

P U L S E F O R G O O D

Low-Literacy

Survey Design Toolkit

A practical guide for designing surveys that are accessible, understandable, and psychologically safe for populations with limited literacy, low English proficiency, or cognitive barriers. This toolkit contains 10 ready-to-use documents covering question simplification, visual response scales, cognitive load reduction, translation readiness, and comprehension-focused pilot testing.

10 Design & Evaluation Documents

Worksheets • Checklists • Templates • Reference Guides

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Toolkit Contents

This toolkit contains 10 standalone documents for designing surveys that work for people who struggle with reading, have limited English, or experience cognitive barriers. Each document includes instructions, templates, and ready-to-use tools.

Document 1: Sentence Simplification Worksheet — Step-by-step process for rewriting complex survey questions

Document 2: Plain-Language Substitution Guide — Swap list for common survey terms and their simpler alternatives

Document 3: Reading-Level Self-Check Rubric — Manual method to estimate reading level without software

Document 4: Visual Response Scale Templates — Ready-to-use non-text response options for touchscreen kiosks

Document 5: Question Length & Structure Checklist — Ensuring one idea per question and appropriate length

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Document 7: Before/After Question Examples — Side-by-side comparisons of complex vs. simplified questions

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Document 10: Pilot Testing Worksheet — Comprehension-focused testing protocol (not just completion rates)

DOCUMENT 1

Sentence Simplification Worksheet

A step-by-step process for rewriting complex survey questions into plain, accessible language

 **INSTRUCTIONS:** Use this worksheet for every question in your survey. Work through each step in order. If a question fails any step, rewrite it before moving on. This process works best when done collaboratively — include someone with direct experience serving your participant population.

The 6-Step Simplification Process

Step 1: Identify the Core Question

Write the original question, then ask: “What is the ONE thing I’m trying to learn?” If the answer includes the word “and,” you’re asking two questions. Split them.

ORIGINAL QUESTION	WHAT AM I TRYING TO LEARN?	SPLIT NEEDED?
		Yes / No

Step 2: Remove Jargon and Abstract Words

Circle any word a 10-year-old would not understand. Replace it with a simpler word. Use the Plain-Language Substitution Guide (Document 2) for common swaps.

DIFFICULT WORD OR PHRASE	SIMPLER REPLACEMENT	CONFIRMED WITH TEST READER?
		Yes / No

Step 3: Shorten the Sentence

Count the words. If the question is longer than 10 words, look for words you can cut without changing the meaning. Target 7–10 words per question on a touchscreen kiosk.

DRAFT QUESTION	WORD COUNT	SHORTENED VERSION	NEW COUNT

Step 4: Use Active Voice and Direct Address

Write the question as if you're speaking directly to the person. Use "you" instead of "the client" or "residents." Use active verbs instead of passive constructions.

✗ BEFORE (Complex)	✓ AFTER (Simplified)
"Were services provided in a timely manner?"	"Did you get help quickly?"
"The degree to which needs were met"	"Did we help you with what you needed?"
"Staff responsiveness was adequate"	"Did staff respond when you needed them?"

Step 5: Read It Aloud

Read the question out loud. Does it sound like something you would say in conversation? If it sounds awkward or formal, rewrite it until it sounds natural. See Document 6 for the full read-aloud guide.

Step 6: Test with a Real Person

Show the question to someone from your participant population (or someone with a similar literacy level). Ask them to repeat back what the question is asking in their own words. If they can't, simplify further.

FINAL QUESTION	TESTER PARAPHRASE	MATCH?	REVISION NEEDED?
		Yes / No	
		Yes / No	
		Yes / No	

		Yes / No	
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DOCUMENT 2

Plain-Language Substitution Guide

A swap list for replacing complex survey terms with simpler alternatives

 **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Keep this guide open while writing or reviewing survey questions. When you encounter a word from the left column, replace it with the simpler version on the right. Add your own organization-specific terms to the blank rows at the bottom.*

General Survey Language

INSTEAD OF THIS...	USE THIS...
Satisfaction	How happy you are
Rate / Evaluate	Tell us how good or bad
Experience	Time here / Visit
Adequate / Sufficient	Enough
Frequency	How often
Respondent / Participant	You
Indicate / Specify	Tell us / Pick
Prior to / Subsequent to	Before / After
Regarding / Pertaining to	About
Utilize	Use
Accommodate	Help / Fit
Facilitate	Help / Make easier
Approximately	About / Close to
Currently	Now / Right now
Demonstrate	Show
Obtain / Acquire	Get
Assist / Assistance	Help
Compliant / Compliance	Following the rules
Implement	Start / Do / Put in place
Subsequently	Then / After that
Voluntary	Your choice / Up to you
Anonymous	Private / No one knows it's you

