

## Testing for ...

- Clarity of questions and response choices
- Comprehensiveness – cover reasonably complete range of alternatives
- Acceptability (length, sensitive questions)

## Pre-testing (Czaja 1998)

1. **Do not assume** that questions taken from a previous survey are necessarily good questions or measures with your population.
2. **Look for problems.** If you do not look for problems, you are likely to find only a few of the most blatant ones.
3. **Always plan on doing more than one pretest**, especially if you are writing a fair number of new questions. Do additional pretesting work with members of the target population each time you make significant changes in the questionnaire. Remember, the revisions you make to fix one problem can create unforeseen new problems. The only way to find out if changes have fixed a problem or improved a question is to test them.
4. **Do not use the main study as your default pretest.** It is far too costly and time consuming to find that respondents do not understand certain questions or that interviewers are having problems with the questionnaire at this late stage in the research.

## Pre-testing

- “Expert” review or **panels**
- IRB
- Questionnaire appraisal coding
- Input from “clients”
- Focus groups

## Focus groups

- Also useful for debriefing survey results
- 8-12 people
- 1-2 hours
- “focused” on limited set of topics
- Planning: who to involve, appropriate number of participants, where, when, financial inducements?
  - Homogenous groups
  - Quiet space
  - Payment or meal
  - Plan for about 2/3 to show up

# Cognitive interviews

Testing the questionnaire (not the survey process)

- Gain an understanding of the cognitive processes that respondents use to formulate their answers
- Identify comprehension, interpretation, and recall problems

“Think-alouds” (work best with self-administered)  
 Probing (concurrent or retrospective)

Often audio-recorded

Table 2. Examples of cognitive probes

Think-aloud/general	How did you go about answering that question? Tell me what you are thinking? I noticed you hesitated before you answered – what were you thinking about? How easy or difficult did you find this question to answer? Why do you say that?
Comprehension	What does the term <i>X</i> mean to you? What did you understand by <i>X</i> ?
Retrieval	How did you remember that? Did you have a particular time period in mind?
Confidence judgement	How did you calculate your answer? How well do you remember this? How sure of your answer are you?
Response	How did you feel about answering this question? Were you able to find your first answer to the question from the response option shown?

## Reporting & analyzing

- Item
- Interpretations
- Problems (limited applicability, unclear references, unclear perspective)
- Wording or tone

Knafel et al. 2007

## Field pre-testing

Declared vs. Undeclared

Essential to run a full “dress rehearsal” of survey protocol (with sufficient time to analyze and revise)

Diagnostics

- Behavioral coding
- Response latency

De-briefing

- Respondents
- Interviewers (standardize & quantify)

# Comparison