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**HOW TO PREPARE A  
RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE**

A step-by-step guide to designing a valid, reliable data-collection  
instrument for a quantitative, questionnaire-based thesis  
*(Undergraduate & Postgraduate / MA / MBA level)*

A companion to the Final Research Paper Template Guide  
and the SPSS Data Analysis Guide

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## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

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A questionnaire is the bridge between your conceptual framework (Chapter Two) and your data analysis (Chapter Four). If it is built carelessly, no amount of skilful SPSS work in Chapter Four can fix it a weak instrument produces a weak reliability score, weak correlations, and a weak regression model. This guide walks through building a questionnaire the same way it was done in an approved MBA thesis on leadership style and organizational performance, from identifying your variables through to a print-ready instrument.

The finished questionnaire should feel like a natural extension of your conceptual framework (Section 2.4): every box in that framework diagram becomes one block of questions here, and every question later becomes one column of data in SPSS.

### *The Workflow at a Glance*

1. Identify your variables from the conceptual framework
2. Decide the instrument type, scale, and overall structure
3. Write the cover/introduction section and general instructions
4. Design Part I the demographic questions
5. Design Part II the construct (Likert-scale) questions
6. Adapt items from validated literature instead of inventing from scratch
7. Apply good item-writing rules to every question
8. Add the confidentiality and ethics statement
9. Translate the instrument, if your respondents need it
10. Pilot test the draft and check preliminary reliability
11. Format and finalize the instrument for distribution
12. Distribute according to your sampling plan

## PART A PLANNING THE INSTRUMENT

### STEP 1. Identify Your Variables from the Conceptual Framework

Before writing a single question, list out every variable in your study exactly as it appears in your conceptual framework diagram (Section 2.4) this list becomes the skeleton of your questionnaire.

#### DO THIS

- Open your conceptual framework and list each independent variable in a box, plus the dependent variable.
- For each variable, write a one-line operational definition what, specifically, does this variable mean in your study?
- Decide roughly how many items (questions) each variable needs most thesis-level constructs use 4-8 items each.

#### WRITING TIPS

- Every variable named in your Research Questions, Hypotheses, and Objectives (Chapter One) must appear here and nothing should appear here that isn't named there. This 1-to-1 match is one of the first things examiners check.
- Keep the dependent variable's item count broadly similar to or slightly larger than each independent variable's, since it is usually the more complex construct to measure.

**Example:** Four independent variables (*Transformational, Authoritarian, and Transactional, Leadership*), each with 5 items, and one dependent variable (*Organizational Performance*) with 8 items 28 items in total, matching the reliability table's "Total reliability, 28 items" row.

### STEP 2. Decide the Instrument Type, Scale, and Structure

#### DO THIS

- For a quantitative thesis, choose a structured questionnaire with closed-ended questions this is what allows the SPSS analysis in Chapter Four.
- Choose your scale: a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree ... 5 = Strongly Agree) is the most common and directly supports mean-based descriptive analysis, correlation, and regression.
- Plan the instrument in two clear parts: Part I (Background/Demographic Information) and Part II (Specific/Construct Information), split into one labelled sub-section per variable.

#### WRITING TIPS

- Keep the same 5-point scale across every construct block in Part II mixing a 5-point scale in one section with a 7-point scale in another complicates both data entry and the composite-score calculations you'll do later in SPSS.
- Decide now whether any item needs to be reverse-worded (e.g., a negatively phrased statement) flag it clearly so you remember to reverse-code it during SPSS data transformation.

## PART B WRITING THE INSTRUMENT

### STEP 3. Write the Cover / Introduction Section

Every questionnaire opens with a short introduction that identifies the researcher, states the purpose, and thanks the respondent this is what a respondent read before answering anything.

#### INCLUDE

- The institution/college name as a header (e.g., "[COLLEGE NAME] GRADUATE STUDIES")
- A line identifying who will fill it in (e.g., "Questionnaire to be filled by [Organization] employees")
- The exact research topic/title
- The researcher's name
- A short, polite opening line thanking the respondent for their time and honesty
- An "Objective" paragraph explaining, in plain language, what the study is about and what the questionnaire aims to find out
- A short assurance that responses are for academic purposes only
- General instructions (e.g., "There is no need to write your name"; "Please tick (☐) the appropriate box")

#### WRITING TIPS

- Write the Objective paragraph in plain, non-technical language this is written for the respondent, not for your examiners, so avoid jargon from your literature review.
- Keep the whole introduction to under one page; respondents are more likely to complete a questionnaire that doesn't look long before it even starts.

**Example:** "My name is [Researcher] Student at [College]. I am researching the topic of '...' for the partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Business Administration. This questionnaire aims to determine the effects of leadership style on the organizational performance of [Company] ..."

