Close-ended survey question checklist

Use this checklist when you write a survey item or critique one in a research methods exam. Work through it in order.

1. Name the item

Type	Format	Data
Dichotomous	Two options	Nominal
Multiple choice	A list of categories	Nominal
Likert item	Agree to disagree	Ordinal
Rating scale	Numbered points	Ordinal
Ranking	Options put in order	Ordinal

2. Check the wording (BRUSO)

- Brief: short enough to read once and answer.
- Relevant: asks only what the study needs.
- Unambiguous: every reader takes the same meaning.
- Specific: one idea, a clear time period.
- Objective: no hint of the expected answer.

3. Look for common faults

- Double-barreled: two ideas, one answer.
- Leading or loaded words, such as "Don't you agree..."
- Double negatives.
- Vague frequency words, such as "sometimes" or "often", with no time period.
- Jargon the participant may not know.

4. Check the options

- Mutually exclusive: no answer fits two options.
- Exhaustive: every possible answer has an option, or there is an "Other".
- Rating scales: five or seven points is usually enough.
- Labels: do the numbers or words suggest a "normal" answer?

5. Name the likely bias

- Social desirability: is the topic sensitive or the survey not anonymous?
- Acquiescence: are all items agree or disagree statements worded the same way?
- Order effects: could an earlier question shape this answer?

6. Write your evaluation

1. State the strength: fixed options give quantitative data scored the same way for everyone (reliability).
2. State the weakness: name the fault or bias.
3. Explain the effect on validity.
4. Rewrite the item or suggest a fix.

Sources: Research Methods in Psychology, "Constructing Survey Questionnaires"; Pew Research Center, "Writing Survey Questions". Checked November 17, 2026.