

Questionnaires – asking people questions

You can find out what people think by getting them to answer questions on paper or by email. When you send out questions to lots of people to get their ideas about a topic, you are using a questionnaire.

There are lots of different ways to ask questions in questionnaires. You can:

- ask people to tick a box beside the answer they agree with – “Do you like lessons? – *yes* or *no*”
- get people to choose an answer from some choices you give them – “I think lessons are: boring – fun – interesting – too hard – too easy”
- get people to show how they feel by choosing from a range of feelings – “How do you feel about lessons? – really like – like – don’t mind – dislike – really dislike”
- ask people to finish a sentence in their own words – “I think lessons are . . .”
- let people write down their ideas in a space you make for their comments – “Tell us what you think about lessons”.

Questionnaires do not have to use words. You can also use photographs, symbols or drawings to ask your questions and you can get people to reply using pictures or symbols too.

Think about how long your questionnaire will be and make it look lively and interesting. People are more likely to fill in a short questionnaire that looks like fun. A short questionnaire that lots of people reply to is better than a long questionnaire that nobody wants to fill in.

You also need to remember that you will have to sort out all the answers. You need to make this work easy for yourselves.

Think about how you will give your questionnaire out and how people will give it back to you when they have filled it in. You can send out questionnaires by post or email or put them in people’s pigeonholes or on desks – but it might be better to give the questionnaires out in person. You could give your questionnaire to lots of people all at once – in a lesson or at tutor time if you get permission – and collect the answers when people have filled them out.

You should always tell people what the questionnaire is all about and answer any questions. You should explain why the answers are important and what you will do with all the ideas you collect. You can tell people how to hand the questionnaire back – and say “thank you” to people for helping. It is also OK to offer people a little reward for joining in.

People are more likely to fill in your questionnaire if they feel involved in your project and if they think the ideas are important. Remember to tell people about your research and ask them if they are willing to help. People should

be able to say “no” if they do not want to fill in your questionnaire – or if they do not want to answer any particular questions.

People usually fill in questionnaires without giving their name. You can let people give you their name if they want to – then you can go back to them to check answers or ask them about interesting ideas they give you. But you should not tell other people who said what when you present the findings from your questionnaire.

It is always good to try out your ideas before you send out your questionnaire for real. You can try your questionnaire out on friends or people in your family to make sure they understand the questions and how they can give their answers. You should change anything they are not sure about to make your questionnaire really clear and easy to fill in.