### STEP 4. Design Part I Demographic Questions

Part I collects the background information used to build your Chapter 4.1 demographic tables and charts. Keep it short and strictly relevant to your study every demographic question you ask must have a reason to be there.

#### TYPICAL DEMOGRAPHIC ITEMS

- Gender (Male / Female)
- Age (in defined brackets, e.g., 18-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, Above 55)
- Marital Status (Married / Single / Divorced / Widowed)
- Level of Education (Certificate / Diploma / First Degree / Masters / Doctorate)
- Current Position / Job Title (open text or defined categories)
- Length of service / tenure (e.g., Less than 5 Years, 5-10 Years, 10-15 Years, Over 15 Years)

## WRITING TIPS

- Use closed categories (checkboxes) rather than open-ended text wherever possible this is what allows you to run clean Frequencies in SPSS without manual recoding afterward.
- Make age/tenure brackets non-overlapping and collectively exhaustive (e.g., 18-25, 26-35 not 18-25, 25-35, which double-counts 25-year-olds).
- Only include a demographic question if you can justify why it might matter for your study irrelevant demographic questions lengthen the questionnaire without adding analytical value.

## STEP 5. Design Part II Construct (Likert-Scale) Questions

Part II is the heart of the instrument one clearly labelled block per variable from Step 1, each containing several statements respondents rate on your chosen scale.

### DO THIS

- Create one sub-heading per construct (e.g., "Transformational leadership style", "Authoritarian leadership style"), in the same order as your conceptual framework.
- Under each sub-heading, list your items as short statements written from the respondent's point of view ("My leader ...", "I ..."), not as questions.
- Present the 5-point scale as column headers above every block, so respondents tick one box per statement: Strongly Disagree (1) Disagree (2) Neutral (3) Agree (4) Strongly Agree (5).
- Repeat the same format for the dependent variable's block at the end (e.g., "Organizational performance").

## WRITING TIPS

- Write statements, not questions "My leader spends time teaching and coaching" (to be rated) reads and analyzes more cleanly than "Does your leader spend time teaching and coaching?".
- Keep each statement to one idea only a statement like "My leader is fair and communicates clearly" is actually two ideas and will confuse respondents who agree with one part but not the other.

**Example:** Under "Transformational leadership style": "My leader spends time teaching and coaching"; "My leader seeks differing perspectives when solving problems"; "My leader suggests new ways of looking at how to complete assignments" five short, single-idea statements, each rated 1-5.

## STEP 6. Adapt Items from Validated Literature (Don't Invent from Scratch)

Strong theses rarely write every item from scratch they adapt items from previously published, validated instruments for the same or a similar construct, then cite the source. This strengthens your instrument's validity (Section 3.8) before you even collect data.

### DO THIS

- Search your literature review (Chapter Two) for authors who studied the same constructs and used a survey instrument.
- Borrow the item wording or structure from those instruments, adjusting the language to fit your context/organization.

- Record, in your methodology notes, which items were adapted from which source you will state this briefly in Section 3.5 (Data Collection Instrument).

### WRITING TIPS

- Adapting an existing scale is standard academic practice and is expected inventing all items yourself with no literature basis is actually a weaker approach and invites the "how do you know this measures the construct?" question from examiners.
- When adapting, keep the wording close enough that the item still measures the same idea the original author validated over-editing an item can quietly change what it measures.

### STEP 7. Apply Good Item-Writing Rules

Once you have a draft list of items, review every single one against these rules before moving on.

| Rule                                         | Why it matters                                                                                                                                                                   |
|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| One idea per item                            | A statement combining two ideas (a "double-barrelled" item) cannot be scored meaningfully if a respondent agrees with one half and not the other.                                |
| Avoid negatively worded items where possible | Reverse-worded items are more error-prone for respondents and require reverse-coding in SPSS before analysis; use only where the construct genuinely needs a reversed statement. |
| Avoid jargon and academic language           | Respondents are employees, not researchers write items in plain, everyday language they would naturally use.                                                                     |
| Keep items short                             | A one-sentence statement is easier to rate consistently than a long, multi-clause sentence.                                                                                      |
| Avoid leading or loaded wording              | "Doesn't your leader unfairly favour certain staff?" pushes the respondent toward a particular answer; keep wording neutral.                                                     |
| Match every item to its construct definition | Re-check each item against the operational definition you wrote in Step 1 if an item doesn't clearly measure that definition, revise or drop it.                                 |

**⚠ Common mistake:** A common mistake is writing an item that actually measures a different construct than the heading it's placed under (e.g., an "ethics" item that is really about communication style) this quietly drags down that construct's Cronbach's Alpha later.