Confidential	Kept private / Not shared
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Service-Specific Language

INSTEAD OF THIS...	USE THIS...
Behavioral health services	Help with feelings or substance use
Case management	Help from your case worker
Discharge planning	Getting ready to leave
Intake process	When you first came here
Therapeutic intervention	Counseling / Talking with a therapist
Recidivism	Coming back after leaving
Transitional housing	A place to stay while you get settled
Wraparound services	All the help we offer
Crisis intervention	Help during an emergency
Harm reduction	Ways to stay safer
Evidence-based	Proven to work
Trauma-informed	Understanding what you've been through
Cultural competency	Respecting your background
Self-determination	Making your own choices
Psychosocial assessment	Learning about your needs

Response Option Language

INSTEAD OF THIS...	USE THIS...
Strongly Agree / Strongly Disagree	Yes, a lot / No, not at all
Very Satisfied / Very Dissatisfied	Very Happy / Very Unhappy
Not Applicable	Doesn't apply to me / Skip
Neutral / Neither agree nor disagree	Not sure / In the middle
Exceeds expectations	Better than I hoped
Meets expectations	About what I expected
Below expectations	Worse than I expected
Prefer not to answer	I'd rather not say
Frequently / Infrequently	A lot / Not much
Always / Never	Every time / Not once

Add Your Own

Use the blank rows below to document organization-specific terms that need simpler alternatives:

YOUR TERM	SIMPLER VERSION

DOCUMENT 3

Reading-Level Self-Check Rubric

A manual method to estimate reading difficulty without software tools

 **INSTRUCTIONS:** Use this rubric to quickly evaluate any survey question's reading level by hand. You don't need readability software — just count and check. Score each question individually and aim for all questions to land in the "Easy" range. Apply this rubric after using the Simplification Worksheet (Document 1).

The 5-Finger Check

For each survey question, check these five factors. Each factor that fails adds one "finger." Like the children's book selection method: 0-1 fingers means the text is accessible; 2-3 means it needs work; 4-5 means it needs a complete rewrite.

#	FACTOR	HOW TO CHECK	THRESHOLD
1	Word Count	Count every word in the question, including articles (a, an, the)	≤ 10 words = Pass
2	Syllable Load	Count syllables in the longest word. Tap your chin while saying it — each chin-touch is a syllable	≤ 3 syllables = Pass
3	Jargon Check	Would a 10-year-old know every word? Ask yourself honestly	0 unknown words = Pass
4	Idea Count	How many separate things does the question ask about? Look for "and," "or," and commas separating ideas	1 idea only = Pass
5	Voice Check	Read it aloud. Does it sound like something you'd say in conversation?	Sounds natural = Pass

Scoring Guide

FINGERS UP	READING LEVEL	ACTION REQUIRED
0-1	Easy (3rd-5th grade) — Accessible to most adults	Good to go. No changes needed.
2-3	Moderate (6th-8th grade) — May challenge low-literacy readers	Revise using Simplification Worksheet. Recheck.
4-5	Difficult (9th grade+) — Will exclude many participants	Complete rewrite required. Start from the core question.

Quick-Reference Word Syllable Counts

Common survey words and their syllable counts to help you check quickly:

1 SYLLABLE (✓)	2 SYLLABLES (✓)	3+ SYLLABLES (× REPLACE)
Safe, Help, Good, Clean, Staff	Happy, Friendly, Easy, Quickly, Welcome	Satisfaction (5), Experience (4), Appropriate (4)
Food, Room, Home, Need, Feel	Better, Careful, Honest, Helpful, Healthy	Approximately (5), Confidential (5), Anonymous (4)
Time, Fair, Treat, Trust, Care	Safe-ty, Com-fort, Pri-vate, Sim-ple	Recommendation (5), Communication (5), Accessible (4)

Worksheet: Score Your Questions

QUESTION	WORDS	SYLLABLES (MAX)	JARGON?	IDEAS	NATURAL?	FINGERS

DOCUMENT 4

Visual Response Scale Templates

Ready-to-use non-text response options for touchscreen kiosks

INSTRUCTIONS: Choose the visual scale type that best fits each question. Consistency matters — use the same scale type throughout a survey section when possible. These templates are designed for touchscreen kiosks but can be adapted for paper. Each scale includes accessibility notes for implementation.

Scale Type 1: Emoji/Face Scale (Satisfaction & Feelings)

Best for: Overall satisfaction, emotional state, and opinion questions. The most universally understood visual scale across literacy levels and cultures.

