I Need to Build My Own Survey. What Are the Characteristics of Good Survey Questions?

The quality of a survey is a function of the quality of the questions asked. While there are entire books full of guidelines for survey item construction, following just nine simple rules will go a long way toward creating a valid and reliable survey instrument.

Here are some sensible survey construction suggestions:

1. **Use simple wording.**
   - Bad: *When you sit down for breakfast each morning, how often do you eat eggs?*
   - Better: *How often do you eat eggs for breakfast?*

2. **Use appropriate vocabulary and phrasing.**
   - Word your questions the way that your population talks and thinks.

3. **Avoid including more than one idea in a question.**
   - Bad: *Do you think that eggs are healthy and tasty?*
   - Better: *Do you think eggs are healthy?*  
   - *Do you think eggs are tasty?*

4. **Avoid negatively worded items.**
   - Bad: *Do you agree or disagree that eggs are not good for you?*
   - Better: *Do you agree or disagree that eggs are good for you?*

5. **Avoid the use of abbreviations.**
   - Try not to use technical jargon from your field including abbreviations and acronyms.

6. **Avoid hypothetical questions.**
   - Bad: *If the cost of eggs increased, how would you feel?*
   - Better: *How do you feel about the cost of eggs?*
7. **Avoid the use of nonspecific quantitative adverbs.**

   Bad: *How often do you have eggs for breakfast?*
   1. Frequently  2. Sometimes  3. Rarely

   Better: *How often do you have eggs for breakfast?*
   1. 5 or more times a week  2. 1–4 times a week  3. Less than once a week

8. **Write questions with balanced answer options.**

   Bad: *How would you rate the taste of eggs?*

   Better: *How would you rate the taste of eggs?*

9. **Avoid related questions; combine them into one question if possible.**

   Bad: 1. *Have you ordered eggs at a restaurant?*
   1. Yes  2. No (If “No” please skip Question 2.)

   2. How would you rate the taste of eggs when you order them at restaurants?

   Better: 1. *How would you rate the taste of eggs when you order them at restaurants?*

   N.A. I never order eggs at restaurants.

   More questions? See #59, #62, and #94.