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Evidence-Based Survey Design: The Use of a Midpoint on the Likert Scale

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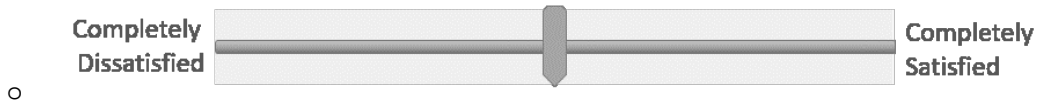
Introduction

One of the most popular response scales used in survey design is the Likert scale. In the 1930s, Rensis Likert, an American social psychologist, first introduced a five-point psychometric scale for measuring a series of attitude-related propositions (Likert, 1932). The wording used in the initial Likert scale was: *Strongly Approve*, *Approve*, *Undecided*, *Disapprove*, and *Strongly Disapprove*. Over time, the wording changed from *Approve* to *Agree*, which resulted in the Likert scale we know today: *Strongly Agree* and *Agree* on one side, and *Disagree* and *Strongly Disagree* on the other side, with a midpoint in the middle.

Due to its simplicity and popularity, the traditional Likert scale expanded into many variations of *Likert-type* scales. These are commonly used in survey instruments designed for: measuring employee performance in the workplace (Purdey, 2013), communications research (Ryan, 1980), marketing research (Garland, 1991), political opinion research (Raaijmakers, van Hoof, 't Hart, Verbogt, & Vollebergh, 2000), and psychometric research (Kulas & Stachowski, 2013). Its popularity, however, does not necessarily equate to its validity as a data collection method (Johns, 2005). Debates over validity arise from the variations in Likert-type scales in the context of these applications. That is, what are the impacts of:

- Including or not including a midpoint in the scale? e.g.,
 - *Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree*
 - *Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree*
- Using descending order vs. ascending order of the scale options? e.g.,
 - *Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree*
 - *Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree*
- Measuring positively- and negatively-stated survey items with the Likert scale? e.g.,
 - The objectives were clear
Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree
 - The objectives were unclear
Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree
 - The objectives were not clear
Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree

- Using Likert-type scales or slider scales? e.g.,
 - Completely Dissatisfied 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely Satisfied



There is a vast amount of research on these topics, and each topic is worth a separate article. The purpose of this article is to 1) provide an overview of the Likert scale's characteristics as a measurement method, and 2) present research-based evidence and recommendations regarding the use of a midpoint on Likert-type scales.

The Likert Scale as a Measurement Method

Types of Measurement

To understand the characteristics of the Likert scale as a measurement method, we need to understand different types of measurement. In the 1940s, Stanley Smith Stevens, another American psychologist, formulated four types (levels) of measurement: nominal, ordinal, interval, and ratio scales (Stevens, 1946). Simply put, the nominal scale contains names of equal quality [e.g., the six cells in Thomas Gilbert's (1996) Behavior Engineering Model—*Data, Instruments, Incentives, Knowledge, Capacity, Motives*]; the ordinal scale contains rank-ordered levels (e.g., performance ratings such as *Poor, Fair, Good*); the interval scale contains levels with equal intervals (e.g., a scale consisting of -2, -1, 0, 1, 2); and the ratio scale contains levels with equal ratios and a meaningful zero value (e.g., test scores of zero to 100).

The Likert scale measures attitudes using five points (anchors) where the third point in the middle represents neutrality. Whether the Likert scale is an ordinal scale or an interval scale has been an ongoing debate among researchers. For the Likert scale to be an interval scale, the distances between consecutive points on the scale must be the same, as shown in Figure 1. That is, the distance between *Strongly Disagree* and *Disagree* (the length of "a" in Figure 1) is the same as the distance between *Disagree* and *Neutral* ("b"), which is the same as the distance between *Neutral* and *Agree* ("c"), as well as the distance between *Agree* and *Strongly Agree* ("d").



Figure 1. The five-point Likert scale assumed as an interval scale.

On the other hand, the distances between two consecutive points on the Likert scale ("a," "b," "c," and "d") may be different, as shown in Figure 2. This disqualifies the Likert scale from serving as an interval scale, but characterizes it as an ordinal scale.



