

# The Savvy Survey #14: Mixed-mode Surveys<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

As part of the Savvy Survey Series, this publication provides Extension faculty with an overview of the mixed-mode survey. There are many methods that can be combined for conducting mixed-mode surveys, including face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, web surveys, and mail questionnaires. This publication focuses specifically on one type of mixed-mode survey that uses both e-mail and postal mail for sending survey invitations, as well as a website and paper questionnaires for collecting responses. Mixed-mode surveys such as this are well suited for conducting needs assessments for program development or follow-up surveys for program evaluation.

A major advantage of mixed-mode surveys is that they allow Extension faculty to include people who lack access to or experience with online surveys to participate via mail, while saving money by reducing the amount spent on postage when e-mail messages and an online questionnaire are used to collect some of the responses. Another advantage is that mixed-mode surveys usually have a higher response rate than surveys conducted solely online (Israel, 2013a; 2013b). In short, mixed-mode surveys are an effective way to collect data (see, for example, Israel, 2011; 2013a; 2013b; Newberry, III and Israel, 2017).

Currently, the University of Florida has a license for Qualtrics survey software, which allows each Extension faculty member to have an account for creating and conducting

online surveys. This fact sheet provides guidance for constructing the questionnaire, addressing visual design and formatting considerations, and implementing a mixed-mode survey. Extension faculty who incorporate best practices of questionnaire design and survey procedures will be able to collect many responses and more useful data.

## Considerations Specific to Constructing a Mixed-Mode Questionnaire

Since mixed-mode surveys combine e-mail invitations and online questionnaires with postal letters and paper questionnaires, the design of the correspondence and questionnaires requires careful attention so that differences between the online and postal versions are kept to a minimum. This is important because even subtle differences in a questionnaire's wording or visual presentation can significantly impact the amount and quality of the collected data.

For the paper version of the questionnaire, the space available on a printed page and the weight of the survey package are important considerations (see *Savvy Survey #11: Mail-Based Surveys*). On the other hand, the online version of the survey must be constructed to match the skill level and experience of the survey population as well as the technology used by the survey software. Qualtrics software, for example, offers a suite of tools for developing a questionnaire, and the designer can include many types

1. This document is AEC408, one of a series of the Agricultural Education and Communication Department, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date April 2014. Revised August 2017 and August 2021. Visit the EDIS website at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> for the currently supported version of this publication.
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of questions and response formats (see *Savvy Survey # 6: Writing Items for the Questionnaire*). A word of caution: using some of the fancier or more complex question formats should be avoided in order to align the online response process with that of the paper version. Consequently, use of sophisticated skip logic (i.e., survey software commands to skip over questions that do not apply to a particular person) and other features of online survey software should be minimized (see *Savvy Survey #13: Online Surveys*). Like Qualtrics, other survey applications include many of the same options. It is important to become familiar with the features of the chosen software, especially default settings, in order to avoid unintended problems that adversely affect the usefulness and credibility of the data.

As discussed in *Savvy Survey #5: The Process of Developing Survey Questions*, a logic model can be very helpful in identifying and selecting high-priority questions to include in the survey.

## Visual Design and Formatting

The focus of designing mixed-mode questionnaires is centered on making the online and paper versions appear as similar as possible. Survey researchers call this a “unified mode” design (Dillman, Smyth, and Christian, 2014). This can be challenging because paper surveys utilize a portrait orientation while online surveys usually display questions in a landscape orientation on a desktop or laptop computer. Consequently, the online version of the questionnaire typically uses one question per screen or a gridded set of items on a single screen (Figure 1). In addition, surveys on smartphones are usually seen in portrait orientation because of the way people hold the phone and the screen size can affect how questions are displayed. Note the paper version of the questionnaire in Figure 1 uses shaded areas on the printed page, separated by white outlines, to mimic the screen-by-screen construction of the online version.

The appearance of individual questions, as well as the entire questionnaire, can impact whether and how people answer the survey (Dillman et al., 2014). A good design provides cues to a respondent on how to navigate from one question to another and what kind of information the survey designer is looking for. For example, the size of the answer space for the question “What could we do to improve our services to you and others in the county?” tells a respondent how much to write (a larger space encourages people to write more than a smaller space; see Israel, 2010). Qualtrics, for example, enables survey designers to specify how much space to include (e.g., a single line of text, multi-line essay space, etc.).

A “clean” design that clearly and consistently indicates where the question starts and where the associated answer choices are helps a respondent answer the questions accurately. In Figure 1, several screens of the online survey illustrate constructing the questionnaire with a consistent format, including a header at the top (with the logo and survey title) and navigation buttons in the bottom center area of the screen. There is little extra wording or graphics to distract the respondent.

