

# SR Quest

*the quarterly newsletter of Simply Research Services LLC*

## Awaking from Hibernation

*Yeah, I watched CBS' Let's Go Crazy: The Grammy Salute to Prince back in April - and the rerun of it too. I bet I know what you are thinking, 'apparently she has nothing better to do.' Well, that is true too. We were on lockdown at the time, right? So. Free concert in my home. A string of jammin' Prince music. Strong and talented performances. Heck, yeah. I watched the show - twice as you now know.*

*Life without music is disjointing, and I know I am singing to the choir when I say this. Music feeds our souls, breathes life into our spirits, and at times just makes us cut loose and move. The day of the Prince tribute rerun, I had spent 6 hours picking my own acoustic and a couple more playing my Baldwin E-150. I do believe I will be great one day - in about 20 more years! I know this because of the performances on that show.*

*Gary Clark Jr. gave a moving rendition of The Cross that steeled me. He also infused it with a strong, emotional guitar solo that made me well up with tears. The man can play! The multitalented H.E.R. showed once again why she deserves the stage, singing Beautiful Ones while moving seamlessly from piano to guitar - and from rhythm to lead on the latter. The girl is bad! I still cannot believe the Foo Fighters performed Darling Nikki on free TV, but they did. It was fun and entertaining, and I am still at a loss for*

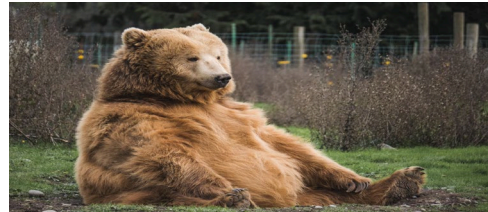


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*words to convey the skills and talent of drummer, Taylor Hawkins. His added energy and exuberance made him such a joy to watch.*

*All of these artists clearly enjoy what they do. They can play, sing, and some can even dance. Because of this, the show was more than just entertaining, it was a moving and spirit filling experience - just when we needed it.*

*Parks are opening now, and the cities and burbs are starting to come alive after what seems like a spring hibernation. But COVID-19 is still quietly jumping all around us, though the warm and sunny weather now beckons us outdoors. So, find a safe way to share in a bit of fun, and hear some music that feeds your soul, breathes life into your spirit, or lets you cut loose and move. Do this while staying in tune to yourself. Continue to listen to and protect your body. Enjoy - but keep in mind that this thing is not over.*

*Reba Chaisson, PhD  
Principal*

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## Au contraire, there is such a thing as a bad question!

Okay, well maybe in the context of school there is no such thing as a bad question. Maybe when speaking to our parents, there is no such thing as a bad question. And maybe even when talking with our significant others, there is no such thing as a bad question. Otherwise, there is indeed such a thing as a bad question, as well as a bad way to ask a question when the goal is to get an unbiased response.

As we discussed in the February issue, the purpose of a survey is to gather information that offers insight into an area of interest. We have all seen them, particularly since COVID-19 arrived. Some, especially those from medical establishments, are very well designed and very focused. Others, not so much.

We all acknowledge the importance of delivering a positive customer experience when selling a product or providing services. But we should also pause to consider respondent experience when asking current and prospective customers to complete a survey. Businesses, especially small businesses, need information that these groups hold. What they have to say serve as the keys to unlocking marketing plans and companies' long and short-term strategies for growth. Yet, many businesses are nonchalant about collecting this valuable information.

Poorly designed surveys result in low response rates and high survey abandonment, which means businesses and service organizations are not getting the data they need to plan and make decisions. Question wording and sequencing are keys to not only ensuring researchers get the information they are seeking but also to providing a good experience for survey respondents. Given their importance, let us take a look at why people ignore surveys or simply do not finish them once they start. Some of the reasons are:

1. Survey fatigue
2. Survey length
3. Improper (or no use) of skip logic
4. Mandatory responses
5. Question Answer incompatibility
6. Lack of exhaustive responses
7. Biased terms

### *Survey Fatigue*

People are simply tired of filling out surveys. The influx of questionnaires regarding COVID 19 have contributed greatly to this exhaustion, though many people had had their fill well before then. But over the last few months, surveys have inundated our inboxes inquiring about our health, services needed, and how we are spending our time as we shelter in place. While states have opened up, many parents are still juggling work from home and their children's schoolwork, as the school year is still in session in many parts of the country. Business owners are being asked about the availability of their products and services while they have limited, if any, access to their offices, storage facilities and retail establishments. They are also being asked about their business' status, structural changes to their companies, and many, many other facets of their work. While some of these are important, the sheer number has caused people to roll their eyes and scroll right past them.