Figure 2. The five-point Likert scale as an ordinal scale.

Also, it is important to word a midpoint appropriately. For instance, *Neutral* (or *Neither Agree nor Disagree*) as a midpoint represents a neutral level of opinion. If, however, *Undecided* is used for the midpoint, it is questionable whether it is truly a midpoint of opinion between disagreement and agreement, or if it should be treated as an absence of opinion. In the latter case, the Likert scale is more like a four-point ordinal scale with *Undecided* as a separate option off the scale, as illustrated in Figure 3. To collect data that is more likely to be interval than ordinal in nature, the use of other opinions such as *I don't know* or *It depends* should not label a midpoint, but could be presented as response options off the scale.



Figure 3. The four point ordinal Likert scale with *Undecided* as a separate option.

So What If the Likert Scale is an Interval or Ordinal Scale?

Why does it matter if the Likert scale is an interval scale or an ordinal scale? A more appropriate question to ask is, “When does it matter?” It matters when we intend to calculate average scores and perform certain statistical analyses on the data collected from the Likert scale. Depending on whether the Likert scale is an ordinal or interval scale, you are limited, or open, to employing certain types of data analysis methods.

A four-point Likert scale is an ordinal scale (as shown in Figure 3). Unlike an interval scale, an average score of “2.5” obtained from a four-point Likert scale has as little meaning as a score of “fair and a half” from a scale labeled *poor*, *fair*, *good*, and *excellent* (Kuzon, Urbanchek, & McCabe, 1996, p. 266). With ordinal data, one should use median or mode, rather than the mean, as the measure of central tendency, and describe a summary of ordinal data with frequencies or percentages of responses in each category (Jamieson, 2004). In addition, certain statistical analyses (such as parametric tests, like an independent samples *t* test or Pearson correlation *r*) require using normally distributed data likely obtained from interval or ratio scales. When data are obtained from ordinal scales such as a four-point Likert scale (Figure 3) or do not meet the normality assumption, you would use non-parametric tests such as Chi-Square (cross-tabulation), Mann-Whitney *U*, or Spearman rho.

The five-point Likert scale can be an ordinal scale as illustrated in Figure 2; however, it is often treated as an interval scale as shown in Figure 1. Proponents of treating the five-point Likert scale as an interval scale argue that since in practice, it is common to use a group of multiple items measured with the Likert scale. Thus, it is “perfectly appropriate to summarise the ratings generated from Likert scales using means and standard deviations, and it is perfectly appropriate to use parametric techniques like Analysis of Variance to analyse Likert scales” (Carifio & Perla, 2008, p. 1151).

The difference between a four-point Likert scale and a five-point Likert scale is whether or not a midpoint is included. The presence of a midpoint makes a difference in treating the scale as an interval scale only if survey respondents use the Likert scale midpoint for a true neutral meaning, as intended. In turn, the assumption of an interval scale influences the decision for using appropriate descriptive statistics among mean, median, mode, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage, and employing appropriate types of inferential statistical analyses. In the following sections, we will discuss research findings associated with respondents’ use of a midpoint in the Likert scale and evidence-based recommendations for designing survey items with the Likert scale.

Research Findings on the Use of a Midpoint on Likert Type Scales

How Do Respondents Interpret and Use a Midpoint?

In structured survey questionnaires, response scales such as the Likert scale are used “to allow respondents to express both the direction and strength of their opinion about a topic” (Garland, 1991, p. 66). You insert a midpoint on the Likert scale to allow respondents to express a neutral opinion between disagreement on one side and agreement on the other. When you present an equal number of options on both the disagreement and agreement sides, including or excluding a midpoint makes the scale an odd-numbered or even-numbered scale (e.g., a five-point or six-point scale). Likert-type scales without a midpoint are also characterized as *forced-choice scales*, as respondents are forced to choose either a disagreement or agreement option. For a midpoint of neutrality, *neutral* or *neither agree nor disagree* are often used.

