7.10 Self-Report Techniques: Questionnaire and Interview Design

AQA 7182 · about 55 minutes · Write-in edition

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

1 Explain briefly what is meant by a leading question and give an example of a leading question about exercise habits that should be avoided in a questionnaire.

(Total for Question 1 is 2 marks)

2 Suggest an improvement to this closed questionnaire item used to measure sleep hygiene: "Do you avoid using screens before bed? Yes/No". Explain why your improvement is better for measuring sleep-related behaviour.

(Total for Question 2 is 8 marks)

3 A questionnaire item reads: "Do you often waste time on your phone instead of studying?" as part of a student study habits survey. Identify the problem with this wording and suggest an improved version, explaining why your version is better.

(Total for Question 3 is 3 marks)

4 Critique this questionnaire item for measuring anxiety before exams: "Rate how anxious you feel on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is not anxious at all and 5 is extremely anxious." Identify one strength and one limitation, and explain each.

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

5 Give two ways questionnaire designers use filler questions in a survey about alcohol use among university students, and explain briefly why each way is useful in reducing bias or improving data quality.

(Total for Question 5 is 3 marks)

6 Outline two strengths of structured interviews compared with unstructured interviews when collecting data on job satisfaction from a workplace sample.

(Total for Question 6 is 4 marks)

7 A psychology team plans to survey 200 first-year university students about study stress using a mixture of closed Likert items and a final open question. They are worried about social desirability bias affecting responses about coping strategies. Identify three design features they could include in their questionnaire to reduce social desirability bias, and explain how each feature would help.

(Total for Question 7 is 6 marks)

8 Discuss the strengths and limitations of questionnaires and interviews as self-report methods for a study aiming to understand university students' experiences of online learning during a pandemic. In your answer compare how each method handles data richness, reliability, interviewer bias, social desirability and practical issues such as cost and sampling. Refer to the research aim throughout. Use material from the specification where relevant.

(Total for Question 8 is 12 marks)

Mark scheme · 7.10 Self-Report Techniques: Questionnaire and Interview Design

Question 1

defines leading question: wording that suggests a particular answer or contains the desired conclusion, biasing respondents towards that answer	**B1**
gives an example leading question about exercise, e.g. "You exercise regularly to stay healthy, don't you?"	**B1**

Answer: A leading question suggests a preferred answer and biases responses. Example: "You exercise regularly to stay healthy, don't you?"

Question 2

identifies an improvement: change to a frequency Likert-style item, e.g. 'How often do you use screens in the hour before bedtime?' with options Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, Always	**M1**
explains that frequency gives more nuanced ordinal data that distinguishes occasional from habitual behaviour oe	**A1**
identifies a second improvement: define 'screens' and 'before bed' or specify a time window to avoid ambiguity, e.g. 'smartphone, tablet or laptop in the 60 minutes before getting into bed'	**M1**
explains that clear operationalisation reduces respondent interpretation variance and increases reliability oe	**A1**
identifies a third improvement: include a follow-up open item asking what activities are done on screens, e.g. social media, studying, watching videos	**M1**
explains that this captures qualitative context which may moderate sleep effects and improves content validity oe	**A1**
identifies a final improvement: include a neutral lead-in and place the item among filler questions to reduce demand characteristics	**M1**
explains that masking the survey purpose reduces biased over- or under-reporting and improves honesty oe	**A1**

Answer: Improvements: use a frequency scale such as 'How often do you use screens in the 60 minutes before bed? Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, Always' to get nuanced ordinal data; define what counts as 'screens' and specify the time window to avoid ambiguity; add a short open follow-up asking what activities are done on screens to capture context; and place the item among filler questions or use a neutral lead-in to reduce demand characteristics. These changes increase reliability, validity and reduce biased responding.

Question 3

identifies the problem: the question is leading/loaded, it presupposes that the respondent wastes time and encourages agreement	**M1**
suggests an improved neutral wording, e.g. "How often do you use your phone during planned study time?" with response options Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, Always	**A1**
explains why the new wording is better: it removes bias and provides neutral response options that can be quantified	**A1**

Answer: Problem: the item is leading and loaded by assuming respondents 'waste time'. Improved version: "How often do you use your phone during planned study time?" with options Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, Always. This is neutral and allows quantification.

Question 4

identifies a strength: the single 1 to 5 Likert-type item is quick to complete and produces ordinal data suitable for summary statistics	**M1**
explains why this is a strength: it increases response rate and ease of analysis, facilitating comparisons across participants	**A1**
identifies a limitation: a single-item scale may lack construct validity and depth, failing to capture different components of anxiety	**M1**
explains why this is a limitation: it cannot assess reliability across items and may miss cognitive versus somatic symptoms, reducing the measure's validity	**A1**

Answer: Strength: the 1 to 5 scale is quick and yields ordinal data that are easy to compare. Limitation: a single-item measure lacks depth and may not validly capture different aspects of exam anxiety, so it reduces construct validity.

