



CRIC and MRS GDQ Guidance

SURVEY DATA QUALITY Do's and Don'ts



Introduction

Quality insights depend on reliable data, yet even well-designed surveys can be undermined by disengaged, inconsistent, or fraudulent participants, and/ or AI-generated responses. Data integrity requires a structured, end-to-end approach that begins before fieldwork, with careful choices around research and questionnaire design, sampling, recruitment to drive representativeness and engagement. It continues through fieldwork with robust in-survey controls and external quality signals to identify and remove low-quality responses.

This Do's and Don'ts guide is intended to give transparency over data cleaning and verification processes to end-clients, with particular focus on areas that an end-client may have greater control.

This document takes into consideration the fact that clients may work with suppliers (research service supplier for full-service work) and/or directly with sample providers (e.g. for DIY research). Some points are applicable to only one of these relationship types.

Before fieldwork

Do

Do include data quality requirements in procurement approaches. Prioritise data quality when buying research services – both full service and DIY – and include expectations in contracts. Use tools such as the [GDQ Pledge](#) to identify quality suppliers. Ensure contracts with sample suppliers enable appropriate transfer and sharing of personal data for quality control purposes (e.g. sharing IP addresses).

Do confirm how participants will be sourced, recruited and validated. Ask the research supplier(s) to explain the sample sourcing approach being proposed.

Do set realistic expectations. Overly narrow quotas and/or low-incidence audiences can increase pressure on recruitment. Discuss with research agencies or research teams to ensure project design and sample sizes are realistic and achievable.

Do agree the course of action if quality checks affect feasibility, timing or cost. If, for example, quotas become difficult to fill, or additional sample verification is needed, agree on approach and next steps as well as the impact on contracts and costs.

Do design surveys with the participant experience in mind. Keep surveys as short and engaging as possible. Ask only what is necessary to meet the research objectives. Refer to relevant GDQ guidance, e.g.:

[GDQ/ESOMAR – How to improve research participants' experience and enhance data quality](#)

[MRS Guidelines for Questionnaire Design](#)

[BHBIA/EHPMRA Screener Design and Best Practice Guidance](#)

Do ensure surveys work well across devices. For example, design questions that are easy to answer on mobile devices and avoid formats that create unnecessary participant burden. See the [MRS Report Mobile Adoption & Optimisation – Best Practice Guidance](#) for further information.

Do build quality controls in the questionnaire. Some questions should be included primarily to assess data quality, such as attention checks, consistency checks, or open-ended questions. These can play an important role in identifying problematic responses.

Do ask your research supplier to explain how representative the survey population is likely to be, given the fieldwork methodology. Ensure the research supplier fully understands the research objectives and the research design's potential trade-offs. For example if an online option is cheaper and quicker, what is the associated risk with the coverage of the population being surveyed.

Do utilise published documents to support

communications with your research Supplier or sample provider. A sample of the information available on the Global Data Quality web site e.g.:

[GDQ/MRS Transparency checklist](#)

[GDQ/MRS Online participant sourcing ecosystem overview](#)

[GDQ/MRS Improving Data Quality and Integrity guidance](#)

[GDQ/CRIC Clients' Guide to Data Quality in Online Research](#)

[GDQ/Esomar 37 Questions to Help Buyers of Online Samples](#)

Don't

Don't assume bigger samples are always better. Large sample targets for difficult-to-reach audiences can increase the risk of poor-quality responses and fraudulent participants attempting to qualify.

Don't limit your sample sizes based on costs. Very low IR samples will always bring higher CPI and lower feasibility, but you should ensure any risks associated with lower sample size (e.g. not being able to cut data and potentially answer all objectives) are identified, accounted for and addressed.

Don't select research service suppliers and/or sample providers based on cost alone. The cheapest option may not deliver sufficient access to genuine participants, particularly for specialised audiences.

Don't create unnecessarily long or repetitive surveys. Lengthy surveys, excessive grids and repetitive questioning can frustrate genuine participants and increase drop-out rates. If you absolutely need to have 20 statements in a grid, split your sample.

During Fieldwork, Post-fieldwork and Delivery of results

Do

Do ask about what validation steps have been completed on the data. Ask for a record of what validation checks have been applied – pre, during and post fieldwork - and the numbers of participants removed from the completed surveys.

Do ask about the representation of the data. Ask about the quota controls / weighting that have been applied and what do these represent? Do ask about the fieldwork mode and, if online, what suppliers were used and their level of representation.

Raise concerns promptly. If quality concerns emerge, ask the research supplier to share the relevant checks, removal rules, etc. before any conclusions are drawn.

Use quality outcomes to improve future briefs. Use the lessons learned to input into future RFPs, survey designs, etc.

Don't

Don't rely on a single quality indicator One metric alone rarely provides sufficient evidence that a participant is fraudulent or low quality. Quality assessment is often nuanced and benefits from reviewing several indicators together, within the context of the project in question. Do not expect that a participant has been excluded for “straight-lining” alone or providing a pure “gibberish” response to an open-end alone. This could impact the representation of the results by excluding potentially “real” participants. Further review may show that some records

initially identified as suspicious are legitimate participants.

Don't close projects without capturing lessons learned. Even when final data may be unusable, unresolved quality issues should be documented so that future projects can be designed more effectively.

Don't treat data quality concerns as purely commercial disputes. Work with your sample provider, focus on evidence, agreed quality criteria and the effect on research findings. It is everyone's best interest to investigate and resolve issues together rather than moving straight to blame, penalties or re-work discussions.