Research has shown, however, that respondents do not always interpret and use a midpoint in the way that scale developers intended. Respondents might select a midpoint even if their true opinion is not neutral. In Kulas and Stachowski’s (2009) research, the researchers asked 82 college students to complete survey items with a five-point Likert scale (with *Neither agree nor disagree* as a midpoint) and also with four options: *It depends*, *Uncertain*, *Average*, and *Not applicable*. Of the four options, respondents who did select the midpoint most commonly chose *It depends* (a 50% probability).

Another concern is that respondents may use a midpoint as a *dumping ground* when they are responding to survey items that are unfamiliar to them, or items that are ambiguous or socially undesirable. In Nadler, Weston, and Voyles’ (2015) study, 635 college students described how they would interpret the midpoint *Neither agree nor disagree* on a five-point Likert scale. Researchers organized their interpretations into 16 different themes. Some of the themes are:

- Unsure (13%), Undecided (8%), Confused (2%), or Need more information (2%)
- Neutral (10%), Neither (9%), or Middle point (4%)
- No opinion (15%)
- Don't care (14%)
- Both agree and disagree (10%)
- Not applicable (3%)

Age also seems to influence the use of a midpoint. Raaijmakers, et al. (2000) conducted political opinion research with younger respondents: 3,220 Dutch youths aged 12-24 years in 1991 and 1,887 youths in 1994. The respondents completed survey items with a five-point Likert scale accompanied by a *Don't know* option. The researchers found that younger adolescents used the *Don't know* option or did not respond considerably more often than older respondents. As age increased, *Don't know* responses and non-responses decreased while midpoint responses increased. The researchers attributed this to *social desirability bias*, which explains that respondents may select an option that they perceive to be more socially accepted or desirable. That is, selecting a midpoint could be viewed as more socially desirable than selecting a *Don't know* option or leaving it blank.

Garland (1991) made a similar observation about social desirability bias in marketing research he conducted with public grocery shoppers (age 15 or older), using a four-point scale (n=223) and a five-point scale (n=225). He found that 14% of the five-point scale respondents who selected the midpoint (neither/nor) chose a negative option when the midpoint was absent from the scale. In other words, a considerable number of respondents selected a midpoint to avoid what they perceived as a socially undesirable behavior by selecting a negative option.

With the popularity of web-based surveys increasing, respondent expectations that the survey will require a response to each item may create *response tendencies* to complete all items. This creates situations where respondents feel compelled to answer questions about which they have no opinion and where they use the midpoint as an out. In Kulas, Stachowski, and Haynes' (2008) study, 118 college students completed an online survey of a personality assessment with a five-point Likert scale (the traditional form) and completed it again with a five-point Likert scale with an additional N/A option (the N/A form). Researchers found an overwhelming tendency for respondents to choose the midpoint on the traditional form if they chose N/A on the same item in the N/A form.

Should You Use a Midpoint or Not?

These researched problems associated with the use of a midpoint in response scales bring up a question as to whether we should use a midpoint in survey instruments (i.e., whether to use odd-numbered or even-numbered scales). Simply omitting a midpoint from the scales, however, is not the best practice. The more important question that practitioners and researchers should seek to answer is not whether or not to include a midpoint, but rather *when* to omit or present a midpoint in a Likert-type scale.

For instance, research conducted by Matell and Jacoby (1972) with 360 college students revealed that more respondents selected the midpoint (*Uncertain*) on a five-point scale than on 17 other Likert-type scales varying in the number of anchors (from two to 19 anchors), while the average completion time was shorter for the five-point scale than for other scales (excluding the two-point scale). The fact that many respondents quickly selected the midpoint on the five-point can be explained as *satisficing behavior*: choosing a minimally acceptable response as soon as it is found, instead of putting effort to find an optimal response. Based on their findings, the researchers recommended that when survey designers need to minimize the misuse of a midpoint, it is better to omit the midpoint on coarse scales (scales with few anchors) or increase scale sensitivity (by using many anchors) when including a midpoint.

