

The Survey Research HANDBOOK

Second Edition

PAMELA L. ALRECK

ROBERT B. SETTLE

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Second Edition

The Survey Research Handbook

**Pamela L. Alreck
Robert B. Settle**

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Preface

Survey research is one of those activities that cut across a dozen different boundaries. Those in business and public administration, the social and behavioral sciences, professional and family studies, journalism and communications, education and health services, politics and law, and many other diverse areas all find an increasing need for information based on survey research. Fortunately, the same basic tools, skills, and activities for doing surveys apply, regardless of the particular purpose or topics for any one survey research project.

As active survey research consultants for many years, we've designed and conducted projects in several areas for many different types of clients. Invariably, during the initial meeting with a potential new survey sponsor, those seeking the information will explain, with a good deal of sincerity and conviction, that their own particular organization, industry, or profession is unique—probably not much like any other we've encountered. This sometimes troubles potential survey sponsors because they wonder if they should seek out a survey research consultant or agency that has worked in their own area of activity and has substantial experience with the special nature of their information needs. Their concerns are genuine, but they're also unfounded. It's certainly true that the institutions and organizations that depend on survey information are often very different from one another in their goals, objectives, and operations. Yet, by applying the same basic principles and techniques described in this handbook, we've surveyed many thousands of different types of respondents for dozens of very diverse clients with uniformly positive and valuable results. Perhaps you're wondering if you should seek a research book devoted exclusively to your own discipline, profession, or activity to guide you in a survey project. You need not be concerned because you'll find what you need here.

Fortunately, survey research *applications* cut across many institutional and disciplinary boundaries. Unfortunately, however, survey research also slices across many *technical* boundaries as well. If you're going to do a complete survey project, from beginning to end, you'll find the diversity of skills rather demanding. You'll be working with people one minute and computers the next. At one time you may be concerned with how to phrase a question or word some instruction. A few days later you may be a little puzzled about some statistical method. You may have to deal with a printer who keeps telling you your work will be ready tomorrow or a computer that just doesn't seem to want to talk to you at all. Fear not!

One of our main purposes in writing this handbook is to bring together all of the various techniques and principles, skills, and activities that are required to conduct a really effective survey project. As university instructors, we've both been faced with an all too familiar situation far too many times. The typical situation is simply this: A student comes to the office or approaches one of us after class and declares with considerable gravity that he or

she has decided to conduct a survey. Then comes the question: “*Where can I find a book that will tell me what to do?*” Often these same students have taken one or more university courses on research methods in their own area of study. Occasionally, they’ll have a research textbook in their hand at the time. Yet we and they both know very well that neither the training they received nor the textbook they acquired would guide them through an entire survey research project from start to finish. We sincerely believe that with this handbook, we and they and you have the answer. This handbook isn’t devoted to any one, specific area, but it provides comprehensive coverage of the wide variety of things you’ll need to know to conduct effective survey research.

We’ve been guided by two criteria when judging whether or not to include material in the handbook: Is this *sufficient* and is this *necessary*? We feel that satisfying both criteria is important. When using a handbook, there’s nothing quite so frustrating as finding it covers every conceivable situation *except your own*. Consequently, the breadth and scope of the handbook is, by necessity, very wide. It must be, in order to meet your own needs, whether you’re a student who will conduct a single survey project to meet your academic requirements or a seasoned survey research professional seeking some new ideas or tools of the trade.

We’ve also avoided or eliminated a substantial amount of material often found in research textbooks. If we had never once used or seen the need for some technique, computation, or procedure in either academic or pragmatic survey research over many years of experience, we felt you probably wouldn’t need it either, and it could safely be excluded. Perhaps there will be some who feel the handbook lacks dignity because the practical and technical aspects of survey research take precedence over the conceptual and the theoretical aspects. To us, that’s the whole idea, and it’s a small price to pay for a handbook that’s understandable and useful.

Over 300 special exhibits are included to help you refer quickly and easily to the information you’ll need to conduct a survey. They cover virtually every aspect of the survey process, from initiation to final report. Each of the six distinct types of exhibits has a special purpose and type of information:

- **CHECKLISTS** contain a series of questions followed by instructions on how to proceed, depending on the answer.
- **GUIDELISTS** provide a series of instructions or directions, in sequence, to perform some task or to follow a procedure.
- **EXAMPLES** contain typical elements or formats to use as models for creating various components of a survey.
- **FIGURES** portray verbal or graphic information, showing quantities or relationships according to their relative position.
- **SUMMARIES** at the end of each chapter provide a sketch or outline of the most important things covered in the chapter.
- **TABLES** of coefficients or probabilities are contained in Appendix B to assess statistical significance.

As you examine the handbook, you should find there's little that's likely to get in the way of understanding. Some aspects of survey research, especially those involving computers and statistics, traditionally use a lot of buzzwords and obscure terminology. In our experience, that kind of vocabulary is intimidating and inhibiting rather than helpful or enlightening. So we've deliberately avoided them in favor of plain, ordinary words and phrases. If you find more here than what you need, at least it will be understandable. To the degree that we've been successful, you'll find everything you need for survey research and very little else.

Pamela L. Alreck
Robert B. Settle

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