CENTER FOR PSYCHOLOGY

Item-writing checklist

Use it on each draft item before a pilot. An item that fails a check is rewritten or dropped; a check that does not apply is crossed out with the reason.

Before writing

- ☐ The construct is defined in two or three sentences, including what it is not.
- ☐ Each facet has a planned number of items, and more items are written than will be kept.
- ☐ The respondents, the setting and the decision the scores will serve are written down.
- ☐ The response format and the time frame (for example, the past two weeks) are fixed.

Content

- ☐ The item belongs to one facet, and an expert who has not seen the plan would place it there.
- ☐ It asks about one thing. There is no "and" or "or" that joins two questions.
- ☐ It is relevant to everyone who will answer, or a "does not apply" route exists.
- ☐ It assumes nothing about the respondent: no partner, job, child, car or diagnosis is taken for granted.
- ☐ It covers behaviour, feeling or opinion that the respondent can know and recall.
- ☐ It is not another item in slightly different words.

Wording

- ☐ It is short: one sentence, one main clause, about 20 words at most.
- ☐ The words are the ones the respondents use; there is no jargon and no abbreviation.
- ☐ There is no negative word such as "not" or "never" unless the meaning needs it, and no double negative.
- ☐ There are no vague quantities ("often", "regularly") in the stem when the response scale already asks how often.
- ☐ There are no absolutes ("always", "all", "nobody") that force a disagreement.
- ☐ It does not lead: no loaded words, and nothing hints at the expected answer.
- ☐ Idioms, sayings and cultural references are avoided, so the item can be translated.

Response options

- ☐ The options answer the question that the stem asks.
- ☐ Ordered options run in one direction, at even steps, with a label for every point where possible.
- ☐ The options do not overlap and leave no gap.

- ☐ A midpoint is used only if it has a meaning, and "do not know" is kept apart from it.
- ☐ In multiple choice, one option is clearly right and the wrong ones are plausible and of similar length.

The set as a whole

- ☐ Some items point the other way if agreement bias is a concern, and they read naturally.
- ☐ The items cover the whole range, from easy to hard to endorse.
- ☐ Sensitive items come late, and respondents are told why they are asked.
- ☐ The scoring key, with reversed items marked, is written before data are collected.

Before the pilot

- ☐ At least two people who know the subject have rated every item for relevance and clarity.
- ☐ Several people from the target group have said aloud what each item means to them.
- ☐ Every changed item has been checked again, and every version is kept.
- ☐ Permission is in place for any item taken or adapted from another instrument.

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