It may be also desirable to omit a midpoint and offer instead an *I don't know* option when respondents are comfortable with the survey topic (they have formed their opinions), when they are under strong social desirability pressures (John, 2005), or when it is expected that some respondents have little or no involvement in the survey topic (Weems & Onwuegbyzie, 2001).

On the other hand, including a midpoint gives respondents the opportunity to express a neutral opinion, especially on obscure topics (Johns, 2005). A midpoint can also improve psychometric properties such as instrument reliability (Adelson & McCoach, 2010). You can reduce the potential misuse of a midpoint as an ‘N/A proxy’ or ‘dumping ground’ by first improving clarity of survey items (Kulas & Stachowski, 2013) and presenting other options off the scale such as *Not applicable*, *I don’t know*, or *It depends* (Kulas, et al., 2008; Raaijmakers, et al., 2000). Table 1 presents a summary of the evidence-based recommendations based on the literature we reviewed.

Another reason for including a midpoint in the Likert scale is to use it as an interval scale and thus apply appropriate statistical analyses, as discussed earlier. Including a midpoint in the Likert scale, however, has raised discussions on how it affects validity and reliability of the survey instrument.

Table 1. Evidence-Based Recommendations on the Use of a Midpoint on the Likert Scale

	Include a Midpoint (<i>Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree</i>)	Omit a Midpoint (<i>Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree</i>)
Benefit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It allows respondents to express their true neutral/indifferent opinion; respondents are not forced to agree or disagree. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eliminates the possibility that respondents will misuse the midpoint.
Problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respondents may use the midpoint as a <i>dumping ground</i> when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> They don’t know enough about the content asked in the survey They are ambivalent about the topic They don’t care about the topic They think their answer depends on other factors They want to provide the responses that are more socially acceptable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respondents are not provided with an opportunity to express their neutral opinion. Forcing respondents to take a side may produce biased data.
When	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respondents are familiar with the topic and should be allowed to express a neutral opinion. It is important to use the scale as an interval scale for the statistical analysis purpose. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respondents are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the survey topic Not expected to have formed their opinion about the topic Under strong social desirability pressures Likely to show satisficing behavior
Strategies to Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve clarity of survey items as respondents tend to select a midpoint when they are uncertain about the meaning of the items. Present additional options such as <i>Not applicable</i>, <i>I don’t know</i>, or <i>It depends</i>. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer an <i>I don’t know</i> or <i>Not applicable</i> option instead of forcing respondents to choose an option.

Does a Midpoint Affect Validity and Reliability of the Scales?

To generate accurate and reliable data, survey designers need to be sure that their survey items actually measure what the designers intended to measure (validity). To test for consistency (reliability), designers will use a set of multiple related survey items. As discussed earlier, presence of a midpoint can promote satisficing behavior and social desirability bias. Respondents may interpret and use a midpoint as a dumping ground or an easy way out (Kulas & Stachowski, 2009), or select a midpoint rather than selecting socially undesirable options (Garland, 1991; Raaijmakers, et al., 2000). Another example is Guy and Norvell’s (1977) study with 200 college students using a five-point Likert scale with a midpoint and a four-point Likert scale without it. They found that when a midpoint was absent, the midpoint responses were not only distributed to the neighboring options, but there were also increased numbers of non-responses. One of the findings was:

- When a midpoint was present - SA (205), A (422), N (291), D (402), SD (178), No response (2)
- When a midpoint was omitted - SA (127), A (568), D (573), SD (202), No response (30)

Based on the fact that the number of no responses increased from two to 30, it is plausible that some of the people who selected the midpoint when it was present did not use it for a true neutral meaning. These are potential threats to instrument validity and reliability.

On the other hand, other studies did not find that the presence and absence of a midpoint affected instrument validity and reliability differently. In Adelson and McCoach's (2010) study with 606 children (grades three-six), researchers tested the validity of a two-factor model of the instrument by using a five-point Likert scale with a midpoint and a four-point Likert scale without it. Regardless of whether a midpoint was present or not, they found a good model fit for the instrument; however, the use of a five-point Likert scale resulted in a significantly higher reliability estimate for the instrument. Alwin and Krosnick (1991) also observed a pattern of increased reliability with an increasing number of anchors (from three to four, to seven, and to nine) in response scales, although the reliabilities of the four-point and five-point scales were not significantly different from each other.

