

Step 4

Example of a Survey

This is a survey that a *TfC* team in rural North Carolina developed. This may help your class in two ways:

- 1) *Design*. When deciding what method is best for your question it is often helpful to see what the methods actually look like in action *before* making your design decision.
 - Students might ask: Why did they choose to use a survey? What would be the biggest *disadvantage* of using this method to answer their research question?
- 2) *Tools*. When creating a research tool, it is helpful to see examples that other high school students have developed.
 - Students might ask: Grade the draft survey based on how well it provides an answer to the research question; Rewrite questions they think are not effective; Translate the best questions they have developed so they more effectively give us information to answer our research question.

There are any number of university research department websites and books on the types and construction of surveys – which may make writing a survey appear to be a daunting task for high school students. For that reason, we want to be clear: students can (and have) written effective surveys. Here are some considerations that we suggest your students think about when constructing a survey:

1. Group questions from easiest to most difficult to answer, with easiest questions appearing at the beginning of the survey.
2. What basic demographic information is necessary? (Age, gender, residence location, any personal experiences that are relevant i.e., employment, victim of violence, voting in the

last local election and so on.) The answer to this question is best answered by recalling the relationship that your research question might be focusing on and/or relationships other researchers have found to be important. For example, a *TfC* class that was interested in the transition from high school to college found that race and family income were important factors in determining how high school students negotiated this transition.

These questions usually go at the end of the survey

3. What questions need to be included to glean clear answers about the issues under investigation?
4. What is the best format for targeting survey respondents? (Electronic, paper and pencil, or administering the survey orally.)
5. Importantly, how will the information be analyzed later? Is the data going to be unwieldy and difficult to aggregate? Or, will the data be in a form that makes it easier to handle? (Likert-like scales, yes or no, or circle an answer that indicates a group, action choice or range.)
6. How do you want to use the knowledge you produce from this research or Who is the audience for this research—i.e. transit officials, guidance counsellors, city officials? If you already have a goal or audience in mind, including questions that might be relevant to these organizations that is big advantage in writing good questions. The *TfC* class that was interested in the transition from high school to college asked guidance counsellors what questions they would most like us to ask of students we were surveying. The class included these questions in their survey and will present the results to the guidance counsellors at the conclusion of their work.

Your students may need to be guided back to their research question and encouraged to stay focused on what that question is asking. We have found that at the start of writing a survey, students begin to add variables and/or make suggestions that are too general or too granular and may not realize when they are using biased and/or using leading language. Here are some questions to ask students so they get the point and begin to figure out what is most effective: a) what is our story (or theory) about what is happening—i.e. race and school influence the transition from high school to college? b) How will that possible survey question help us answer our research question? c) Why are you asking about X when your question says we are interested in Y?

Of course, it is also a good idea to use existing surveys as sources of ideas and inspiration. A survey produced by more experienced social scientists will provide language that may be used to give respondents instructions, show a Likert-like scale and ways to structure check-off, circle-the-response or other multiple-choice question formats.

Here is an example of a survey

Research question that shaped the survey questions: *“Why do high school students in Halifax and Northampton Counties feel unsafe and what can be initiated to increase the feeling of safety?”*

**Tool for Change Roanoke Valley Early College
Safety Survey**

1) Do you live in Halifax County or Northampton County, NC?

- Halifax County
- Northampton County
- other
- Don't know

2) Were you born before March 2001?

- Yes
- No

___ Refuse to answer

3) What is your age? _____

3) What does safety mean to you?

___ Not worrying about violence or that something bad might happen

___ Feeling comfortable and confident to move freely in the community

___ Feeling secure that if something were to happen the proper authorities would come and resolve it.

___ Other _____

4) How often do you worry about your safety?

___ Daily

___ A few times a week

___ A few times a month

___ Almost never

___ Never

6) How safe do you feel at home on any given night?

___ Very unsafe

___ Unsafe

___ Neither safe nor unsafe

___ Safe

___ Very safe

___ Other

7) When do you feel that your safety is most at risk?

___ Alone

___ In large groups

___ In your neighborhood

___ At School

___ Other _____

8) Explain your response to question 7:

9) How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The rate of violent crime is higher in my county than in similar counties in North Carolina."

___ Strongly agree

___ Somewhat agree

- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

10) How safe do you feel when you see a patrol car parked in your neighborhood?

- Very unsafe
- Unsafe
- Neither safe nor unsafe
- Safe
- Very safe
- Other _____

11) Who is ultimately responsible for safety in your community?

- People in the community
- Police
- State government
- Federal government
- Other _____

12) How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "There is nothing that I can do to ensure the safety of my community."

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

13) True or False. "I would feel more confident that I could increase safety in my community if I thought my concerns and safety suggestions would be heard."

- True
- False

14) The most helpful action I could take to improve safety in my community would be to:

- Contact the County sheriff
- Start a community conversation about safety
- Set up a community watch program in my neighborhood
- Attend meetings of the county government
- Get more information about safety and crime in my area
- Other _____

Demographic Questions

(The following questions are for classification purposes only. All responses are strictly confidential.)

15) What is your gender?

Male

Female

16) Do you see your family as?

Making it

Living comfortably

Well-off

17) What is your race or ethnicity?

White

Black

Asian

Non-White Hispanic/Latino/a

Other _____

