In order to write a good survey, you need to ask questions in a way that lets respondents answer truthfully, and by taking the time to write good survey questions, you will be well on your way to getting the best possible responses you need in order to achieve your goals. The better your survey, the better your responses!

Try to keep the following in mind when creating your survey ....

**Brevity.** Design your questions to be short, succinct and easy to understand. Use plain English where possible. This will allow your respondent to complete the questionnaire quickly. They should understand what is being asked on the first reading.

Avoid using ambiguous words such as ‘usually’ or ‘frequently’ in your questions. These have no specific meaning and they need qualifying.

**Focus on asking closed-ended questions.** Closed-ended questions provide respondents with a fixed set of options to choose from. These response choices can be simple yes/no options, multiple choice options, Likert rating scales, and more.

**Try not to ask too many open-ended questions.** Open-ended questions ask respondents to add personal comments. These questions require more time and effort to answer and as a result, asking too many of them can result in respondents leaving your survey sooner than if they were asked closed-ended questions instead. Ideally, try to ask no more than 2 open-ended questions per survey.

**Keep your survey questions neutral.** Putting an opinion in your question prompt (or asking a “leading question”) can influence respondents to answer in a way that does not reflect how they really feel. Avoid using leading phrases such as ‘how often’ or ‘how good’.

**Keep a balanced set of answer choices.** Respondents need a way in which to provide honest and thoughtful feedback otherwise their answers may not be credible. The answer choices you include can be another potential source of bias, so it is very important that respondents are presented with a balanced set of answer options.

**Don’t ask for two things at once.** Confusing respondents is just as bad as influencing their answers. In both cases, they will choose an answer that doesn’t actually reflect their true opinions and preferences. A common culprit which often causes confusion is the “double-barreled” question, which asks respondents to assess two different things at the same time. This can easily be avoided by only asking for a response to one thing at a time.

**Keep your questions different from each other.** You can address this by varying the types of questions you ask, how you ask them, and by spacing out questions that may look similar.
Let most of your questions be optional to answer. Respondents may not know the answers to all the questions being asked. Added to which, there may be some questions that they simply do not feel comfortable answering.

Keep both of these things in mind when deciding which questions you require answers to, and if you are unsure as whether to make a certain question optional or required, make it optional. Forcing respondents to answer questions will make them far more likely to abandon the survey or select an answer at random.

Test drive your survey! Once you've created your survey there is nothing worse than finding mistakes after it has been deployed! This can easily be avoided by sharing your survey with colleagues, friends, and others in advance.