

DOES COMPLETING A SURVEY MAKE ANY SENSE?

Questions and answers about online
consultations and surveys

Why participate in consultations? How can you be sure that completing a survey makes sense? Why is a question asked this way? How not to be misled?

During our research, we received similar questions from you. That is why we have decided to look at the uncertainties around surveys and questionnaires and introduce you to the methodology of these.

Table of content

- I. Frequently asked questions about consultations**
- II. Frequently asked questions about surveys**
- III. Why are questions asked this way?**
- IV. How do you become a conscious respondent?**

Read the frequently asked questions below and take part in online surveys more consciously!

**Did not find your answer? Contact us here:
tehogylatod@hintalovon.hu**

I. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT CONSULTATIONS

What are consultations? What characterizes consultations made for children?

- This is a kind of survey that gathers children's opinions in a given topic to enable adults to make decisions based on the results.
- The decisions are made by the adults. The children are not in a position to control the outcomes.
- Consultations come in many forms. The simplest is the online survey you can fill out alone without any help. Other forms of consultations are focus groups (conversations with a specially selected group), forums, conferences or negotiation processes.

What is the process of a consultation?

- There is a need to ask children about a certain topic.
- The exact goal and aim of the consultation is set.
- A plan is made on what to ask, from whom and how.
- The consultation sets off – it is advertised online through contacts and partners in order to reach as many children as possible.
- The results are summarized.
- The decision makers take all things into consideration and hand down their decision.

What is the point of taking part in a consultation?

- Give a voice to children. The decision reaches the press, decision-makers, specialists, universities and international organizations. Parents and teachers can also get a better understanding of your opinions.
- Decisions are made with reference to your views, rather than by ignoring them. To deliver an adequate decision one must inquire and know the opinions of the involved.
- You can affect the opinion of others, maybe even those you would not think of.
- It might build a tradition, become common knowledge to ask children about questions concerning them.
- The questions can make you think and allows you to get an insight into what professionals and decision makers are interested in.
- Being part of something can feel good by itself. You can feel the significance of being an active member of your community.

Does my opinion really matter?

- You can be sure of this if the What? and Why? are transparent. You have to be informed about who handles the results, how the results get processed and how decisions are made. Finally, you have to get feedback. This is called transparency.
- Your right to participate is valid if your views are fully taken into consideration. This does not mean that adults should make a decision based on your preferences but they must consider them and after due consideration come to a conclusion regarding your best interest.

- The initiator of the consultation is often not the decision maker but an organization which mediates between the children and the EU, the UN or the government. Learn about the background of the consultation! The organisations might have an existing cooperation, a well working system of gathering children's opinion.
- Publicising children's views can have various effects or unexpected results. Check out how organisations anticipate using the results. Saying your opinion makes you one step closer to making your voice heard by the decision-makers.



„I hope this will get to the leaders and they will listen to what we have to say.“

How can I be sure they are really interested in children?

- You are kept informed of the aim of the consultation, the course of events and how you can access the results and use it.
- You can decide whether to take part in it and you won't be disadvantaged regardless of your decision.
- It is important that you are taken seriously and able to be sincere. Your answers should not be led by the questions.
- You are asked about topics you have experience in, things you have thoughts about.
- Questions are understandable and you have enough time and space to answer them.

- Anyone can answer the questions without any distinction and the consultation reaches the highest number of possible participants.
- You are enabled to get better knowledge on the topic you are interested in allowed to establish your own opinion.
- The questions are not harsh and don't make you feel bad. You are informed where to turn to if you need help or are upset about something.
- After evaluating the consultation you are informed of the result and how the result was used.
- You can give feedback.
- There are opportunities to ask questions.

Can I trust the results to get delivered to the important people?

- Get informed about what happens with your answers, who analyses them and whether there will be a summary available to the general public. Check out who is anticipated to get the results. During a reliable consultation you would be informed of everything beforehand.
- Get to know the initiator organization, make sure they are authentic. Check the resources and references.
- In case you cannot find information, ask the organizers. Not finding any contact information is a bad sign.



