



## Crafting Behavior Questions

### Questions about behavior: should you use a yes-no response? NO? YES?

When you create questions about behavior such as ones examining the management practices of producers, health behaviors of citizens, public policy actions of coalition members, you may provide a yes-no response.

For instance, for a needs assessment:

*Do you leave meat on the counter to thaw? (circle number)*

- 1 NO
- 2 YES

Review such behavior questions. A problem that occurs stems from the assumption we often make about respondents when we develop surveys, that if respondents perform some task, they do it *all the time*. Examples from other programs could include teat dipping cows after milking, or, determining the proper depth to operate a deep tillage tool.

In such instances, the answer categories available to respondents, “yes” and “no,” put respondents who only perform the task occasionally, or even periodically, in the awkward position of choosing “yes” even though they don’t perform the task all the time, or, choosing “no” even though they do it some of the time. Forcing a respondent into inappropriate categories undermines the validity of data.

You can improve your data in a number of ways *depending on the purpose* of your question.

1. Add stringent criteria to the question like the word ‘ever’ (for a negative behavior). For example,

*Did you ever leave meat on the counter to thaw? (circle number)*

- 1 NO
- 2 YES

2. Create a middle answer by changing the nature of the answer categories to a range of frequencies.

*To thaw meat in the past week, how often did you leave it on the counter? (circle number)*

- 1 ALMOST ALL OF THE TIME
- 2 FREQUENTLY
- 3 OCCASIONALLY
- 4 HARDLY AT ALL
- 5 NOT AT ALL
- 6 DID NOT THAW MEAT

In summary, be leery of using yes-no response categories in a behavior question. When asking a question about a behavior that is not typically an isolated event (such as getting x-rays at the dentist), but one that can be *continuous*, you may not want to provide respondents with an all-or-nothing choice, yes or no, in the answer categories.

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