In Leung's (2011) study with 1,217 secondary school students (13-18 years of age) in Macau, the presence of a midpoint in the five- and 11-point scales compared to the four- and six-point scales without a midpoint did not make any differences in factor loadings (a measure of construct validity) and Cronbach's alpha (a measure of reliability). The six- and 11-point scales, however, produced data that met the normality assumption while the data obtained from the four- and five-point scales did not.

In Kulas, et al.'s (2008) study with college students discussed earlier, researchers found no significant difference in variance and reliability estimates of data obtained from the traditional form with a five-point Likert scale and the N/A form with a five-point Likert scale and an additional N/A option. However, the researchers warned that the lack of effect on reliability and validity estimates could have been due to the low frequency of the overall N/A responses.

As shown above, there has been inconsistent evidence regarding the impacts of inclusion of a midpoint on validity and reliability. Krosnick and Fabrigar (1997) also indicate that experimental studies have failed to show a clear pattern in the effects of a midpoint on scale reliability. The research findings, however, seem to point to another issue to consider: the number of anchors used in response scales.

How Many Anchors Should You Use?

When determining the number of anchors in response scales, the survey designer should consider various factors, including strategies to minimize potential biases, as illustrated earlier. Research has shown that, as the number of anchors increased, the use of a midpoint decreased; thus, it is better to use many anchors in scales when you need to discourage respondents' use of a midpoint (Matell & Jacoby, 1972). Respondents may also prefer having a sufficient number of options from which to choose. With 149 adults, Preston and Colman (2000) studied respondents' preferences for response scales based on three criteria: 1. Was easy to use, 2. Was quick to use, and 3. Allowed adequate expression of feelings. The response scales differed in the number of options included (2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 101) and were end-anchored (e.g., *Very poor* 1 2 3 4 5 *Very good*). The data showed that five-, seven-, and 10-point scales were the easiest to use, while (unsurprisingly), two-, three-, and four-point scales were the quickest to use. On the other hand, respondents felt that the scales with more options (nine-, 10-, 11-, and 101-point scales) allowed them greater expression of feelings. The researchers concluded that overall, the 10-point scale scored best, followed by the seven-point and nine-point scales.

In contrast, Chang (1994) points to a problem in using many anchors in scales. By comparing the reliability of two even-numbered Likert scales, a four-point scale (*Disagree, Somewhat disagree, Somewhat agree, Agree*) and a six-point scale (*Strongly disagree, Disagree, Somewhat disagree, Somewhat agree, Agree, Strongly agree*), the researcher found a tendency of respondents to skip categories in the six-point scale and an inability to differentiate between two similar categories such as *Strongly disagree* and *Disagree*, leading to a possibility that respondents may use the categories interchangeably.

This leads to the importance of considering information processing issues in survey design. Chen, Yu, and Yu (2015) conducted an eye-tracking experiment with a sample of 184 Chinese people to measure respondents' reaction time in answering a question as evidence of their cognitive effort. They found that a five-point scale required the shortest reaction time, compared to four-, six-, seven-, eight-, and nine-point scales. Also considering the data showing potential *acquiescence bias* (respondents' tendency to choose positive options) and *extreme response bias* (respondents' tendency to disproportionately select extreme responses), the researchers determined five as the optimal number of anchors, and emphasized keeping an optimal balance in the scale design in order to lower the respondents' cognitive effort while maximizing the communication of information within the scale.

Similarly, in a study with 1,207 male Dutch-speaking Internet users (aged from 15 to 65 with a median age of 49) comparing four-, five-, six-, and seven-point Likert-type scales, Weijters, Cabooter, and Schillewaert (2010) concluded that including a midpoint resulted in lower levels of extreme responses, and that using fully labeled scales with a midpoint produced lower levels of mis-responses when reversed items were used. They recommended using fully labeled five-point scales for the general population and fully labeled seven-point scales for populations with high levels of verbal skills and experience with using survey questionnaires.