„It would be bad to fill a fake test so I hope it is not a hoax.“

**„Nothing ever changes.“ „A survey won't help this.“
„It's not enough to ask us.“**

- Whether a change occurs depends on many factors. . We are unable to influence everything. But we can try our best and what is within our capacities. If you can spend 15 minutes answering a questionnaire or talk about it to someone, it is precisely as much more of an influence as doing nothing. Why not try?
- Adjust your expectations to the anticipated results. Find out what the goal with the consultation is, what the organisers are hoping for and then follow them to stay informed about the consequences.
- The fact is that a survey rarely brings revolutionary changes. But it serves as a tool for orientation. It can open your eyes, give ideas, make you think. It is often difficult to keep track of impact, change is often slow or only materialises later. You might be 18 years old when change actually happens still, its significance won't be less as a result of the delay.
- Sometimes you are not informed of the impact of your participation, even though the results of the consultation were taken seriously.
- Filling in a questionnaire is only one way to take part in something concerning you. It does not solve everything but it is a simple and fast way to express your opinion.
- Talk to an adult or contact the organizers to find out what other opportunities you have to influence a decision. For example, in collaboration with others, or by initiating your own ideas.



„Will it change anything? This was not my first one and nothing has changed yet...“

Am I sure I know it best?

- As a child you know something that no specialist can know. Nor you, nor others should underestimate this knowledge.
- During a reliable consultation you are asked about things you experienced. For example you could be asked about your experiences with online learning, but you might not be the right person to decide the best type of technology to use for online learning.
- It is important that you are asked about things you are involved in, but it is all right to be disinterested or to not have an opinion.
- Some of the questions might be more fitting and others might have less to do with you but might be interesting for your peers.
- In case you feel like the questions are not related enough to you to answer them adequately, you are not obliged to answer. Skip a question or leave the survey.



„In my opinion not children but teachers should be asked about these questions.“

„I have encountered several questions not concerning me (what should be better, or important questions aimed at young teenagers but don't concern me).“

My opinion might be detached from reality...

- Reality is complex and we usually try to grasp it through observation or questions. How you experience a situation, what you feel or think are important pieces of information. Children are asked because we are curious about their views and thoughts. The more points of views we examine the closer we get to reality.



„This questionnaire asked my opinion and it might be far from reality.”

What difference does a single answer make in a survey?

- There are two main interests while processing a survey: how the majority respond and the factors influencing their answers (if someone responded in a particular way to a question, how did they respond to the other?) You might feel powerless but your opinion adds up and is taken into consideration when conclusions are drawn.



„I don't think they are personally interested in me.”

„I do not expect much of this consultation, most of the people spend their life saying »one swallow does not make summer«.”

Does my opinion suck?

- There is freedom of expression. There is no bad answer, this is just a survey. Everyone has to accept your honest answer.



„I am sorry for my long answers and hope I did not hurt anyone :/“

I do not want to deal with politics.

- You probably mainly hear about education, health, poverty or other public issues mostly in a political context or from politicians. But you have the right to participate in issues concerning children. This is a political right but does not equal to activities of political parties. Professional decisions are at stake.
- Pointing out obstacles serves to overcome those, finding challenges serves to face them.
- It is never a good idea to create a survey to justify our own views. It would misuse others which is manipulation and is against the law.
- It is important to be informed about the nature of the survey and when having any second thoughts about it to know that participation is not obligatory.
- It is completely fine not to be interested in a particular topic. Do not forget that no one can make you participate in a survey if you don't want to . Participation is voluntary.



„I don't want to do politics but this could change the future.“

It barely talks about what was advertised before.

- An advert emphasizes interesting elements in order to attract attention.
- Adverts themselves are not providing enough information, look for more, read up on the official instructions of the survey.

II. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT SURVEYS

Why are surveys a good opportunity to express my opinion?

- A survey is the simplest way to affect a decision by collecting the opinion of children.
- Provides an opportunity for those to be heard whose voices otherwise don't reach specialists and decision makers.
- It allows you to participate without a representative, staying anonymous.
- Decision makers are enabled to deliver thorough resolution.

Why do it online, when many of us are without internet?

