All units across Mercer University are typically engaged in ongoing evaluation to determine their effectiveness and long-term objectives. From time to time, various departments may attempt to assess their stakeholders, internally or externally, so as to understand their needs.

One of the common means by which this is accomplished is through the use of questionnaires. Technically speaking, a survey is the process for gathering data that could involve a variety of methods. Questionnaires are the instruments used in a survey plan to accomplish this measurement through a set of printed/published questions/items.

With that said, many may need help in understanding how to formulate questionnaires so that they can effectively capture the needed information for good decision making. There are many variables to take into consideration to prepare for an effective questionnaire of any kind, regardless of the size of the group.

This guide should prove helpful in understanding survey development, asking the right questions, and planning for an effective experience. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness, on the Macon and Atlanta campuses, is prepared to assist you in any way should you need further guidance.

The following will outline the process, questions, and procedures that commonly are involved:

I. Planning
   a. Identify the overall purpose of the survey.
      Is it to help in developing some aspect of the program, study the purchase or investment in something, or evaluate the satisfaction of a service?

   b. Determine the decisions to be made as a result of the survey.
      Will changes be made in a program, procedure, or policy? Will a program, procedure, policy or service be initiated? Terminated?
      Example: a decision needs to be made whether or not to expand the student tutoring service.

   c. Determine the information you will need to make these decisions.
      This will be determined largely by the answer to B above. Do you need feedback from people on courses, curricula? Opinions on priorities? Demographic data? A combination of these?

   d. Identify the most likely sources of information.
      Internal examples: faculty members, students, support staff, managers, facilities personnel, etc.
      External examples: funding resources, regulatory body, benchmark organizations, alumni, community.
e. **Determine the methodology you will use**
   Will you need a questionnaire sent to a large group of respondents? Will a simple poll by Email or phone acquire what you need?

II. **Audience**

a. **Who are the members of your target audience?**
   These may be internal or external and could very well be the same people identified as sources of information above.

b. **Where are the respondents physically located?**
   Multiple sites? One local site? Within state? In the region? Throughout the nation?

c. **How much time do they have to devote to your questionnaire?**
   Are they in the midst of a peak period, vacation, or holiday? Would they need to commit more than 20 minutes? 30 minutes?

d. **How interested might your target audience be in the topic?**
   How relevant is the topic to your audience? Would they be passionate? Curious? Ambivalent?

e. **What might be their preferred question formats?**

f. **Might they be interested in your results?** Would your results give them needed information, insight, ideas, or applications? Would results help build their relationship with your department or school?

g. **How will you choose your sample?**
   *Example of RANDOM samples:* Systematically choosing every fifth person in a directory or select a proportionate, stratified element in the population (70% female in a population, so 70% of target will be female).
   *Example of NON-RANDOM sample:* All people in a history class or an administrative department on a given date.

h. **What will be the size of your sample?**
   Representation is critically important. Based on statistically significant research, the following chart depicts the minimum number of responses needed to obtain sound results (at a 95% confidence level) compared to the total size of a population:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Minimum Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300</td>
<td>168</td>
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<tr>
<td>500</td>
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<tr>
<td>700</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
III. Designing the Questionnaire

a. Types of information can be obtained using questionnaires. You need to decide the type that will be most useful and focus efforts on forming the right set, or combination, of questions or statements. These types fall in four general categories:

- **Attitudes**: how respondents feel about something.  
  *Example: “To what extent are you satisfied with…”?*

- **Beliefs**: what a respondent thinks is true or false.  
  *Example: “I believe Mercer University is a good investment in my future.” T or F*

- **Behaviors**: how respondents perceive their behavior or actions.  
  *Example: “Number of hours spent in research weekly.”*

- **Attributes**: demographic or personal characteristics.  
  *Example: “Age,” “Ethnicity.”

b. Structure of Questions. Items should be simple, objective, and specific. “Do unto your respondents as you would have them do unto you!”

1. **Open-ended**: No answer choices, but requires respondents to write their own answers.  
   *Example: “What was the most important thing you learned in the internship?”*  
   Advantages: stimulates free thought, elicits suggestions, and clarifies positions.

2. **Close-ended**:  
   *Example: “In an average week, how many times do you go to the gym?” (0, 1-2, 3-4, 5 or more) OR “Overall, how satisfied are you with the service you received from the assessment office?” (Very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied, and not applicable).*  
   Advantages: provides answer choices, whether on an ordered or unordered scale, in a discrete set of answers.

3. **Language and development.**
   - Keep items objective and avoid “leading questions” indicating desired responses. Instead of: “Why don’t you like statistics?” ask, “Do you like statistics?”
   - Define “foggy,” generalized terms.  
     *Instead of asking, “What percentage of students keep their dorm rooms clean?” ASK “What percentage of students: a) make their beds daily, b) keep clothes off the floor, or c) vacuum/sweep weekly, d) perform all the above?”*
   - Be concrete and avoid double negatives.  
     *Instead of asking, “Don’t you believe that tuition should not go up?” Ask, “Do you believe that tuition should go up?”*
• Use only one question per item. Split “double barreled” questions into two questions. Instead of, “Do you like theoretical or practical classes?” ask, “Do you like theoretical classes?”

4. Ordering questions. The questionnaire should lead the respondent from topic to topic smoothly using logical or psychological specifics.
• If questionnaire is long, place the most important items at the beginning, not the end. Ask, “I would recommend Mercer to someone else because” somewhere within the first ten questions, not toward the end of the questionnaire.
• Order items from general to specific, Example: “Overall, how would you rate your experience in research with your professor? What struck you as especially outstanding?” NOT “What was outstanding about your research? How would you rate your experience?”

c. General Tips:
• Include only items that directly shed light on what you want to learn. Remove trivial “nice to know” questions.
• Include only what you’re sure to use. Do not ask questions if you are not sure how or if you will use the survey responses.
• Remove items for which a respondent will not have immediate access to the information needed to answer the item. (Or, at least tell the respondent beforehand what is needed).
• Have a group of knowledgeable people review your draft for feedback
• Remove items that a respondent may not be willing to answer.
• Analyze and aggregate your data.
• Use your results to make specific improvements!

d. Reduce potential non-responses to your questionnaire by anticipating these issues and double checking such items.
• Questionnaire is too long
• Wording is difficult to understand
• Topic is inappropriate for respondents
• Respondents consider items too sensitive or invasive
• Use of unfamiliar jargon
• Inappropriate deadlines
• Directions are vague or incomplete
• Items favor one type of respondent

The following works are appreciated and were partially adapted for this guide:

Marlene Lowe and Monica Stitt-Bergh of the University of Hawaii-Manoa. http://manoa.hawaii.edu/assessment

Nova Southeastern University Programs for Higher Education. (April, 1994). Learning Activity Package. Questionnaire section. Fort Lauderdale, FL.