## Au contraire (continued)

### *Survey Length*

People also resist surveys because they are simply too long. Some researchers will indicate the amount of time the survey will take to complete. This way, recipients can decide if they want to take the time to participate. But most surveys do not include this information. We received one today that stated the following:

*We're conducting a survey and your input would be appreciated. Click the button below to start the survey. Thank you for your participation.*

The introduction is missing a time estimate as well as a statement explaining what the survey is about. Often when time is included, it tends to be underestimated. This is usually attributed to lack of adequate testing.

So, unfortunately, the series of never-ending questions go on and on and on until eventually, the respondent abandons the survey. This leaves a gaping hole in the information the researcher was seeking. And the partially completed questionnaire cannot be factored into the findings. Everyone's time was wasted, and no one got what they expected.

### *Improper (or no use) of Skip Logic*

Surveys can also be frustrating when skip logic is not used. This ensures the respondent is only asked questions based on the information they provided in their previous responses. Take the following example:

13. Is your firm currently certified as a minority business? \*

1. Yes
2.  No

14. If Yes, which certification does your firm possess? \*

Here, the respondent answered 'No' to question #13. Given this, question #14 is not necessary and therefore should not

be posed to them. Including a statement directing the respondent to Go To the next relevant question in the survey takes care of this. In fact, many online survey systems have integrated skip logic, so the researcher can simply program the tool to skip to the next relevant question based on the response. This is a clean implementation that prevents waste of the respondent's valuable time.

### *Mandatory Responses*

Question #14 also requires an answer before the respondent can proceed (\* indicates required response). But how can they move forward if this question is premised on a Yes response to the previous question? Imagine how frustrating this must be for the respondent. They are likely annoyed at this point and quite upset that their time is being wasted, while they figure out a circumvention.

Unfortunately, these problems are quite common in the surveys many people receive. Their presence indicates that the survey instrument was not thoroughly tested prior to launch. This is the phase where such errors are caught and fixed before the survey is presented to the research population.

### *Question-Answer Incompatibility*

Though not among the most egregious errors, question-answer incompatibility is when the question asked is inconsistent with the wording of the answer options provided. For example:

How likely are you to attend a [type] virtual workshop?

1. Very interested
2. Somewhat interested
3. Not at all interested

The question refers to the *likeliness* of attending a workshop, but the responses denote the *level of interest* in attending one. One can be interested in attending a

## Au contraire (continued)

workshop, but unlikely to do so because of the time of day it is held, for example. Or they are likely to attend even though their level of interest in the subject is casual and they simply enjoy learning. The crux of the inconsistency here is whether the responses reflect what the researcher wants to know. Do they want to know the likelihood of attending, or do they want to know the level of interest? Because of the incongruence, the responses to this question will be unusable since it is unclear how to interpret the respondent's answer in relation to the question.

### *Lack of Exhaustive Responses*

In the case of multiple-choice questions, sometimes the response choices are not exhaustive, meaning they lack all possible responses. To do this, many surveys provide a very long list of options. Think about those that inquire about your major in college. Often these lists contain more than a hundred choices, and it is still not exhaustive. At the other extreme are lists such as the one below that contains only four options, when plenty more exist.