For more detailed information about writing items or for formatting a questionnaire, see *Savvy Survey #6a–d* and *#7* of the series.

## Implementing a Mixed-Mode Survey Preparation

Getting ready to conduct a mixed-mode survey involves several steps.

### Step 1: Prepare the correspondence that will be used in the survey process.

There are several options for sending e-mail or mail invitations to the survey. For surveys that emphasize using e-mail and the online questionnaire, the initial contact should include the link to the website hosting the survey. This recommendation is due to the nature of e-mail messages: they are easily discarded and quickly buried in a person’s inbox. Follow-up contacts using this strategy will continue with several e-mail invitations and finish with one or two postal invitations.

Each e-mail and postal message should be carefully worded using the principles of social exchange theory (Dillman et al., 2014) to encourage people to complete the survey. Briefly, social exchange theory asserts that people will be more likely to respond when the benefits (e.g., importance, salience, prestige, usefulness) outweigh the costs (e.g., time, effort, difficulty) and they trust those sending the survey to deliver the benefits. In practice, the e-mail message should discuss how the respondent will benefit, why his or her response is important, and steps taken to reduce costs (i.e., providing a link to access the survey).

Figures 2–6 in Appendix A illustrate a series of messages, with each one tailored to play a specific role in the survey process. In addition, the correspondence should provide all of the information needed for a person to make an informed decision to participate in the survey, including, for example, the amount of time it will take to complete. It is a

best practice (and may be required) to have the questionnaire and letters reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure compliance with regulations for conducting research on human subjects. Note that mixed-mode strategies that use a different sequence of postal and e-mail contacts, as discussed below, will also have the letters worded in a manner that fits the mode and step in the process.

When preparing the correspondence, consider how to personalize it. Research shows that personalization has a small but significant effect on increasing response rates (Dillman et al., 2014). Personalization helps connect the respondent to the survey. This can be done by using individual names of clients in contact messages (e.g., Dear Joe Client) or by a group name with which clients identify (e.g., Dear Jackson County Cattlemen). Although including logos or images might help personalize e-mails to a group, some people continue to use e-mail applications without HTML formatting (which is required to display the graphics). Consequently, e-mail messages should limit the use of logos and images. Finally, draft a simple subject line to use with the e-mail messages (e.g., UF/IFAS Extension Client Experience Survey).

**Step 2: Develop an e-mail list with names, e-mail addresses, postal addresses, and other relevant information.** Spreadsheet programs, such as Microsoft® Excel, are useful for organizing the information and keeping track of which people respond and which do not. Table 1 illustrates a spreadsheet list, which includes a column listing the response status and one recording the date that a completed questionnaire is received. In addition, data in a spreadsheet can be used in a mail merge to personalize both e-mail and mail messages by inserting names and other information.

Table 1. Example of a spreadsheet file with contact information for mailing and record keeping.

ID	Status	Date	Name	Email	Street
001	Eligible		Joe Client	Joe.Client@email.com	3 Chestnut St
002	Returned	6/1/13	Jane Client	Janelovesbees@email.com	21 Live Oak Ct

**Step 3: Test the survey.**

The third step is to test (and re-test) the online survey, making sure that questions are displayed properly, they are shown in the right order, and questions are skipped when they should be. In addition, it is important to test the e-mail distribution procedures by sending an invitation to your own and a colleague's e-mail address (it is embarrassing to have to send out corrected links to the survey, etc.).

**Sending Survey Invitations**

Contact procedures should be tailored to the situation, as recommended by Dillman et al. (2014) Tailored Design Survey Method. Table 2 shows several examples of contact procedures for a mail and e-mail mixed-mode survey. A best practice is to use multiple contacts to obtain a high response rate and minimize the risk of nonresponse bias.

Table 2. Examples of contact procedures for a mixed-mode survey.

Contact	Option 1: E-mail augmentation	Option 2: E-mail preference	Option 3: E-mail emphasis
1st	Postal pre-letter (Day 1)	Postal pre-letter (Day 1)	E-mail message with URL link to the survey (Day 1)
2nd	Mail survey packet: cover letter, questionnaire, & return envelope (Day 4)	E-mail message with URL link to the survey (Day 4)	E-mail message with URL link to the survey (Day 4)
3rd	E-mail message with URL link to the survey (Day 7)	E-mail message with URL link to the survey (Day 11)	E-mail message with URL link to the survey (Day 11)
4th	Mail survey packet to nonrespondents (Day 21)	Mail survey packet to nonrespondents (Day 25)	Mail survey packet to nonrespondents (Day 25)
5th	Mail survey packet to nonrespondents (Day 35)	Mail survey packet to nonrespondents (Day 39)	Mail survey packet to nonrespondents (Day 39)

The sequence of contacts can be tailored to fit one's budget and desire to emphasize online responses.

