

Pretesting guidelines

Types of pretesting

To meet the core goal of data quality and to ensure the long-term sustainability of the TSS panel, pretests are conducted on questionnaires prior to the commencement of actual fieldwork.

TSS offers two kinds of pretesting:

A. Pretesting of content and wording

TSS strongly recommends this type of pretesting, but the decision is ultimately left to the applicants.

- Assessing the clarity and comprehension of introductory sentences, interjections, questions, and answer categories
- Relevance of the introductory sentences and interjections
- Assessing the clarity and relevance of instructions
- Evaluating whether the language employed, including tone and style consistency, is acceptable across all languages in which the questionnaire is administered
- Ensuring a smooth questionnaire flow: Evaluating the coherence of the order of questions with respect to both content and format

B. Technical pretesting (= conventional pretesting or pilot test)

This pretesting replicates the conditions under which the survey will be conducted in real-life.

- Online
 - Accuracy of survey programming (lay-out, error messages, routing, ...)
 - Duration of questionnaire completion
 - Pretests are to be conducted in all languages in which the questionnaire will be administered
- Offline (paper version)
 - Lay-out check
 - Routing check
 - Duration of questionnaire completion
 - Consistency with the online questionnaire
 - Pretests are to be conducted in all languages in which the questionnaire will be administered

Procedure for the pretesting of content and wording

TSS recommends research teams commissioning questionnaires in TSS panel to conduct content and wording pretesting, but the choice is left to applicants.

Stage 1: Pretest among research team

A. Researchers fill out the entire questionnaire and provide comments on:

- Understandability: for each question, each answer item and all other text elements
- Routing: coherence of routing instructions
- General flow of the questionnaire (rhythm, redundancy, problems with the question order (e.g., influence by previous question))

B. Deliberation during plenary meeting, considering the feedback provided

C. Improvement of the questionnaire

Stage 2: Cognitive pretest

The procedure is recommended to be implemented for specific kinds of questions:

- **Not** already fielded (several times) in the framework of **existing longitudinal survey projects**
- **Not** included in the framework of an **international survey project** (i.e., identical wording needed in all countries)
- Completely new questions
- Questions whose wording has been adapted compared to the initial question from an existing survey project

A. Researchers perform cognitive pretesting with selected respondent profiles and record comments (similar to stage 1)

- This pretesting occurs in a face-to-face setting, preferably in person, and if necessary, through a video call
- Respondents read the questions and attempt to answer without assistance, with researchers intervening only when necessary
- Following each question, respondents are encouraged to report any issues related to understandability or other concerns such as sensitivity or unfamiliarity with the topic
 - If assistance from researchers was required to answer a question, it must be duly noted
 - Researchers are instructed to report any spontaneous reactions observed from respondents while contemplating how to answer the question

- For specific questions, staff members could be instructed to utilize either:
 - Comprehension probes (e.g., “What do you understand by [...] in this question?”)
 - Category-selection probes (e.g., “Can you explain why you chose this answer?”)
 - Information retrieval probes (e.g., “How did you remember that you had gone to the doctor [...] times in the past 12 months?”)
- Researchers pay special attention to the routing and provide comments if necessary
- At the end of the interview, the respondents are asked to provide general feedback

B. Deliberation during plenary meeting, considering the feedback provided

C. Improvement of the questionnaire

Profiles of respondents

Pretesting should strive for a diverse range of profiles, encompassing approximately 3-5 Dutch-speaking and 3-5 French-speaking individuals, based on the following criteria:

- Gender
- Age category: specific focus on youngest and oldest age categories (25- and 65+)
- Native language: specific focus on non-native speakers
- Educational attainment: specific focus on the least educated

Procedure for the technical pretesting

The objective of technical pretesting is to identify programming-related issues in the questionnaire and evaluate the practical timing of the questionnaire in real-life scenarios. This process is conducted for both the paper-and-pencil version and the online version. It is required from research teams commissioning a questionnaire to support TSS Survey Management in this phase (see stage 2).

Stage 1: Pretest among TSS staff members

A. TSS staff members fill out the entire questionnaire and provide comments.

At least two individuals per language assess the **online version** within the TSS online infrastructure, reviewing the following criteria:

- Accuracy of all questions types
- Accuracy of routing
- Accuracy of error messages
- Duration of questionnaire completion
- Consistency between the Dutch and French questionnaires

At least two individuals per language assess the **paper-and-pencil version**, reviewing the following criteria:

- Lay-out quality
- Accuracy of routing
- Understandability of routing instructions
- Duration of questionnaire completion
- Consistency with the online questionnaire
- Consistency between the Dutch and French questionnaires

B. Improvement of the online and offline questionnaires by TSS Survey Management

Stage 2: Pretest among research team

- A. **Researchers from the research team commissioning the questionnaire fill out the entire questionnaire and provide comments for both the online and paper-and-pencil versions of the questionnaires**

TSS staff members gather their feedback or comments on the same criteria as in stage 1.

It is recommended that at least two individuals per language perform this pretesting.

- B. **Improvement of the online and offline questionnaires by TSS Survey Management**

