

Appendix B

THE BASICS OF CREATING AN ONLINE SURVEY FORM

The questionnaire was written as a form and placed on the web using Microsoft's FrontPage. A form is a collection of fields that can be used for gathering information from people visiting a Web site. Site visitors fill out the form by typing text, clicking radio buttons and check boxes, and selecting options from drop-down menus.

A **one-line text box** is used to accept one line of information from a site visitor. **Radio buttons are used** when you want a site visitor to select one option in a group on your form. Only one radio button in a group can be selected at a time. **Check boxes** are used when you want a site visitor to select one or more items, or none at all. **Drop-down menus** allow the site visitor to choose options from a list or menu. You can set the properties of the menu so that only one choice can be made, or you can allow multiple choices. A **reset push button** is used to allow a site visitor to reset the form to its default settings. Clicking the reset button deletes any text that has been entered in a field and clears any selections that have been made.

Each form field (radio button, etc.) is assigned an **internal name** to specify the choices that you want displayed on the menu. An internal name is not displayed on the form, but identifies the field in the form results. A **submit push button** allows the site visitor to submit a form after filling it out. When a form is submitted, the data is sent to the form handler, including the internal name of the submit button and its value/label. An internal name is not displayed on the button, but identifies the field in the form results.

A **confirmation page** can be used to display the contents of form fields after the survey is complete. The site visitor can confirm that the information was entered correctly and, if necessary, return to the form and fill it out again. You can also personalize the confirmation page; for example, if you request the site visitor's name in your form, you can display it on the confirmation page. You can also thank the site visitor for participating in the survey.

You can send form results (data that a site visitor enters in your form) in an **email message**. Each time a site visitor submits a form, a message containing the results of the form is sent to the email address you specify. You can also configure other options for the messages, such as the text for the Subject line and the address for the Form (Reply To) line.

After filling out the form, site visitors submit the data they entered, which can be processed in a variety of ways. The data in this study was submitted directly to an Excel Spreadsheet. Previously defined **internal names** served as column headings.

Once the survey has been written and placed on the web, it must be tested from several remote sites before proceeding. Colleagues on and off campus with a variety on browsers (i.e., Netscape, Internet Explorer) and computer types (i.e., PC, Mac) should participate in the test. All data entry combinations should be tested. For example, if the survey contains radio buttons, each should be selected and submitted. This will help identify potential form construction errors. You may find that older computers and web browser software will not be able to access the website or read all of its components. This will be a problem among respondents with older computers/software.

Once the revisions are complete, erase the test data collected in the spreadsheet. Perform several additional tests to determine if the form is working properly. Code the data to indicate a test. If you have one-line text boxes, write-in "test." After the final tests are complete, do not change any part of the survey form or spreadsheet. It is easy to damage the survey, making it impossible to collect data. Test data can be deleted after the survey is complete. A back-up copy of each response can and should be automatically emailed to a different site. Hard copies should be made of each email response.

Electronic requests to participate in the survey can be made on a listserv or by a personal email request. One participant indicated she quickly browsed over a listserv request to participate in a survey but felt compelled to participate only after receiving a personal request to participate.

You can use an email merge to create a personal request to participate in the survey. This allows you to send a generic document to a large number of people without typing a personal email to each. The email merge works the same as a letter mail merge. The mailing list can be placed on an excel spreadsheet or access database. It should include a minimum of the salutation, last name, and email address.

Merge fields are placed in the letter for sorting into personalize requests. Additional information, such as, first name, institution, address, email address, etc. can help identify survey participants. This information should also be placed on the survey form to help ID participants.

The email message should include the survey website address, how the information will be used, and a confidentiality statement. For the AETS survey, a record of invalid email addresses and responses was kept and those addresses were deleted from the master email list. Two additional follow-up email requests were made over one month later using the updated list.

Be prepared to manage returned invalid email after the email merge. It is easy to overwhelm your email account when you receive a large number of returns in a short period of time. Hard copies of each return can be made and cross-referenced with the master email list.