Method

Survey

A questionnaire with the same questions for many people, designed to measure in numbers how many think, do or prefer something.



In Spanish

Encuesta

Origin

Social research; questionnaire design by Dillman (1978), updated in Dillman, Smyth and Christian (2014)

Output

Numerical data on what many people think, do or prefer

What it's for

It answers how much and how many: how many people have a problem, how often and in which groups.

Key elements

One question, one idea

If a question asks two things at once, you won't know which one people answered.

In their words

Terms the respondent understands, not the team's.

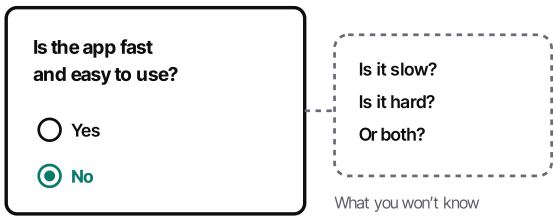
Who answers matters

The sample decides what you can conclude.

An example

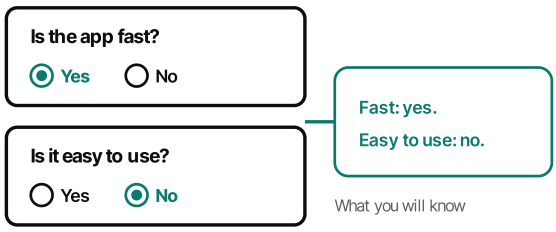
A public transport app asks the people who use it what it should improve.

A double question



"Is the app fast and easy to use?" Someone who answers "No" may mean one thing, the other, or both. **An answer you can't read.**

One question per idea



With the two questions separated, the answers show that the app is fast, but hard to use. **An answer that says what to change.**

In a survey, how you ask decides what you can conclude: a double question gives numbers no one can interpret.

How it's done

1

Define what to measure. Which decision depends on the answer.

2

Write and test. Test the questionnaire with a few people before sending it.

3

Send and analyze. Count, compare groups and read carefully.

Applications in design

When to use it

After researching with a few people, to find out how many share what you found.

Avoid

Asking about what they will do in the future ("would you use it?"): what people say they will do isn't what they later do.

Don't fall for it

Test the questionnaire first: one ambiguous question spoils all its answers.

Connections

Builds on

- Qualitative and quantitative research
- Say vs. do
- HEART framework

Used by

- Behavioral design
- UX design
- UX research

Related to

- System Usability Scale (SUS)
- Delphi method
- Kano model

Authors and works

2014	**Don A. Dillman, Jolene D. Smyth and Leah Melani Christian**	Updated the tailored design method: fitting questions, contacts and format to each survey to get more responses with fewer errors.
1978	**Don A. Dillman**	Set out a method for designing mail and telephone surveys that attended to every detail to get more responses.

Sources

Original sources

- Dillman, D. A. (1978). Mail and telephone surveys: The total design method. Wiley.

Secondary sources

- Dillman, D. A., Smyth, J. D., & Christian, L. M. (2014). Internet, phone, mail, and mixed-mode surveys: The tailored design method (4th ed.). Wiley.

Last reviewed: October 25, 2026

Atlas público de diseño, de Adriana Ojeda. Texto e ilustraciones bajo licencia CC BY 4.0.