- This is the cheapest way which allows the highest number of children to participate.
- Although not everyone has access to the internet, online surveys are a way to reach children quickly and directly. This also means that your answers are sent back and processed instantly, resulting in less mistakes.
- Online data gathering is often complemented by other methods, for example, organizing focus groups where children outside of the reach of surveys can be reached.

What happens to my answers? How are these processed?

- Your answers are compiled with the others.
- Statistical analysis is used to determine the proportion of children who answer certain questions in a particular way and how these relate to their other answers. Textual responses are also analysed and coded. There are several methods to the analysis of textual responses. Sometimes coding is done by a computer software, but often it is done on an answer by answer basis by several people. This means that answers are processed based on their topic or other aspects.
- Generally used textual answers can be included as quotes into reports.
- Results are presented in written reports that may contain conclusions but the results itself always stay identifiable.

- Reports are handed over to the decision makers and are often released to the public.



*„I don't think anybody will read this.
Only a computer will sum up my
answers.“*

What is anonymity when everything leaves a trace?

- Anonymity means staying anonymous in front of the researchers, they will not know who is behind your answers.
- No one will ask your name or any other data that would make you identifiable.
- Answers result in a database where a large chart shows every answer of every participant. A software automatically generates a number with the time of taking the survey. This creates a personal identification number.
- Aside from the above, this database contains only what you have written into the survey. Pages store technical data too (online identifiers as IP address, browser, device) but only those you allowed in your cookies and browser settings.

What does „ensuring safe and secure data handling“ mean?

- Indicates that only those you enabled in the survey can see your answers.
- You must be informed of who will handle your data, where and how it is stored. This is explained in the data processing agreement. If you don't see one, filling the questionnaire is unsafe.

“*„ÖI was glad to say my opinion anonymously. (Though the internet is tricky. My IP address might lead to me.)“*

What does saying that a survey is representative mean?

- It means that certain characteristics apply to the participants and the whole society as well. Lets say a survey is aimed at 13-17 year olds and the study is representative by gender and county. In this case amongst the participants aged between 13-17 years, the girls and boys of the counties are in the same proportion as in the whole society.
- Categorizing respondents helps us to confidently draw conclusions about the opinion of a wider range of children.
- The same time it means that not everyone has a chance to participate since the number of respondents in each group has to be limited.

III. WHY ARE QUESTIONS ASKED THIS WAY?

Why are surveys so long?

- Determining the length of a survey is always hard. It has to be detailed enough to enable discussion of the essentials.
- If the survey is too long or boring the completion rate might decrease.
- This is why you often find a manual with the survey where you will see the estimated time you need to complete it. Often you will find that less time will be sufficient to do it than the estimate, but the opposite could also be the case.

“

„It was interesting enough to do it. Did not bore me otherwise I would not have started. It was easy to understand and complete it. It was nothing new and I think it was short for a research but the order of the questions was OK.“

What decides the order of the questions?

- The order of the questions might affect you. For instance, you might see more general questions about a particular topic, but might receive more detailed questions about it later.
According to the experiences the responders try to stay consequent to their first answer. Creating a survey one must focus on minimising manipulating answers.

- Every questionnaire is mapping the background of participants (age, gender, address, etc.). These are demographic questions and they can appear at the beginning or at the end of the survey. These might help to get in tune when placed at the beginning but are often at the end because they might be boring and the aim is to peak the interest of the respondent and to motivate participation.
- The order of the questions does not make a difference when analysing the results.

“*„I would place the personal questions in the front, not the end.“*

Why are the questions asked this way?

- To have authentic results, questions have to be formulated in an exact way so they are understood by everyone. A good question is never ambiguous.
- It is helpful if the surveys are tested on children first, who can then provide feedback about the clarity of the questions.

“*„I think it was OK, but I would refine the questions, because some of them were ambiguous. Like this question »Are adults interested in...« made me confused whether it asks about adults in general or my parents.“*

Why are there both textual and multiple choice questions?

