Questionnaire

The goal of a questionnaire is to capture information from a relatively large number of people in a form that is easy to analyse and interpret. Questionnaires do not provide the same level of detail as face-to-face interviews, especially since you cannot probe for more information after a particular response. Nor are questionnaires practical for open-ended questions, not only because the responses are cumbersome to analyze but because people tend to avoid writing long answers (unless they want to complain about something). However a good questionnaire can give you useful feedback about a design or about relevant characteristics of the target audience.

Begin by thinking carefully about what you want to find out and from whom. Be aware that people may not interpret your questions in the way that you intended, nor are they always honest. Be especially cautious when asking people to interpret their own activity, since perceptions often differ greatly from independently recorded measures of that activity.

Make your questionnaire as short as possible. People quickly get bored answering questions and often simply stop. (Consider this when you think about the order of your questions – the questions at the end may not be answered by as many people as those at the beginning.)

Use standard question formats. People are more likely to answer in a consistent way and it is much easier to analyze the results. When possible, use concrete before abstract questions. For example, ask the respondent to think about a specific event, rather than how such events usually occur.

Before sending out a questionnaire, always pilot test it on a small group of people, ideally members of the target audience.

Asking questions is expensive, both in your time and that of the respondents. Ask as few questions as possible and make each one count. Do not ask overlapping questions: each response should reveal new information. Calculate how long it will take for someone from your target audience to answer your questionnaire. If it takes longer than 5 minutes, it is probably too long.

Specific & directed: (User background or system related)
- Short answer (What is your profession? ________)
- Rank (Order these techniques from most to least preferred: <list>)
- Multiple choice (Which of the following systems do you use regularly? <list>)
- Radio button (Why did you begin using this system? Choose all that apply: <list>)
- Likert scale (The documentation is clearly written: <Strongly disagree ... Strongly agree>)

Specific & open:
- Critical incident (Describe what happened the last time a rule failed.)
- Recent event (Did X occur last week? If so, describe what happened.)

Place general, open-ended questions at the end. Allow people to indicate level of confidence or add a comment, even to restricted questions.
Exercise: Questionnaire

Group:

Question type: ____________________________

Question: ____________________________

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Question type: ____________________________

Question: ____________________________

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