

# 3 STEPS TO GO FROM SURVEY HELL TO SURVEY HEAVEN



## ORGANIZE SURVEY QUESTIONS BY THEME

Think of the three or four key themes that you want your surveys to address. Consider themes like program quality, stakeholder satisfaction, and participant outcomes. Write your key themes down, then map the questions to these themes. You'll find that, at least to start, you have lots of questions in one theme, and almost none in the other. That's OK! Revise the items until you have a balance of questions in each theme. (We aim for 2-3 questions per theme.)

What about the survey questions that don't link up to any theme? First, we encourage you to drop those mismatched questions. If you find that you have a lot of "orphan" survey items, you may need to revise or expand the themes in the survey.

To make analysis a breeze, save a copy of your survey with the appropriate theme listed next to the question.



## FIND AND FIX CONFUSING SURVEY ITEMS

There are a few common mistakes we all make when writing survey questions. Ask yourself:

Will the respondent know the answer? For example, we ask parents to weigh in on the quality of their kids' homework help, or ask kids to report logistical details about their enrichment program. Think about how likely your audience is to have experience with – and an opinion about – what you are asking. Cut or modify questions that are likely to elicit lots of "I don't know" responses... or well-intentioned fibs.

Are you asking two – or three – questions in one? For example, we ask clients whether their workforce readiness was engaging, high-quality, and educational. What if it was educational, but not particularly engaging? What answer should the young person pick? The easiest way to find two-in-one survey questions is to use the Find function to look for the word "and." Almost always you will need to re-write your item – or break it into two.



## CHECK THE READING LEVEL OF YOUR SURVEY, WEEP, REVISE

You spent a long, long time learning to become a facile reader. We are proud of you – really! Reading is awesome, but hard. It's very easy to forget what you read in 5th grade, much less if you were a 5th grader who struggled to read.

For surveys with kids and adults with limited formal education, you absolutely, positively must run all of your instructions and each survey item through a reading level calculator. Use the reading level calculator to estimate the age-level at which your survey question is written, and revise until it is close to your survey takers' reading level. Keep a box of tissues handy, as this is a painstaking, yet essential, process.

To calculate readability scores: <https://readability-score.com/>

To learn more about crafting surveys, without earning a PhD:  
*The Survey Playbook: How to Create the Perfect Survey* (Matt Champagne)

Want to talk shop about surveys? Be in touch! [www.publicprofit.net](http://www.publicprofit.net) [public profit]