Question 5

gives one use of filler questions, e.g. placing neutral questions about general leisure activities among sensitive alcohol questions to mask the survey's focus	**M1**
explains why: it reduces demand characteristics and social desirability bias by making the purpose less obvious, so responses to sensitive items are more honest	**A1**
gives a second use, e.g. including simple demographic or easy behavioural questions to break up long sections and maintain engagement	**B1**

Answer: One use: insert neutral questions about general leisure activities among alcohol items to mask the study aim, reducing social desirability and demand characteristics. Second use: include simple demographic or easy behavioural items to maintain engagement and reduce dropout, improving data completeness.

Question 6

first strength: structured interviews give standardised questions, improving reliability and comparability across respondents oe — **M1**

explains why this matters: responses can be compared and analysed statistically, reducing interviewer variability oe — **A1**

second strength: structured interviews are quicker and easier to administer and code than unstructured interviews oe — **M1**

explains why this matters: larger samples can be collected and data entry is simpler, increasing practicality and reducing cost oe — **A1**

Answer: Structured interviews provide standardised questions improving reliability and comparability, and they are quicker and easier to administer and code, making larger samples more practical.

Question 7

identifies one design feature, e.g. assuring anonymity/confidentiality and explaining it clearly on the questionnaire — **M1**

explains how it helps: reduces motivation to present oneself favourably because answers cannot be linked to identity, improving honesty oe — **A1**

identifies a second design feature, e.g. using indirect questioning or third-person wording for sensitive items, e.g. 'How often do students like you...' rather than 'How often do you...' — **M1**

explains how it helps: reduces perceived personal threat and allows respondents to project behaviour onto a group, increasing candour oe — **A1**

identifies an additional feature, e.g. including validated social desirability scales or embedding filler items to mask the sensitive focus — **M1**

explains how it helps: allows researchers to detect and correct for desirability bias or to make the survey purpose less obvious, improving data quality oe — **A1**

Answer: Assure and explain anonymity to reduce pressure to answer in a socially desirable way. Use indirect or third-person wording for sensitive items to make responses less personal. Optionally include a brief social desirability scale or filler items to detect or mask biased responding, allowing adjustment in analysis.

Question 8

Level 4 Knowledge of questionnaires and interviews as self-report methods is accurate and detailed. Discussion evaluates strengths and limitations of both methods in relation to the research aim, addressing data richness, reliability, interviewer bias, social desirability and practical considerations. Comparisons are balanced and well developed, and application to the online learning context is consistent and insightful. Clear structure and appropriate terminology are used. — **10-12**

Level 3 Knowledge is generally accurate with some detail. Discussion includes evaluation of both methods and makes comparisons relevant to the research aim, but some points may be underdeveloped. Application to the online learning context is present but not always consistently integrated. The answer is mostly organised and uses relevant terminology. — **7-9**

Level 2 Knowledge is limited or partly inaccurate. Discussion is simplistic or one-sided, with few comparisons between methods. Application to the research aim is brief or superficial. Organisation may be weak and terminology used inconsistently. — **4-6**

Level 1 Very limited knowledge, largely descriptive and lacking evaluation. Little or no comparison between methods. Application to the online learning aim is missing or irrelevant. The answer is poorly organised. — **1-3**

Level 0 No creditworthy content. — **0**

Indicative content:

- AO1: Questionnaires can use closed items to gather large-scale quantitative data on frequency of behaviours, satisfaction ratings and demographic variables relevant to online learning; they are cost-effective and allow wider sampling across universities.
- AO1: Interviews (structured, semi-structured, unstructured) allow collection of qualitative, in-depth accounts of experiences such as challenges with technology, isolation, and coping strategies; semi-structured interviews balance comparability and depth.
- AO3: Data richness: interviews provide richer, contextualised data that can capture nuance about emotional reactions and specific incidents, important for understanding lived experience during a pandemic; questionnaires, especially closed-item ones, may miss this richness but can include open items to add some qualitative depth.
- AO3: Reliability: structured questionnaires and structured interviews offer higher reliability through standardisation, enabling comparison across respondents; unstructured interviews are less reliable due to variable questioning.
- AO3: Interviewer bias and social desirability: interviewer effects can bias interview responses, particularly about sensitive topics like mental health; however, skilled interviewers can probe and build rapport to elicit honest, detailed accounts. Questionnaires, especially anonymous ones, can reduce social desirability but still suffer from self-presentation biases.
- AO3: Practical issues: questionnaires are cheaper, quicker to administer to large samples and easier to code quantitatively, facilitating statistical analysis of patterns across student subgroups. Interviews are time-consuming and costly, limiting sample size and generalisability, but are valuable for theory generation and exploring mechanisms.
- AO3: Sampling and representativeness: large questionnaire samples can improve external validity if sampling is well designed, while interview samples are often smaller and purposive, useful for depth but not for prevalence estimates.
- AO3: Mixed-methods considerations: combining questionnaires for breadth with interviews for depth can address the research aim comprehensively, using questionnaires to identify general patterns and interviews to explain why those patterns occur.
- AO3: Ethical and practical constraints during a pandemic: remote online questionnaires are easy to deploy; interviews may need video calls which raise issues of privacy and digital access, potentially biasing the sample towards students with better connectivity.