What topic are you most interested in learning about? (select all that apply)

1. Accounting/Bookkeeping
2. Digital Communications
3. Information Technology
4. Marketing/Advertising

In either case, it is especially frustrating for respondents when none of the options applies to them. A cleaner implementation would be to provide the top 3 or 4 choices and a *Other* option. Here, *Other* would include a line that allows the respondent to write in what they **are** interested in learning about. It adds flexibility to the question. It avoids wasting the respondent's time combing through long lists. It leaves the respondent with the satisfaction that they had the freedom to state what they were most interested in learning. And it better ensures the researchers get the information they need.

### *Biased Terms*

Recently, I came across a survey entitled, The [Political Candidate's] Approval Survey. Remember, the objective of a survey is to gather unbiased responses – that is, responses that are not influenced by question wording nor overt or subliminal hints on how the respondent should answer the questions. It is rare to see a survey like the aforementioned from a reputable researcher because an instrument such as this breaches research ethics. But occasionally, they do come across our inboxes. The questions typically begin with clauses like *Don't you agree that...* or *Isn't it true that*. Their goal is to influence opinion, not gather objective information to learn something from the research audience.

### Other Factors

Other factors contributing to low response rates and survey abandonment are lack of incentives and the absence of external stimulation. The offer of money, coupons, gifts, and other bonuses tend to boost response rates for surveys. In addition to the costs though, these inducements also have implications for bias. They can unintentionally increase the chance that individuals

## Au contraire (continued)

answer the questions in ways that are favorable to the sponsoring organization. This removes the objectivity element that is so key to survey research.

Perhaps a balance can be struck by making the incentive very modest, such as donating some amount of money to a charity for every survey completed. In this way, the respondent might become invested enough in the study to complete the survey, but not so much that they lose a sense of honesty and fairness in their responses.

External stimulation has to do with integrating a mild distraction into the survey or at various points in the process to break up the question-answer monotony. The insertion of a joke every few questions or so could add a bit of fun to the exercise. The incorporation of easygoing, background jazz can make survey-taking a relatively pleasant experience. It is unlikely to disrupt the respondent's concentration nor extend the time it takes them to complete the questionnaire. Heck, I am still quite productive listening to Herbie Hancock and the late Grover Washington Jr (though Bobby Caldwell, Alicia Keys, and Jay Z work just as well for me too). Indeed, music across genres is used quite extensively in grocery stores and retail outlets to enhance the shopping experience (and lull us into buying more – lol). I think it works!

### Conclusion



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To sum, remain cognizant of respondent experience when designing a survey. Respect your audience and thoroughly test your research instrument before launching it. Confusing, unneeded and biased questions make for a frustrating respondent experience. They also waste company time, as well as that of service organizations and those they are attempting to serve. In the end, the incomplete and conflicting information derived from poorly designed



Photo by Kat Yukawa on Unsplash

surveys means the business did not get the answers it so critically needed for their marketing and strategic planning. So, it is prudent to learn to properly design a survey and construct survey questions. Try to refer to a book on the subject or take a few courses. If this is not possible, then consider seeking the consultation of an experienced researcher for assistance. Do not let a bad survey tarnish your company or organization's credibility.



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## Small Business Music Schools' Shift to Tech

Music artists are passionate folks – not only the professionals but also those working to perfect their craft. Some of the latter aspire to make it big one day, but overwhelmingly they play because they love it and they want to share that joy with others. Along with their regular day jobs, many musicians perform at clubs and private or community events on the weekends. They even teach lessons weekday evenings to earn money while continuing to do what they love. For some, teaching is a side gig. For others who own their own brick and mortar music schools, teaching IS their day job.

Although sometimes referred to as store-front music schools, we coined the term, small business music schools or SBMS', to refer to these brick and mortar establishments. This tag better acknowledges and values the seriousness, effort and time the owners put into their businesses and the monies they continually reinvest to make them successful. But this work has been seriously disrupted since COVID-19 arrived.

Even long-established schools have been struggling to adapt to the new economic conditions. What had been working all these years was suddenly no longer viable. The circumstances brought on by COVID-19 required owners to pivot their business models on a dime. They had to shift their lessons from traditional in-person to virtual instruction overnight. Some schools lacked the connectivity and software technologies to do this. Others seamlessly transitioned their lessons to video platforms using computer programs or smartphone apps.