- *Option 1: E-mail Augmentation* is designed to collect a large majority of the responses by postal mail. This option also provides an opportunity for people who prefer to complete the survey online by sending an e-mail invitation that is scheduled to arrive shortly after the mailed survey packet (Israel, 2013a).
- *Option 2: E-mail Preference* can be used with populations who may be unfamiliar with Extension (and reluctant to respond to a cold contact via e-mail). The postal pre-letter can help to introduce the survey and encourage people to respond to the two e-mail invitations. The final two contacts might be sent by postal mail because a number of studies have shown that a postal follow-up with a paper questionnaire results in a large number of completed surveys (Israel, 2013a; 2013b; Millar and Dillman, 2011; Messer and Dillman, 2011; Newberry, III and Israel, 2017).



## Client Experience Survey

ID # 84-156

First, we would like to find out how you feel about the information you received from the Extension office. We understand that you attended the 4-H District Event. Please mark your answers with an 'X'.

1. How up to date was the information?

☒ Completely up to date

☐ Mostly up to date

☐ Somewhat up to date

☐ Slightly up to date

☐ Not at all up to date

2. How timely was the information given to you in order to be useful?

☒ Completely in time to be useful

☐ Mostly in time to be useful

☐ Somewhat in time to be useful

☐ Slightly in time to be useful

☐ Not at all in time to be useful

3. How relevant was information to your situation?

☒ Completely relevant

☐ Mostly relevant

☐ Somewhat relevant

☐ Slightly relevant

☐ Not at all relevant

4. How easy to understand was the information?

☒ Completely easy to understand

☐ Mostly easy to understand

☐ Somewhat easy to understand

☐ Slightly easy to understand

☐ Not at all easy to understand

8. This question is very important, so please tell us all that you can. What could we do to improve our services to you and others in the county?

9. Please think about how receiving Extension services has affected you. How have you benefitted from Extension's services during the last year? Check all that apply.

☒ Saved me money

☒ Increased my income

☒ Improved my health or well-being

☒ Helped me conserve water or energy better

☒ Developed my skills as a leader or volunteer

☐ Other benefit \_\_\_\_\_

☐ I have not benefitted in any way during the last year

Finally, we would like to ask a few questions about yourself to help us better understand who is receiving Extension services throughout the state. Please answer all of the following questions.

10. How many times during the past 12 months have you attended an Extension program or contacted the Extension office? (Include '1' for the time when you received information)

Times

11. How many years have you been using Extension services? (Write '1' if only this year)

Years

Next, we'd like to ask about the information you received.

5. Have you had an opportunity to use it?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't Know

5a. If YES, did it solve the problem or answer your question?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't Know

5b. If YES, please explain what your information need or problem was, what you did with the information, and what the results were.

6. Have you shared the information with anyone?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't Know

7. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the service provided by the Extension office?

☐ Very satisfied

☐ Satisfied

☐ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied

☐ Dissatisfied

☐ Very dissatisfied

12. Where do you live?

☐ A farm

☐ Rural area, not a farm

☐ A city, town, or suburb

13. What is the highest level of education you have attained?

☐ Some high school or less

☐ High school graduate or GED

☐ Some college, including attending a technical college, community college, or 4-year program

☐ College bachelor's degree

☐ Post graduate degree

14. Do you work for pay?

☐ Yes ➡ What kind of work do you do? \_\_\_\_\_

☐ No ➡ Are you looking for a job or retired?

☐ Looking for a job

☐ Retired

☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

15. What is your racial-ethnic background? (Please mark the best answer)

☐ White, non-Hispanic

☐ Black, non-Hispanic

☐ Hispanic

☐ Asian American

☐ American Indian or Native Alaskan

☐ Multi-racial (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

16. What year were you born?

17. What is your sex? ☐ Male ☐ Female

Thank you for answering the survey.

Form A2017

## Client Experience Survey

First, we would like to find out how you feel about the information you received from the Extension office. We understand that you received information concerning yard help.

1. How up to date was the information?

☐ Completely up to date

☐ Mostly up to date

☐ Somewhat up to date

☐ Slightly up to date

☐ Not at all up to date

<< Back

Next >>

## Client Experience Survey

5. Have you had an opportunity to use the information?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Don't Know

<< Back

Next >>

## Client Experience Survey

5a. If YES, did it solve the problem or answer your question?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Don't Know

5b. If YES, please explain what your information need or problem was, what you did with the information, and what the results were.

