

# GESIS Summer School in Survey Methodology 2023

## Syllabus for course: “Pretesting Survey Questions”

Lecturers:	Cornelia Neuert	Timo Lenzner
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Date: 02 – 04 August 2023

Time: 09:00-12:00 + 13:00-14:00 CEST

Venue: Online via Zoom

### About the Lecturers:

**Cornelia Neuert** is a social scientist and head of the team *Questionnaire Design & Evaluation* at GESIS - Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences. She has been working as research associate in the GESIS pretesting unit since April 2012. Together with the staff of the pretesting unit, she has conducted numerous cognitive pretests for various research projects and survey programs. Her research focuses on methods for testing and evaluating survey questionnaires and questionnaire design.

**Timo Lenzner** is a senior researcher in the cognitive pretesting unit at GESIS – Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences. Since joining the pretesting unit in 2012, he has conducted cognitive pretests for several large-scale survey programs, including the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE), and the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS), as well as for more than 40 national research projects. His research focuses on developing good questionnaires and improving pretesting methods.

### Selected Publications:

- Lenzner, T., & Neuert, C. E. (2017). Pretesting survey questions via web probing – does it produce similar results to face-to-face cognitive interviewing? *Survey Practice*, 10(4), 1-11.
- Lenzner, T., Hadler, P., & Neuert, C. (2022). An experimental test of the effectiveness of cognitive interviewing in pretesting questionnaires. *Quality & Quantity*. Online first. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-022-01489-4>
- Neuert, C. E., & Lenzner, T. (2016). Incorporating eye tracking into cognitive interviewing to pretest survey questions. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 19(5), 501-519.
- Neuert, C. E., & Lenzner, T. (2021). Effects of the number of open-ended probing questions on response quality in cognitive online pretests. *Social Science Computer Review*, 39(3), 456-468.
- Neuert, C. E., Meitinger, K. & Behr, D. (2021). Open-ended versus closed probes: Assessing different formats of web probing. *Sociological Methods & Research*. Online first. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00491241211031271>

### Course Description:

The course covers the basic elements of evaluating questionnaires and highlights the general importance of carrying out (cognitive) pretests before fielding a questionnaire. This is achieved through both lectures and group exercises. In the lectures, we introduce three pretesting approaches, namely questionnaire appraisal systems, cognitive interviewing, and web probing. The exercises aim at familiarizing participants with these pretesting methods. We focus on the sorts of information gathered by each method and how the information can be used to reduce

measurement error. In this context, we will also discuss the pros and cons of the different pretesting methods and mixed-method approaches. Besides a more general introduction of the pretesting approaches, participants will receive practical advice on how to conduct (cognitive) pretesting projects and how to decide which pretesting methods should be selected in a given research situation.

### Keywords:

Pretesting, Questionnaire Evaluation, Cognitive Interviewing, Web Probing, Expert Review.

### Course Prerequisites:

- Basic knowledge in questionnaire design; however, some practical experience in conducting surveys will be beneficial.
- There are no statistical prerequisites.

### Target Group:

Participants will find the course useful if:

- they develop their own questionnaires for own data collection.
- they work in a survey organization and work on questionnaire design and evaluation.
- they use survey data and wish to understand the importance of pretesting to reduce measurement error.

### Course and Learning Objectives:

By the end of the course participants will:

- be familiar with current (cognitive) pretesting methods.
- know the pros and cons of the different approaches to test survey questions.
- be able to make an informed decision about when to use which pretesting method and the ways in which several methods can be combined within a pretesting project.
- be able to evaluate survey questions using the selected methods.

### Organizational Structure of the Course:

- This is a three-day course with a total amount of 12 hours of virtual class time. The course structure includes 3 hours of in-class teaching in the morning with a mix of teaching and exercises, and Q&A sessions. Exercises will be divided in group and individual exercises.
- During the group exercises, lecturers will be available to support in the breakout rooms.
- After the lunch break, we will discuss the exercises and be available for group and individual consultations (Q&A session).

### Software and Hardware Requirements:

Participants need a laptop/desktop computer that enables them to access the internet.