We wondered about the technological readiness of SBMS' now that they were faced with the challenges presented by physical distance and PPE measures to keep everyone safe. We also wondered how the shift in lesson delivery strategies impacted their respective missions and brands. Using information from their websites between May 1st and May 15th, approximately six weeks into the COVID-19 shutdown, we profiled 30 schools across Illinois, focusing on their mission statements and lesson delivery options. You can view the full report of our findings [here](#) or visit our [website](#).

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## A Final Word

There is a saying in sociology that ‘the personal is political.’ It means that our everyday experiences and ways in which we go about our lives without a second thought, are inextricably connected to policy and what is going on in the larger society. While we are often able to compartmentalize our lives for the sake of moving on to make a living and just getting through the day, sometimes an event occurs that steels us, nudging our souls so painfully that we have to just stop. This was the case for me when I saw the video of George Floyd, an African American man in handcuffs, murdered (allegedly) in broad daylight on a Minneapolis street at the hands of several police officers.

I did not know George Floyd, so what is my connection to him? Well, first, he was a fellow human being who had an inalienable right to life; yet it was snuffed out by the very authorities who were responsible for protecting it. One even stood by indifferently, as if this was a normal occurrence. Second, George and I are both African American. And like Jews, Irish, Italians, and other racial and ethnic groups, we shared a common history and similar present-day experiences in our interactions with mainstream society. Finally, we both have children, although my two boys are now young men – young, African American men like George Floyd.

I have never been naïve to the realities of mainstream life for my sons. When they were teenagers and learning to drive, I had somber talks with them about how to handle interactions with police officers should they be stopped. ‘Don’t make any sudden movements.’ ‘When they ask for your license and you need to get it from your pocket, tell them this before you do it.’ ‘If you need to get the registration or insurance from the glove compartment, tell them this before you do it.’ I impressed upon them how important it was that they heed this, not just now as kids, but throughout their adult lives and in every interaction with police everywhere. As they grew up, they observed that their White friends, male and female, seemed unconcerned about these ‘rules’ when interacting with police. Eventually, they became keenly aware why.

In recent years, I have seen the increasing likelihood of George Floyd’s fate befalling my sons, my husband, my nephews, and other African American men in my life – even inside their own homes. This is because these assaults not only occur at the hands of police with their military tactics like strangleholds and unfettered authority to ‘stop and frisk.’ But they also occur at the hands of vigilantes, as states have passed gun carry and ‘stand your ground’ laws over the last ten years.

Without question, these laws are designed to gain control over Black lives. Further emboldened by the apathy and political rhetoric of the nation’s leaders, police and civilians behave as if they have the legal authority to stop, detain, assault, and murder African Americans with little if any cause and without consequence. It is no wonder that African Americans are angry, fed-up and outraged. And given the increasing multiracial landscape, it is no wonder that the demonstrations have become increasingly diverse. In the U.S. large numbers of Whites of all age groups, along with Latinx, Asians, Native Americans, and Middle-Easterners walk hand-in-hand with Blacks in protest of these violations of the most basic of civil liberties – the right to breathe.

I contend that everyone across age, race, ethnicity, and class should be outraged by George Floyd’s murder. If not about this, then what? Being able to go to a restaurant or beach in the middle of a pandemic? What does it say about us if we can watch a fellow American murdered (allegedly) by the very authorities that exist to serve and protect us, and yet feel nothing or just keep going about our everyday lives? Unless – it is believed that African Americans are not entitled to be served and protected by the police. And unless it is believed that African Americans are not real Americans, despite being here for 400 years.

NASA launched a rocket this week, and the President proudly offered ‘military’ assistance to the states to help manage the demonstrations occurring across the country. But if we are not all outraged by this murder, then Houston, we have a problem - here on Earth.



**Simply Research Services**  
PO Box 194  
Flossmoor, IL, 60422

**Phone:** 708 202 9113  
**E-mail:** [reba@sr-svcs.com](mailto:reba@sr-svcs.com)

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**Editor: Chris Chaisson**  
[chris@sr-svcs.com](mailto:chris@sr-svcs.com)