- Providing feedback in your own words(open-ended question) serves a different purpose than choosing from answers (close-ended question).
- Answering open-ended questions means you can freely express your opinion and provide value for the researchers. The evaluation process is longer and more subjective which means the answers may be misinterpreted. Also these questions are often left unfilled by respondents since this takes more time.
- Close-ended questions are quick to fill in and data is easily quantifiable and allows researchers to categorize based on their interests. Preselected option choices might lead to some important but unanticipated answers being left out.

Why can't I choose as many answers as I want to?

- When creating answer choices we have to ensure that they are mutually exclusive, meaning that no two answers are the same. This is particularly important when choosing one single answer from a list of choices (single-answer multiple choice question).
- There are questions where you can check multiple answers under a given question (multiple-answer multiple choice questions). This occurs when the surveyors want to limit the choices in line with their aim, for example what is the biggest fear about their future amongst children? Possibly there will be many answers on the list that worry most of them but not equally. If every choice could be ticked off it would not offer reliable information about their biggest fears.

“*„The survey was really fine. Under some questions though, I would tick off all the choices but only 3 or 4 answers were allowed.“*

In a rating scale question (e.g.: 1 to 4, or how much I agree), why can't I choose the middle?

- According to researches we are inclined to choose the middle or neutral answer without really reflecting on the question. Surveyors try to eliminate this problem by not offering a middle scale option.
- Sometimes this is not possible because it bears meaning to feel either way. Before creating the scale the aim of the question has to be determined as well as the method in use to analyse results.

“*„Sometimes it is hard to decide if I agree or not and I would prefer to tick off a middle choice.“*

Why do they want to know my gender, age or address?

- We can gain important information comparing the opinions of girls with boys, or answers given in a county with those given in the capital, or someone aged 18 with a young teen.
- Surveyors determine beforehand the data they are interested in, what they are curious about and the questions are created according to this.

- They anticipate whether there will be enough respondents in every group they intend to ask. To have a statistically sound comparison they have to control the composition of the respondents.
- They can also unite groups or categories afterwards but it is a basic principle to only use questions which are then taken into consideration.

Budapest is not Pest county?

- Budapest is the county town of Pest county but Pest is also an independent regional unit.
- In the surveys Budapest is treated separately due to the number of inhabitants because answers usually differ by capital city and the countryside and these differences appear in the results.

Why don't I have to tell my exact age? Why is 18 the age limit in a survey for students?

- Age is indeed an artificial limit since many may be in a similar situation but at a different age.
- Surveys for children are for those who are under 18 because by legal regulation only they are regarded as children who are also the subjects of the child rights convention.
- The other artificial limit is the age of 13, as that is the age limit to create social media accounts which is usually where surveys reach the youth.



„Not only is a 17 year old a student, but an 18 year old too.“

IV. HOW DO YOU BECOME A CONSCIOUS RESPONDENT?

Get informed beforehand!

- Who created the survey?
- What happens to your answers?
- Will you stay anonymous?
- Where and when will the results be published?

Be conscious while filling in a survey!

- Do they ask you about topics you have experience in?
- Do they lead you with a question? Don't check it off or abandon the survey.
- Be careful not to give out your personal information!

Follow up the results!

- Is there a summary of the results?
- What is the decision and how were the results taken into consideration?
- Give feedback to the surveyors, ask questions.

EXAMPLES OF ONLINE CONSULTATIONS AND SURVEYS WITH CHILDREN

- Participating in a consultation in 2020 you were able to affect the strategy of the European Union on how to protect children.
- In a 2019 survey “How do you see it?” you could tell the UN what you think about the implementation of your rights. The results were included into the recommendation addressed to Hungary.
- Participating in the research InternetMost you could influence the process to create a digital safety programme for Telekom, also the future content of Yelon.hu, and you could share your opinion about digital education with teachers.
- The survey “Life during the pandemic / CovidUnder19” collected experience and proposals of children worldwide. The results were received by decision-makers through international organisations and universities.

More information: www.yelon.hu, www.hintalovon.hu

WRITTEN BY

Barbara Németh

Karolina Balogh

Lilla Palotay

Hintalovon Child Rights Foundation, 2020



HINTALOVON

Child Rights Foundation