### STEP 8. Add the Confidentiality and Ethics Statement

#### INCLUDE

- A statement that the research is for academic purposes only, authorized by your institution

- A statement that no one besides the researcher will access individual responses
- A statement that no report will include information identifying any individual respondent
- Confirmation that participation is voluntary and the respondent may withdraw at any time without penalty

### WRITING TIPS

- Place this statement clearly, either right after the introduction or as its own short labelled section ("Confidentiality") before Part I begins.
- This statement should match, word for word in spirit, what you describe later in Chapter Three, Section 3.10 (Ethical Considerations) the two must be consistent.

### STEP 9. Translate the Instrument (If Needed)

If your respondents are more comfortable in a local language, prepare a translated version alongside the original.

### DO THIS

- Write the master version first in the language you will analyze and report in (commonly English, for an internationally reviewed thesis).
- Have a fluent bilingual speaker translate it into the local language.
- Back-translate that version into the original language by a second independent translator, and compare the two English versions for meaning drift.
- Adjust wording until both language versions ask the same thing.

### WRITING TIPS

- State your translation method briefly in Section 3.4.1 (Types of Data) e.g., "developed in English and back-translated to [language]" this is a recognized way to defend translation validity to examiners.

**Example:** "The questionnaire is prepared using five-point Likert scale approaches ... developed in English and back-translated to Amharic as most employees have an understanding of these two languages."

## PART C TESTING AND FINALIZING

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### STEP 10. Pilot Test the Draft and Check Preliminary Reliability

Before distributing to your full sample, test the draft on a small group to catch confusing wording, and get an early read on reliability.

### DO THIS

- Distribute the draft to a small pilot group (commonly 15-30 people) similar to, but not part of, your final sample.
- Ask pilot respondents to flag any confusing wording, ambiguous items, or items they weren't sure how to answer.

- Enter the pilot responses into SPSS and run a quick Reliability Analysis (Analyze → Scale → Reliability Analysis) per construct.
- Revise or drop any item that pilot respondents found confusing, or that noticeably lowers a construct's Cronbach's Alpha.

### WRITING TIPS

- A pilot test is what lets you say your instrument's validity and reliability were considered before, not just after, full data collection strengthening Sections 3.8 and 3.9.
- If time or access doesn't allow a separate pilot, at minimum have your advisor and two or three colleagues review the draft for clarity before distribution.

## STEP 11. Format and Finalize the Instrument

### DO THIS

- Lay out the instrument cleanly: introduction/cover section → confidentiality statement → Part I (demographics) → Part II (constructs, one labelled block per variable) → a closing thank-you line.
- Use a table or grid for the Likert items, with the scale points as column headers and statements as rows, so respondents can tick consistently.
- Number every item in each block so it maps directly to a codebook entry later (Step 1 of the SPSS guide).
- Proofread for consistent tense, consistent scale wording, and consistent formatting (checkbox style, spacing) across the whole document.

### WRITING TIPS

- Keep the finished instrument to a length respondent can realistically complete in 10-15 minutes a shorter, focused instrument reliably gets a higher and more careful response rate than a long one.
- Save the finalized instrument as the version you attach in your Appendix ("Questionnaire and SPSS outputs") this is expected as supporting evidence in the final thesis.

## STEP 12. Distribute According to Your Sampling Plan

### DO THIS

- Confirm your sample size using your sampling formula (e.g., Yamane's formula, Section 3.3.1) before printing/publishing the instrument.
- Distribute copies proportionally across your strata (e.g., departments/branches) following your chosen sampling technique (Section 3.3.2) if you choose stratified sampling method.
- Track distribution and returns per stratum as you go, so you can report an accurate response rate in Chapter 4.1.

### WRITING TIPS

- Keep a simple distribution log (stratum, number distributed, number returned) this becomes the source for your response-rate statement and any per-department breakdown you might want to report.

## QUESTIONNAIRE-READY CHECKLIST

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Before printing or distributing your final instrument, confirm:

- Every variable in the conceptual framework has a matching, clearly labelled block of items
- The introduction, objective, and confidentiality statements are complete and consistent with Chapter Three
- Part I demographic items use closed categories and are all relevant to the study
- Every Part II item is a short, single-idea statement written from the respondent's point of view
- The same rating scale (e.g., 1-5) is used consistently across every construct block
- Items were adapted from cited literature sources where possible, not invented without basis
- Any reverse-worded items are identified and flagged for reverse-coding in SPSS
- The instrument was piloted or reviewed, and any confusing items were revised
- Every item is numbered and ready to be matched to a codebook entry
- A translated version exists and has been back-translated, if respondents need it
- The finalized instrument is saved for inclusion in the thesis Appendix

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