### Day-to-day Schedule and Literature:

Day	Topic(s)
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Introduction</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Reasons for conducting pretests and goals of pretesting</li> <li>○ Overview over different pretesting methods</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ <b>Expert Review &amp; Questionnaire Appraisal Systems</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Different forms of expert reviews</li> <li>○ Exercise on application of QAS-99</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ <b>Q&amp;A Session</b></li> </ul>
	Suggested reading:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lenzner, T., Neuert, C., &amp; Otto, W. (2016). Cognitive pretesting. <i>GESIS Survey Guidelines</i>. Mannheim: GESIS – Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences. <a href="https://doi.org/10.15465/gesis-sg_en_010">https://doi.org/10.15465/gesis-sg_en_010</a></li> <li>▪ Olson, K. (2010). An examination of questionnaire evaluation by expert reviewers. <i>Field Methods</i>, 22, 295-318.</li> <li>▪ Willis, G., &amp; Lessler, J. T. (1999). Questionnaire Appraisal System: QAS-99. <a href="https://docplayer.net/147787-Question-appraisal-system-qas-99.html">https://docplayer.net/147787-Question-appraisal-system-qas-99.html</a></li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Cognitive interviewing</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Planning cognitive interviews + Exercise</li> <li>○ Conducting &amp; analyzing cognitive interviews + Exercise</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ <b>Supplementing cognitive interviewing with eye tracking</b></li> </ul> <p><u>Suggested reading:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Beatty, P. C., &amp; Willis, G. B. (2007). Research synthesis: The practice of cognitive interviewing. <i>Public Opinion Quarterly</i>, 71, 287-311.</li> <li>▪ Neuert, C. E., &amp; Lenzner, T. (2016). Incorporating eye tracking into cognitive interviewing to pretest survey questions. <i>International Journal of Social Research Methodology</i>, 19(5), 501-519.</li> <li>▪ Ridolfo, H., &amp; Schoua-Glusberg, A. (2011). Analyzing cognitive interview data using the constant comparative method of analysis to understand cross-cultural patterns in survey data. <i>Field Methods</i>, 23, 420-438.</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Web Probing</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Introduction to web probing</li> <li>○ Optimal implementation: Visual design, probe order, nonresponse reduction</li> <li>○ Planning &amp; conducting web probing studies</li> <li>○ Analyzing web probing studies + Exercise</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ <b>Discussion of advantages and disadvantages of the different pretesting methods</b></li> </ul> <p><u>Suggested reading:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Behr, D., Kaczmirek, L., Bandilla, W., &amp; Braun, M. (2012). Asking probing questions in web surveys: which factors have an impact on the quality of responses? <i>Social Science Computer Review</i>, 30(4), 487-498.</li> <li>▪ Lenzner, T., &amp; Neuert, C. E. (2017). Pretesting survey questions via web probing – does it produce similar results to face-to-face cognitive interviewing? <i>Survey Practice</i>, 10(4), 1-11.</li> <li>▪ Meitinger, K., &amp; Behr, D. (2016). Comparing cognitive interviewing and online probing: Do they find similar results? <i>Field Methods</i>, 28(4), 363-380.</li> <li>▪ Neuert, C. E., Meitinger, K. &amp; Behr, D. (2021). Open-ended versus closed probes: Assessing different formats of web probing. <i>Sociological Methods &amp; Research</i>. Online first. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/00491241211031271">https://doi.org/10.1177/00491241211031271</a></li> </ul>

### Preparatory Reading:

- Behr, D., Meitinger, K., Braun, M., & Kaczmirek, L. (2017). Web probing – implementing probing techniques from cognitive interviewing in web surveys with the goal to assess the validity of survey questions. *GESIS Survey Guidelines*. Mannheim: GESIS – Leibniz-Institute for the Social Sciences. [https://doi.org/10.15465/gesis-sg\\_en\\_023](https://doi.org/10.15465/gesis-sg_en_023)
- Lenzner, T., & Menold, N. (2016). Question Wording. *GESIS Survey Guidelines*. Mannheim, Germany: GESIS – Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences. [https://doi.org/10.15465/gesis-sg\\_en\\_017](https://doi.org/10.15465/gesis-sg_en_017)
- Lenzner, T., Neuert, C., & Otto, W. (2016). Cognitive pretesting. *GESIS Survey Guidelines*. Mannheim: GESIS – Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences. [https://doi.org/10.15465/gesis-sg\\_en\\_010](https://doi.org/10.15465/gesis-sg_en_010)
- Neuert, C., & Lenzner, T. (2019). Use of Eye Tracking in Cognitive Pretests. *GESIS Survey Guidelines*. Mannheim: GESIS – Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences. [https://doi.org/10.15465/gesis-sg\\_en\\_025](https://doi.org/10.15465/gesis-sg_en_025)

### Additional Recommended Literature:

- Blair, J., & Conrad, F. G. (2011). Sample size for cognitive interview pretesting. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 75, 636-658.
- Collins, D. (2015). *Cognitive Interviewing Practice*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Galesic, M., & Yan, T. (2011). Use of eye tracking for studying survey response processes. In: M. Das, P. Ester, & L. Kaczmirek (Eds.). *Social and Behavioral Research and the Internet* (pp. 349-370). New York: Routledge Academic.
- Jansen, H., & Hak, T. (2005). The productivity of the Three-Step Test-Interview (TSTI) compared to an expert review of a self-administered questionnaire on alcohol consumption. *Journal of Official Statistics*, 21, 103–20.
- Kaczmirek, L., Meitinger, K., & Behr, D. (2017). Higher data quality in web probing with EvalAnswer: a tool for identifying and reducing nonresponse in open-ended questions. *GESIS Papers 2017/01*. <https://doi.org/10.21241/ssoar.51100>
- Meitinger, K. (2017). Necessary but insufficient: Why measurement invariance tests need online probing as a complementary tool. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 81(2), 447–472.
- Neuert, C., & Lenzner, T. (2016). A comparison of two cognitive pretesting techniques supported by eye tracking. *Social Science Computer Review*, 34(5), 582-596.
- Neuert, C. E., & Lenzner, T. (2021). Effects of the number of open-ended probing questions on response quality in cognitive online pretests. *Social Science Computer Review*, 39(3), 456-468.
- Willis, G. B. (2005). *Cognitive Interviewing*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Yan, T., Kreuter, F., & Tourangeau, R. (2012). Evaluating survey questions: A comparison of methods. *Journal of Official Statistics*, 28(4), 503-529.