

Department of Student Life Studies

Good Practices for Writing Cover Letters and Reminders

Good communication with your potential respondents is an important part of the assessment process. It can increase your response rates, build trust, and create a positive perception of your organization. There are several strategies to use when developing communication with your audience.

Factors found to increase response rates (Archer, 2008)

- Personalize email invitations use respondent's first name
- Use several (2-3) follow-up reminders

Recommendations for cover letter and reminders

Before creating the cover letter and reminders:

- Know how you are going to use the data: Program improvement? Student learning assessment? Research article?
- Know your audience: Do they respond well to emails? Do they respond to incentives?
- Be aware of campus events and timing: finals, Spring Break, other surveys collecting data

Writing the cover letter: (Saab, 2011)

- Write invitations and reminders that are brief, informal, non-technical and personal, using active voice
- Create eye-catching subject lines (do not use the word "survey")
- Include the organization/department name or recognizable person's name in the "From" line
- Keep important information (instructions, respond by date, link) near the beginning of the correspondence
- Create a sense of urgency and responsibility: Why is the survey important? Why is each individual respondent important?
- Explain how you are going to use the information
- Address confidentiality or anonymity
- Set a deadline for their participation (usually 2-3 weeks)
- Thank respondents for their participation
- Provide contact information in case they have questions or comments
- Include opt-out link in reminders (Student Life Studies can do that for you)
- Legitimize the request by providing contact name, title, and contact information in the signature block

Reminders:

- Make each reminder shorter and harsher (Saab, 2011)
- Send 2-3 reminders depending on how long the survey is available
- Remind only the people who have not yet responded to the survey
- Escalate requester's rank with every reminder
- Update the amount of time people are actually needing to take the survey (Student Life Studies can help with that)

- Report the number of people who have responded and how many people you'd like to have respond (Student Life Studies can help with that)

After receiving survey results:

- Generate and share results with your audience in a timely manner
- When making changes based on results, share that with participants
- Evaluate if non-respondent bias (*are respondents different from non-respondents*) is a concern:
 - *Compare known characteristics of respondents with non-respondents*
 - *Compare late to early respondents*

References

Archer, T. M. (2008). Response rates to expect from web-based surveys and what to do about it. *Journal of Extension*, 46 (3). Retrieved February 27, 2012 from <http://www.joe.org/joe/2008june/rb3.php>

Saab, S. (2011). Proven strategies for optimizing response rates in course evaluations. Presented at the Association for Institutional Research in Toronto, Canada.

Cover Letter Template

From: [An important/recognizable name or organization]

Subject: [Something interesting to motivate the recipient to open the email]

Howdy [First Name]!

The [Department/Student Organization] needs your input about **** . The purpose of the survey/assessment is to assess ***. The results of the survey/assessment will be used to *** . We have used the results of previous/similar surveys to make the following improvements/changes: ***.

We would appreciate you taking the time to respond to the survey, which will take approximately ** minutes to complete. The survey will be open until [DATE], but we'd love to hear from you before then.

Follow this link to the survey/assessment:

LINK

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:

URL

You have been chosen for participation because you are ***. Your participation is very important, confidential, and voluntary. The data will be collected and analyzed by the Department of Student Life Studies, and results will be reported in aggregate.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact [me/another name] at [email] or [phone].

Thank you for your time,

Name, title

Student Organization/Department

Texas A&M University

Telephone number

Email

Reminder Template

From: [An important/recognizable name or organization]

Subject: [Something interesting to motivate the recipient to open the email]

Howdy [First Name]!

It's not too late for you to complete the [Department/Student Organization] survey/assessment about ****. The results of the survey/assessment will be used to ***. We have used the results of previous/similar surveys to make the following improvements/changes: ***.

We would appreciate you taking the time to respond to the survey, which will take approximately ** minutes to complete. The survey will be open until [DATE], but we'd appreciate hearing from you before then.

Follow this link to the survey/assessment:

LINK

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:

URL

If you do not want to receive any more reminders and do not plan to respond, click here.

Thank you for your time,

Name, title

Student Organization/Department

Texas A&M University

Telephone number

Email

Final Reminder Template

From: [An important/recognizable name or organization]

Subject: [Something interesting to motivate the recipient to open the email]

Howdy [First Name]!

This is a final reminder for you to complete the [Department/Student Organization] survey/assessment about ****. Your responses are very important, so we appreciate you taking ** minutes to complete the survey before the survey closes on [DATE].

Follow this link to the survey/assessment:

LINK

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:

URL

Thank you for your time,

Name, title

Student Organization/Department

Texas A&M University

Telephone number

Email