<< Back

Next >>

## Client Experience Survey

7. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the service provided by the Extension office?

☐ Very satisfied

☐ Satisfied

☐ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied

☐ Dissatisfied

☐ Very dissatisfied

<< Back

Next >>

Figure 1. Example of visual design principles.  
Credits: UF/IFAS

- *Option 3: E-mail Emphasis* starts with three e-mail invitations to maximize online responses and minimize postage costs. Because of the findings from the previously cited studies, sending one or two replacement questionnaires by postal mail is highly recommended for this option.

Because the population and timing of the invitations will vary with each option, the letters and e-mail messages should be tailored to the specific role in the sequence. For example, the e-mail message in Option 1 should emphasize the convenience and opportunity to complete the survey online instead of using the paper questionnaire, while the initial email for option 3 would use a similar introduction as that for an e-mail-only survey.

There are several methods for sending e-mail invitations with the Qualtrics survey software. These options are outlined in Table 3.

**Table 3. Methods for implementing the online portion of the survey using Qualtrics.**

Contact	Advantages	Disadvantages
1. Using an anonymous link that is included in the e-mail invitation to each person	Simple to use; the same link is sent to each person	Respondents cannot be identified and omitted from follow-up e-mail messages
2. Creating a unique link to the questionnaire and sending the e-mails using the Qualtrics mailing utility	Simple to use; allows tracking of respondents and nonrespondents for targeting follow-up contacts	More complex than using anonymous link; requires additional skills for addressing bounced e-mails; Opt-out option is required for emails and can encourage people to refuse participation
3. Creating a unique link for each person, which is then exported to Excel and used by the faculty member's e-mail program	Allows tracking of all outcomes of e-mail messages (delivery and bounced messages); most user control	Complex; requires skills with Qualtrics, Word, Excel, Outlook, or a similar suite of applications for mail merge procedures

These options vary in complexity and the amount of faculty control, with the first having the least and the last having the most complexity and control. When using the second option (the Qualtrics internal mailing tool), it is important to recognize that the software reports the number of e-mail invitations sent and, recently, it also reports the number of e-mails that “bounce” or fail to be delivered. One advantage of the third option—using your own e-mail software—is that bounced and delayed e-mail messages can be identified and more easily addressed.

## In Summary

This publication in the Savvy Survey Series has focused on procedures for constructing a mixed-mode questionnaire and implementing the survey. It noted that a population's access and experience, software capabilities, and screen/paper compatibility are important considerations in the construction of the questionnaire. In addition, attending to the visual design and formatting of the online and paper questionnaires to minimize differences was emphasized as a critical step in the process. Finally, steps in getting prepared and for sending a sequence of e-mail and postal invitations for completing the survey were discussed. Using multiple contacts in each mode also was emphasized as a best practice for mixed-mode surveys. Using a mixed-mode survey is a way for Extension faculty to collect data from more people and reduce the risk of bias while keeping costs within the available budget.

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## Appendix A.

Israel, Glenn D

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**From:** Israel, Glenn D  
**Sent:** Monday, June 5, 2017 9:20 AM  
**To:** Israel, Glenn D  
**Subject:** UF/IFAS Extension Experience Survey.

Dear <Firstname> <Lastname>,

UF/IFAS Extension is conducting a survey of people who have contacted the UF/IFAS Extension <Countyname> County office for information or attended one of its programs. We want to find out how people feel about the information that they received. Your responses will help us find out what we are doing well and where we need to improve. The survey will take about 5 minutes to complete.

We are hoping that you will be able to complete the survey on the Internet so that we can summarize the results more quickly and accurately. Doing that is easy: just click on the link below or enter this web page address in your Internet browser's address field to begin the survey.

[<Link>](#)

You are one of a small number of Extension clients randomly chosen to participate in this study. Since your responses will also represent others who were not selected, we hope that you will complete the survey as soon as possible. Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to answer any question that you do not wish to answer. We believe that there are no risks to you from participating in this study. There are also no direct benefits or compensation to you for participating in the study. If you have questions about your rights, please contact the UFIRB office, Box 112250, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-2250.

We will keep your answers confidential to the extent provided by law. Your name will not be used in any report. We will only use your answers after they have been combined with the other respondents' answers.

