

What do your students think?: Writing items for course evaluations

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**What do your students think?:
Writing items for course evaluations**

Measurement Quality Issues

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Measurement Quality Issues

Start with “what do you want to know?”
then address how to measure it.



Measurement Quality Issues

Two critical questions to ask:

Is the student competent to answer?

Is the student willing to answer?



Measurement Quality Issues

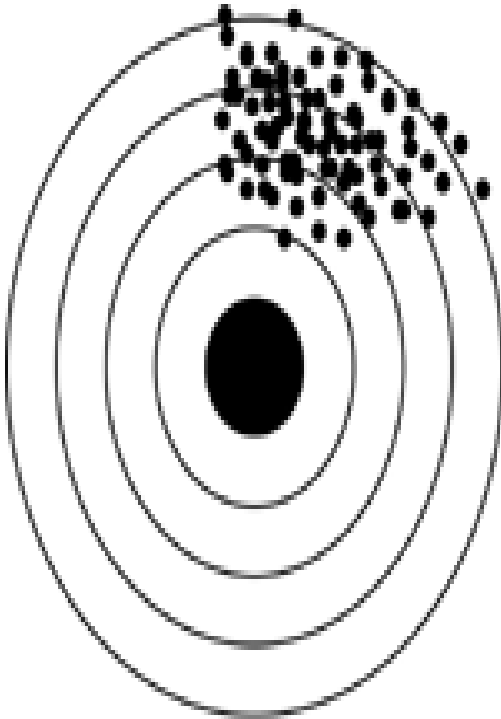
Reliability: consistent measurement

You ask students to complete the course evaluations following the return of test scores—will you get reliable data?

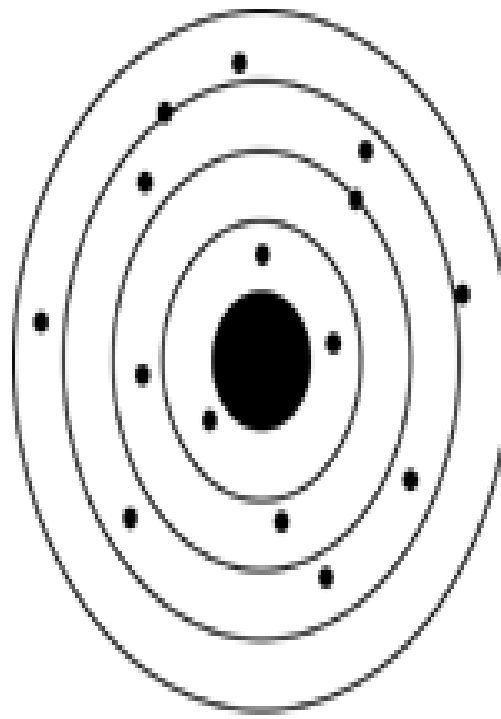
Validity: true measurement

Can you measure learning by the weight of student brains?

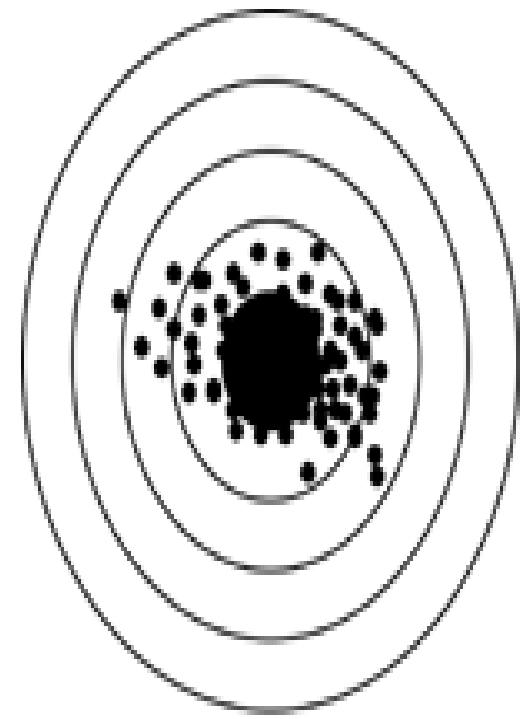
Measurement Quality Issues



Reliable but Not Valid



Valid but Not Reliable



Valid and Reliable

Measurement Quality Issues

Exhaustive response options

"I like my instructor."

agree

disagree

strongly disagree

Is it OK to leave out the "no opinion" or "not sure" options?

Mutually exclusive response options

"Estimate the hours spent on work outside of class last week."

0

1-2

2-3

3-4

>4

Precise measurement

Include a time referent.

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Writing Good Questions

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Department of Sociology

Writing Good Questions

Open-ended questions

“What is the most important issue facing the US today, and why?”

Weakness

Can be hard to generalize from different responses

Writing Good Questions

Closed-ended questions

Your typical “multiple choice” question

Weakness

Difficult to think of every possible response

Writing Good Questions

Make sure your questions are clear

“What do you think of the proposed peace plan?”

What proposed peace plan?

Writing Good Questions

Avoid double barreled questions



Writing Good Questions

Avoid double barreled questions

A question that looks for a single answer but is really two questions is double-barreled.

“Is this question interesting and useful?”

“Do you think cars should be faster and safer?”

If your question contains the word “and,” it might be double-barreled

Writing Good Questions

Avoid negative items

Readers may misread a question, ignoring the word “not”

Negative questions can be confusing

Writing Good Questions

Avoid negative items

Yes or no: The US should not go to war with Iran

A “no” answer could mean:

- No, the US should not go to war with Iran
- No, the US should not *not* go to war with Iran

Writing Good Questions

Avoid bias

A biased question encourages respondents to answer in a particular way

More support for

- "Assistance to the poor"
- "Halting the rising crime rate"
- "Dealing with drug addiction"
- "Solving problems of big cities"
- "Improving conditions of blacks"
- "Protecting social security"

Less support for

- "Welfare"
- "Law enforcement"
- "Drug rehabilitation"
- "Assistance to big cities"
- "Assistance to blacks"
- "Social security"

From Rasinski, Kenneth A. 1989. "The Effect of Question Wording on Public Support for Government Spending." *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 53 (3): 388-394

Writing Good Questions

Avoid bias

1986 General Social Survey asked:

“Do you believe too little money is being spent on assistance to the poor?” – 62.1% said yes

“Do you believe too little money is being spent on welfare?” – 23.1% said yes

From Rasinski, Kenneth A. 1989. “The Effect of Question Wording on Public Support for Government Spending.” *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 53 (3): 388-394

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Thank you!