# Dillman's Principles for Questionnaire Construction

## Step One: Define a desired navigational path for reading all information presented on each page of the questionnaire.

o Write each question in a way that minimizes the need to reread portions in order to comprehend the response task.
o Place the instructions exactly where that information is needed and not at the beginning of the questionnaire.
o Place items with the same response categories into an item-in-a-series format, but do it carefully.
o Ask one question at a time.
o Minimize the use of matrices.

## Step Two: Create Visual navigation guides and use them in a consistent way to get respondents to follow the prescribed navigational path and correctly interpret the written information.

o Begin asking question in the upper left quadrant; place any information not needed by the respondent in the lower right quadrant.
o Use the largest or brightest symbols to identify the starting point on each page.
o Identify the beginning of each succeeding question in a consistent way.
o Number questions consecutively and simply from beginning to end.
o Use a consistent figure/ground format to encourage the readings of all words.
o Limit the use of reverse print to section headings or question numbers.
o Place more blank space between questions than between subcomponents of questions.
o Use dark print for questions and light print for answer choices.
o Place special instructions inside of question numbers and not as freestanding entities.
o Optional or occasionally needed instruction should be separated form the question statement by font or symbol variations.
o Do not place instructions in a separate instruction book or in a separate section of the questionnaire.
o Use of lightly shaded colors as background fields on which to write all questions provides an effective navigational guide to respondents.

- When shaded background fields are used, identification of all answer spaces in white helps to reduce non-response.
- List all answer categories vertically instead of horizontally.
- Place answer spaces consistently to either the left or right of category labels.
- Use numbers or simple answer boxes for recording of answers.
- Vertical alignment of question subcomponents among consecutive questions eases the response task.
- Avoid double or triple banking of answer choices.
- Maintain spaces between answer choices that are consistent with measurement intent.
- Maintain consistency throughout a questionnaire in the direction scales are displayed.
- Use shorter lines to prevent words from being skipped.

## Step Three: Develop additional visual navigational guides, the aim of which is to interrupt established navigation behavior and redirect respondents.

- Major visual changes are essential for gaining compliance with skip patterns.
- Words and phrases that introduce important, but easy to miss, change is respondent expectation should be visually emphasized consistently, but sparingly.
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Dillman, D.A. (2007) *Mail and Internet Surveys: The Tailored Design Method,* New York: Wiley