

Leading Practices: Avoiding Survey Fatigue

Survey fatigue is a cultural phenomenon. You're probably familiar with this ironic headline: "Survey says Americans getting tired of surveys."

As a tool that has made surveys so very easy to build, we accept some of the responsibility for the fatigue. Admittedly, we don't necessarily want to reduce the number of surveys out in the world. This is not just because they are our bread and butter, but because we sincerely believe that good survey data can make the world go 'round. What we do want, however, is to reduce the number of fatiguing surveys in the world.

In this tutorial, we'll equip you with a number of tools and tips that will help you reduce fatigue in your surveys.



Why Should You Care

You may just conduct one survey a year, so you think, "Yeah the survey is a little long, but it's an annual survey. I only bother people once a year." Here's the rub, though; even if you only ever do one survey per year, you still want your results to be accurate. You'll want to have good response rates. And, ideally, it would be great if you didn't have to pay for responses wouldn't it? Well, these are just some of the benefits of reducing the fatigue score of your survey!

- **Better, more accurate data** - The easier your survey is to respond to, the more likely you are getting truthful, accurate responses. If your survey is too long and/or not engaging, some respondents will just click through your survey mindlessly to get to the end, especially if you offer an incentive.
- **Better response rate** - Potential respondents often page through the first pages of surveys to get a sense for how fatiguing it will be. Admit it. You've done it. If you've made an effort to ensure your survey is not fatiguing, you will get more responses.
- **More representative sample** - More responses mean your data better represents the people you are trying to better understand.
- **Reduce the need for incentives** - If your survey is quick and to the point, you won't have to offer incentives to get people to respond to your survey. Instead, you can save that money to fund actions you'll want to take based on your survey results!

Survey Fatigue Reduction Checklist (Must Do)

We've created this checklist for you to run through each time you build a survey. Think of these like required tasks to review during and after each survey build. You'll be doing your part in the battle against cultural survey fatigue!

Take the Survey Yourself

This is our best and simplest advice. Put yourself in a potential respondent's shoes and ask yourself, "Is this survey too long?" If you hesitate to answer then, it probably is. Remember, *you* built the survey. You are both familiar with it *and* invested in it. It will be easier for you to respond to than someone who is neither familiar nor invested.

Remember to respond to your survey on various devices. What is fatiguing on a desktop might be very different than what is fatiguing on a mobile device.

Ask Yourself "What will I do with the data?"

"How many questions is too many?" This is one of the most common questions we are asked when it comes to survey fatigue. Unfortunately, there are no hard and fast rules. Because every potential survey respondent is different and each person's experience will differ depending on the survey topic, the day of the week, or the time of day that they respond to the survey, it's impossible to come up with a magic threshold that will apply to all surveys and all survey audiences.

Eliminating questions will certainly reduce potential fatigue, however, because there is no magic threshold, the better question you should be asking yourself is "What will I do with the data?" Take the survey and ask yourself this question before answering each question in the survey. If you cannot answer this question then the survey question needs to go!

Invite Others to Take Your Survey

Once you've made a pass through your survey, it's time to ask others to respond to the survey and send along feedback. It is a good idea to have a variety of people test; some that are more and some that are less invested in the project. If you include some project stakeholders, this might also give you an opportunity to persuade stakeholders to allow you to remove some of their pet questions that are bogging down the survey.

Check out our tool for inviting others to test!

Do Not Ask Questions You Already Know the Answer To

This *is* a hard and fast rule. When you ask questions you already know the answer to, you'll effectively be wasting your respondent's time, whether they know it or not. Nothing leads to more survey fatigue and abandonment than the feeling that your time is not being respected.

Check out our Prepopulation Tutorial to learn how to stop asking questions you already know the answer to.

Use Logic

Using logic you can ensure that the survey is relevant to each survey respondent. We have logic that will conditionally show both pages and questions only to the relevant respondents. We also

have skip and disqualify logic to jump respondents over entire sections of your surveys. Piping logic will allow you to repeat previously-collected data later in the survey. All of these logic tools will allow you to tailor your survey to each respondent to keep them engaged!

If you are new to setting up Alchemer Logic check out our [Getting Started with Logic Tutorial!](#)

Use Open-Text Questions Sparingly

Open-text questions are very fatiguing for survey respondents. If you use open-text questions, use them sparingly AND make sure that you act on this very expensive data.

Avoid Grid Questions

Grid questions should only be used if you wish for your survey respondents to make comparisons. For example, in the below question survey respondents are implicitly making comparison across the various ice cream brands listed in the rows. If this is not the purpose of your grid question, it is best not to use them.

Packing a bunch of questions in a grid to save space and make your survey "seem" shorter will not serve you in the long run; grid questions are very fatiguing and can lead respondents to abandon your survey or, worse, give you bad data.

Indicate your level of satisfaction with the ice cream brands you purchase:

	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Dairy Cream	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tasty Treat	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Wholesome	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sugar Cow	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ice Dream	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Jill's	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mike and Sammy's	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cold Cream	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Homemade	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other Tips for Reducing Survey Fatigue

Once you've made it through the Must Do Survey Fatigue Reduction Checklist you hopefully have a much shorter, less fatiguing survey. If you are still concerned about your survey's fatigue potential, below are a couple of tips that might help ameliorate survey fatigue.

Organize your Survey by Topic

Surveys that are organized by topic are generally easier to respond to. Use page titles and descriptions as signposts to help your respondents along.

Use a Progress Bar

Progress bars can also help the survey respondent to understand where they are in the survey and motivate them to complete it. Beware, if your survey is really long, a progress bar might be discouraging as submitting each page will only increment the progress bar by a small percentage.

Communicate Survey Details

Ideally, your survey is so easy to complete that your survey respondent never questions the time that they are giving you. If, however, your survey is unavoidably long, it is a good idea to communicate the survey details with your respondent. Below are some suggestions of things you can communicate with your respondent so that they feel better about giving you their time.

- Why you are asking what you are asking and what you plan to do with the data.
- How long, realistically, it will take.
- Number of questions.

Offer to Share Your Results

You can also offer to share the results and/or the actions you took based on the survey data. This can serve to both engage respondents, as well as, get more accurate responses.

Use Branching

The percent branch tool is primarily used in more research-focused surveys to A/B split test different groups, however, it is also great for distributing the burden of a very long survey across your respondents. If for example, you have an 80 question survey, you can create two branches and only ask 40 questions of each respondent instead of the full 80 questions. This will likely mean that you will have to collect more responses to get enough data to make conclusions, but it is a pretty effective way to get all the data you need without burdening your respondents too much.

Related Articles