If you have any questions, please call 352-273-2586, or send an email to [gdisrael@ufl.edu](mailto:gdisrael@ufl.edu). Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Glenn Israel  
Professor and Survey Director



## Israel, Glenn D

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**From:** Israel, Glenn D  
**Sent:** Monday, June 12, 2017 8:26 AM  
**To:** Israel, Glenn D  
**Subject:** UF/IFAS Extension Client Experience Survey.

Dear <Firstname> <Lastname>,

A few days ago, we sent you an e-mail asking you to complete a questionnaire about your experience with contacting the UF/IFAS Extension <Countyname> County office for information or attending one of our programs. We want to find out how people feel about the information that they got. Your response will help us find out what we are doing well and where we need to improve.

We hope that you will do so as soon as possible. Because of the small number of people being asked to participate in this survey, it important that each person complete the questionnaire. The survey will take about 5 minutes.

Please click on the link below or enter this web page address in your Internet browser's address field to begin the survey.

[<Link>](#)

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Glenn Israel  
Survey Director



## Israel,Glenn D

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**From:** Israel,Glenn D  
**Sent:** Monday, June 19, 2017 4:18 AM  
**To:** Israel,Glenn D  
**Subject:** UF/IFAS Extension Client Experience Survey.

Dear <Firstname> <Lastname>,

This is a busy time of year for many people and we understand how valuable your time is. We are hoping that you can give about 5 minutes of your time to help us collect important information for UF/IFAS Extension by completing a short survey. We would really like to know about your experience with contacting your local UF/IFAS Extension office for information or attending one of its programs. Your response will help us find out what we are doing well and where we need to improve.

We urge you to complete the survey as soon as possible. Please click on the link below or enter this web page address in your Internet browser's address field to begin the survey.

[<Link>](#)

Thank you in advance for completing the survey. Your response is important. Clients, such as yourself, are the best source of information to help shape UF/IFAS Extension's services.

Sincerely,

Glenn Israel  
Survey Director

July 3, 2017

«First\_Name» «Last\_Name»  
«Street»  
«City», FL «Zip»

Dear «First\_Name» «Last\_Name»,

A couple of weeks ago, we sent you an *email* invitation to complete a survey asking about your experience in receiving information from the UF/IFAS Extension «County» County office or attending one of its programs. «Text» «Information»«Punctuation» As of today, however, we have not received your completed survey.

Many people have already responded. They described their experience, both good and bad, from their contact with Extension. The results will be very useful to us at the University of Florida.

We are writing again because of the importance that your questionnaire has for helping us to have accurate results. Although we sent questionnaires to people across Florida, we need to hear from nearly everyone in the sample to be sure that the results are truly representative.

Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to answer any question that you do not wish to answer. We believe that there are no risks to you from participating in this study. There are also no direct benefits or compensation to you for participating in the study. If you have questions about your rights, please contact the UFIRB office, Box 112250, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611.

We will keep your answers confidential to the extent provided by law. Your name will not be used in any report. We will only use your answers after they have been combined with the other respondents' answers. Please note that the number on the questionnaire will be used only to check your name off the mailing list when your survey is returned.

If you have any questions, please call 352-273-2586, or send an email to [gdisrael@ufl.edu](mailto:gdisrael@ufl.edu). We have enclosed a postage paid envelop for you to mail the completed survey. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,



Glenn Israel  
Survey Director

*The Foundation for The Gator Nation*  
An Equal Opportunity Employer

Figure 5. Example of a fourth contact message in the series.  
Credits: UF/IFAS

July 28, 2017

«FirstName» «LastName»  
«Street»  
«City», FL «Zip»

Dear «FirstName» «LastName»,

This is our last call for your opinion on how we are doing! Please take just five minutes to answer the survey about your experience in getting information from the UF/IFAS Extension «County» County office or attending one of its programs. «Text» «Information»«Punctuation»

Many people have already responded, but we need to hear from you too. This is because we need to hear from nearly everyone to get an accurate picture of our clients' experience, both good and bad. The results will help us serve you and your neighbors better.

Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to answer any question that you do not wish to answer. We believe that there are no risks to you from participating in this study. There are also no direct benefits or compensation to you for participating in the study. If you have questions about your rights, please contact the UFIRB office, Box 112250, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611.

We will keep your answers confidential to the extent provided by law. Your name will not be used in any report. We will only use your answers after they have been combined with the other respondents' answers.

If you have any questions, please call 352-273-2586, or send an email to [gdisrael@ufl.edu](mailto:gdisrael@ufl.edu). We have enclosed a postage paid envelop for you to mail the completed survey. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,



Glenn Israel  
Survey Director

*The Foundation for The Gator Nation*  
An Equal Opportunity Employer

Figure 6. Example of a fifth and final contact.  
Credits: UF/IFAS