

The Psychology of Survey Response

Summer Institute in Survey Research Techniques, 2010

Instructor: Roger Tourangeau

Time: July 12-16, 1:00 pm – 4:00 pm
Location: 368 ISR
1208 LeFrak

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Course Description

This course examines survey questions from a psychological perspective. It describes the major psychological components of the response process, including comprehension of the questions, retrieval of information from memory, combining and supplementing information from memory through judgment and inference, and the reporting of an answer. It discusses several models of how respondents answer questions in surveys, reviews the relevant psychological and survey literatures, and traces out the implications of these theories and findings for survey practice, especially for the design of questionnaires.

The course has two major objectives— 1) to cover what is known about how respondents answer survey questions and 2) to examine how problems in each component of the response process can produce reporting errors. Both attitudinal and behavioral questions will be discussed. The course will include examples applying findings from the literature on cognitive aspects of survey methods to improve questions.

The course will meet daily for three hours. Class time will include lecture and discussion of homework. Students will be provided with a copy of nearly all materials that are presented as PowerPoint slides. Questions are welcomed during lecture sessions.

Homework and Examinations

There will be no examinations in the course but there will be a couple of assignments. The assignments are important and will be graded. Although we emphasize applied implications for questionnaire construction, this course is more theoretical in nature than other courses on questionnaire construction offered as part of the Summer Institute.

Textbook

The only text for the course will be *The Psychology of Survey Response* by Roger Tourangeau, Lance Rips, and Kenneth Rasinski (Cambridge University Press, 2000). Students may also be provided with additional articles to supplement this text.

Schedule

The syllabus presents *approximate* dates of lecture and homework assignments:

Date	Topic	Homework
July 12	Overview. Models of the response process. Comprehension of survey questions.	- -
13	Memory and forgetting. Dates and durations.	Chapters 1-3 in <i>The Psychology of Survey Response</i> (hereafter, TRR)
14	Judgment and estimation processes for factual questions	Assignment 1; Chapters 4 and 5 in TRR
15	Judgment and estimation processes for attitude questions.	Chapters 6 and 7 in TRR
16	Mapping and formatting. Editing and mode of data collection.	Chapters 8 and 9 in TRR
