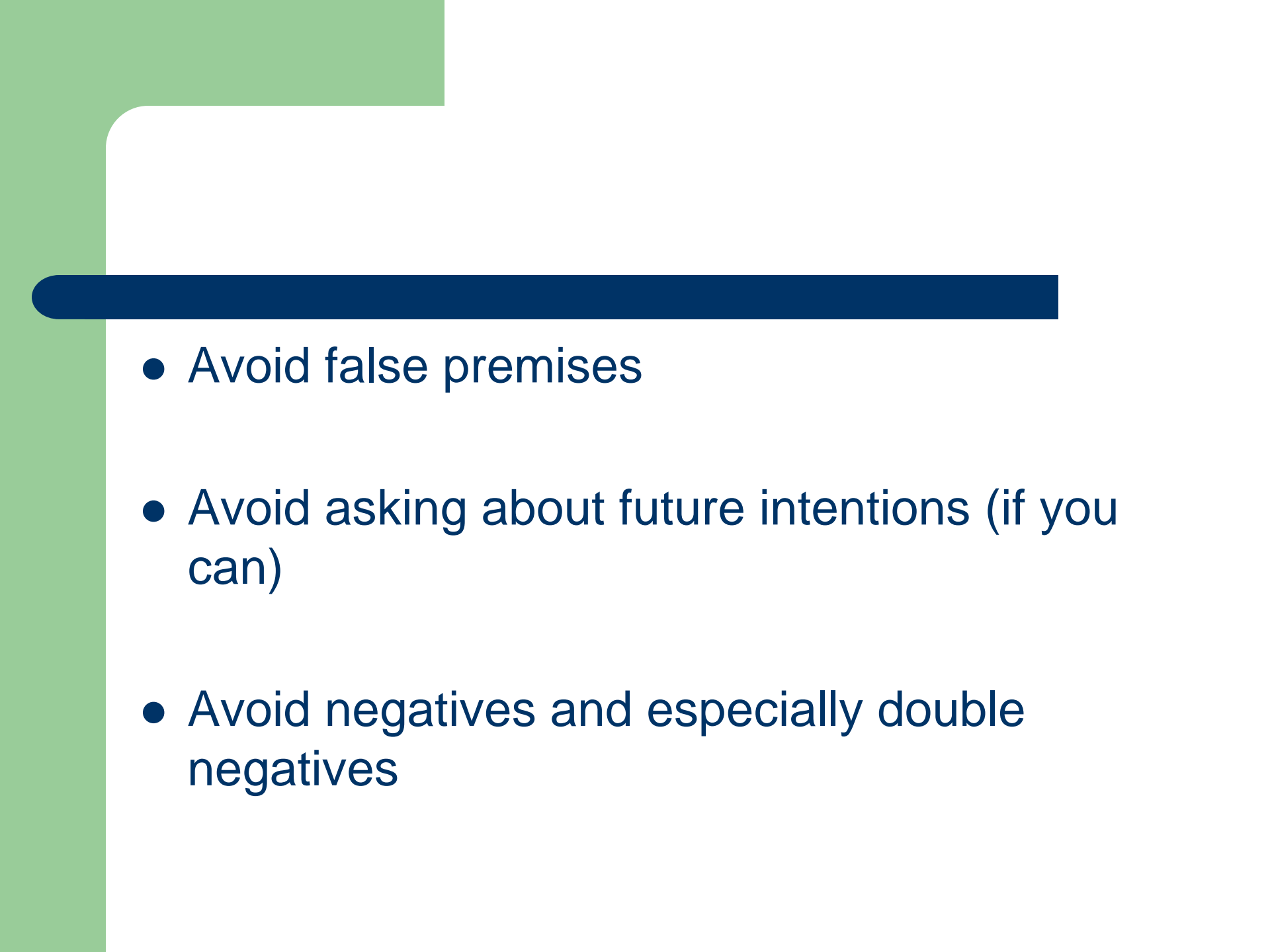
Question Writing

- Target the vocabulary and grammar to the population be surveyed.

  – For studies within a specific organization, use the jargon used in that organization.

  – Be careful to avoid language that is familiar to you, but might not be to your respondents. Avoid unnecessary abbreviations.

- Avoid ambiguity, confusion, and vagueness.

  - Make sure it is absolutely clear what you are asking and how you want it answered.

  - Avoid indefinite words or response categories.

- Avoid emotional language, prestige bias and leading questions

  – Watch out for loaded words that have a history of being attached to extreme situations.

  – Watch for prestige markers that cue the respondent to give the "right" answer.

  – Avoid leading questions.

  – Avoid loading questions with extra adjectives and adverbs.

- Avoid double-barreled questions

  – Make each question about one and only one topic.

- Don't assume the respondent is an expert on themselves (unless you have no choice)

- Avoid asking questions beyond a respondent's capabilities

  – People have cognitive limitations, especially when it comes to memory of past events.

  – It is pointless to ask people about things that are not natural ways for them to think.

- Avoid false premises

- Avoid asking about future intentions (if you can)

- Avoid negatives and especially double negatives