Guidelines for Consortium Items

Should you have any questions or concerns about these guidelines, please contact NSSE’s Consortium Coordinator at consorti@indiana.edu

1. **The question set should take no more than 3 minutes** to complete. As a rule of thumb, this means no more than 15 items, where “item” refers to anything requiring a discrete response as detailed below.

2. **Each response in a “check all that apply” type question counts as a separate survey item.**

   *For example, the following counts as three separate survey items:*
   
   Which of the following co-curricular activities do you participate in (check all that apply)?
   
   - A social fraternity or sorority
   - A book club
   - Student government

3. **Each item under a common stem counts as a separate survey item.**

   *For example, the following represents three survey items:*
   
   How often do you the following activities? [at least one but less than two hours a day, at least two but less than three hours a day, at least three hours a day]
   
   - Surf the internet
   - Read outside of course requirements
   - Watch TV

4. **Where possible, use response sets that are already familiar to respondents,** such as those used throughout the core NSSE survey.

5. **Limit the number of response options for each item.** We recommend keeping the number under seven. A considerable number of students complete NSSE on a smartphone, and items with fewer response options fit better on a small screen. When possible, limiting the number of response options to four or five improves smartphone optimization.

6. **We strongly discourage ranking questions** (e.g., “Rank your top three reasons for attending this college in order of importance”). These types of questions are cognitively difficult for respondents, especially after completing the core survey, increasing the risk of survey drop-off or satisficing (providing insincere or unthinking responses). Ranking questions are also difficult to report and interpret.

   We recommend rewording the question in one of the following ways:
   
   “Choose your top three reasons for attending this college”
Or:
“Choose your most important reason for attending this college from the list below:”
“Choose your second most important reason for attending this college from the list below:”

7. **Comment boxes** are permitted, but we recommend no more than four (including “other” and “please specify” responses). Keep in mind that smartphone respondents may be less willing to enter comments. NSSE does not recode or report write-in information for consortium sets.

We do not allow text boxes for entering numbers (e.g., How many foreign language courses have you taken?). These must be presented as fixed response options containing exact numbers or ranges. When in doubt, please contact us to determine appropriate fixed response options.

8. A **filter question** at the beginning of a consortium set is permitted, but additional skip logic is not permitted due to the additional burdens of programming, quality control, data preparation, and reporting.