

Sample Protocol for Pilot Testing Survey Items
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Time required: Approximately one hour (depends on length of survey)

Subjects: 4-6 persons. (Multiple cohorts if you have reason to believe their experiences are different enough to have an effect on their interpretation of the items.)

Explain the purpose of the survey:

(As a part of our ongoing process to continuously improve the quality of the XXX program, we are developing a survey designed to assess your experience . We appreciate your willingness to help us pilot test the survey and provide us some feedback on your understanding and perception of the survey items. Your individual responses in the pilot test phase are not going to be recorded or reported to anyone except those who are designing the survey.)

Process:

1. After explaining the value of their participation, hand out the questionnaire only.
2. Indicate to the participants that they should take the survey seriously and respond to the items thoughtfully. They MAY NOT ask questions as they go through the items but need to take the survey as they would under normal circumstances.
3. Take note of how long it takes participants to respond to all items (it may vary from one person to another, but should not vary by much).
4. After the respondents have completed the survey, have them respond to each survey item in four ways. Review with them the meaning of each of the headers (see example below).
 - A. **Understandable:** Was the item “understandable.” That is, did you have to read the item more than once to understand what it was asking? Was the meaning of the question clear and straightforward?
 - B. **Scale adequate:** Was the scale (very little.....very much) adequate? That is, do you feel the scale provided you with an appropriate way to respond?
 - C. **Only one response:** Was the item written in such a way that you could have answered it more than one way? (E.g., could you have said BOTH “very little” and “very much”?)
 - D. **Loaded:** In your opinion, was the item written in such a way that there was ONLY one OBVIOUS answer for you? In other words, the way the item is worded, it is highly unlikely that respondents, regardless of cohort group, would be able to respond using more than one response choice.
5. Have the respondents circle “yes/no” for each item. This will enable you to document their responses for comparisons within the pilot group.
6. After all the participants have independently responded to the four items for each of the 11 survey questions, ask them to discuss with you any of the items that have a “no” response. Start with “understanding” column and discuss any item that has a “no” rating in that column. Have them discuss why they responded that way. TAKE NOTES!!! You will want to evaluate their responses to make modifications on the items. Do this for each of the four columns.
7. Ask respondents to explain what they believe was meant by each item—especially any item that you had difficulty developing.
8. Ask respondents if they found any of the questions to be “emotionally laden.” For example, did they find any of the items offensive or insulting?
9. Prepare a summary of all concerns about survey items to guide developers in improving the quality of the survey.