Based on these research findings, it seems that the decision on the number of anchors to use should depend largely on what the survey designer deems important in terms of ways to lower the respondents' cognitive effort and boost the ease of taking the survey, while allowing respondents to express their opinions sufficiently, especially when respondents are under time pressure. For these situations, the use of five- or seven-point scales is commonly suggested.

Summary

Over the last several decades, researchers studied the effects of the presence or absence of a midpoint in response scales on respondents' behavior and discussed both benefits and challenges, as well as suggested ways to mitigate respondents' potential misuse of a midpoint. The decision to enhance instrument reliability and validity by choosing to include or exclude a midpoint on the response scale cannot be easily isolated from other factors, such as scale sensitivity, age and education-level of respondents, absence/presence of a midpoint label, and choice of a midpoint label. When designing a scale, we suggest employing the strategies discussed earlier to reduce response bias and the possibility of respondents misusing the midpoint as a catch-all. For your reference, Table 2 includes a summary of the research evidence used in generating our recommendations.

Table 2. Research Evidence for the Use of a Midpoint on the Likert Scale.

Focus	Authors (Year)	Recommendations Based on Research Findings
Inclusion vs. exclusion of a midpoint	Garland (1991)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offering a midpoint is largely based on researchers' preference Social desirability bias can be minimized by omitting a midpoint
	Johns (2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Omit a midpoint when respondents are comfortable with the subject matter, and under social desirability pressures Vary formats within a questionnaire to increase respondents' awareness
	Kulas, et al. (2008)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include an <i>N/A</i> option in addition to a midpoint, especially in online survey questionnaires
	Kulas and Stachowski (2009)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve clarity of survey items Offer an <i>It depends</i> option
	Kulas and Stachowski (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use a midpoint cautiously; improve clarity of survey items Offer alternative <i>I don't know</i> or <i>It depends</i> options
	Nadler, et al. (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use a midpoint with caution; clearly define the meaning of a midpoint for respondents Offer a <i>No opinion</i> option and treat <i>No opinion</i> as missing data
	Raaijmakers, et al. (2000)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not remove a midpoint simply based on the problem associated with its dual meaning Provide an <i>I don't know</i> option
	Ryan (1980)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Differentiate between <i>I don't know</i>, <i>Neutral</i>, and <i>No opinion</i> <i>Neutral</i> is a definite opinion, while <i>No opinion</i> is not
	Weems and Onwuegbuzie (2001)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Omit a midpoint when respondents are less involved in the content Provide other response categories (e.g., <i>I don't know</i>)
Validity and reliability of the instrument and the number of anchors	Adelson and McCoach (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can use a five-point scale including a midpoint when surveying with children in Grades three to six.
	Alwin and Krosnick (1991)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be aware that response scales with more categories are more reliable; fully labeled seven-point scales are more reliable than those not so labeled; reliability does not improve by offering <i>I don't know</i>
	Chang (1994)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When using many anchors in scales, be aware of respondents' inability to differentiate between two similar categories such as <i>Strongly disagree</i> and <i>Disagree</i>
	Chen, et al. (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep an optimal balance in the scale design in order to lower the respondents' cognitive effort while maximizing the communication of information within the scale Use a five-point scale as it is the best option from an information-processing perspective
	Guy and Norvell (1977)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be aware that if respondents are familiar with using a five-point scale, the use of a four-point scale may produce somewhat distorted data
	Leung (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use a 11-point scale for improved psychometric performance (meeting the normality assumption)
	Matell and Jacoby (1972)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use many anchors in scales when needing to minimize respondents' (mis)use of a midpoint, as the number of anchors decreased, the use of a midpoint increased
	Preston and Colman (2000)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be aware of respondents' preference toward having a sufficient number of options from which to choose; e.g., a 10-point scale, followed by seven-point and nine-point scales Trade off reliability and validity if needed to improve factors such as respondent preferences
	Weijters, et al. (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use fully labeled five-point scales for the general population and fully labeled seven-point scales for populations with high cognitive skills

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