5-Point Emoji Scale



Labels (optional, for screen readers): Very Unhappy • Unhappy • Okay • Happy • Very Happy.
Touch target: minimum 48x48px per emoji. Spacing: equal gaps between all options.

3-Point Emoji Scale (Recommended for Lowest Literacy)



Labels: No / Bad • Okay / So-so • Yes / Good. Fewer options reduce cognitive load. Best for yes/no/maybe type questions.

Scale Type 2: Star Rating

Best for: Quality ratings (food, facility, staff). Familiar from consumer apps and reviews. Intuitive for most people.

5-Star Rating



Implementation: Stars fill from left to right on tap. Filled = gold/yellow, empty = gray outline.
Labels: 1 star = Bad, 3 stars = Okay, 5 stars = Great. Touch target: entire star clickable, minimum 44px wide.

Scale Type 3: Thumbs Up/Down (Binary Choice)

Best for: Simple yes/no questions, agreement/disagreement. The simplest possible response format. Use when nuance is less important than participation.

Binary Thumbs



Labels: No / Thumbs Down • Yes / Thumbs Up. Large touch targets (minimum 64px). Can add a third option (“Not Sure”) with a shoulder-shrug icon or question mark if needed.

Scale Type 4: Color Gradient Scale

Best for: Degree/intensity questions (how much, how often). Works well for people who struggle with number scales but understand color progression.

5-Point Color Scale



Colors progress from red (worst) through yellow (middle) to green (best). Each circle is a tappable target. Pair with position labels: leftmost = worst, rightmost = best. Note: Test with colorblind users — add icons or patterns as backup.

Scale Type 5: Frequency Icons

Best for: “How often” questions. Uses repeated icons to represent frequency visually.

Frequency Scale



Labels: Never • Sometimes • Often • Always. The number of dots visually represents frequency. Can use calendar-style icons instead (empty calendar, partially filled, full).

Implementation Guidelines

<input type="checkbox"/>	Touch targets are at least 48px × 48px (44px absolute minimum per WCAG)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Visual scales include hidden text labels for screen readers (accessibility)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Scale direction is consistent throughout the survey (left = negative, right = positive)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Colors are not the only differentiator — shape, size, or position also vary (colorblind accessibility)

<input type="checkbox"/>	A "Skip" or "I'd rather not say" option is available for every question
<input type="checkbox"/>	Scales are tested on the actual kiosk hardware to verify tap accuracy
<input type="checkbox"/>	Selected state is clearly visually distinct from unselected (border, fill, size change)
<input type="checkbox"/>	No more than 5 options per scale (3 is ideal for lowest literacy populations)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Text labels appear below icons as a secondary aid, not a primary requirement

DOCUMENT 5

Question Length & Structure Checklist

Ensuring every question asks one thing, uses simple structure, and respects cognitive limits

 **INSTRUCTIONS:** Apply this checklist to every question in your survey. The goal is one idea per question, 10 words or fewer, and a structure that is instantly understandable. Use the scoring row at the bottom to determine if your survey as a whole passes.

Length Rules

<input type="checkbox"/>	Every question is 10 words or fewer (hard limit for kiosk display)
<input type="checkbox"/>	No question contains a subordinate clause (“if,” “when,” “although,” “because”)
<input type="checkbox"/>	No question contains parenthetical explanations or examples in parentheses
<input type="checkbox"/>	Response option labels are 3 words or fewer each
<input type="checkbox"/>	The total survey is 10 questions or fewer for kiosk use (15 absolute max)

One-Idea Rule

Each question must ask about exactly ONE concept. Here’s how to spot “double-barreled” questions:

✗ BEFORE (Complex)	✓ AFTER (Simplified)
“Are staff friendly and helpful?” — Two ideas: friendliness AND helpfulness	Split into: “Are staff friendly?” and “Are staff helpful?”
“Do you feel safe and comfortable here?” — Two ideas: safety AND comfort	Split into: “Do you feel safe here?” and “Are you comfortable here?”
“Is the food good and is there enough?” — Two ideas: quality AND quantity	Split into: “Is the food good?” and “Do you get enough food?”
“Were you treated with respect and dignity?” — Overlapping concepts	Combine: “Were you treated with respect?” (dignity is implied)
“Do staff listen to you and take action?” — Two ideas: listening AND acting	Split into: “Do staff listen to you?” and “Do staff help when you ask?”

Structure Patterns That Work

Stick to these proven sentence structures for maximum comprehension:

PATTERN	EXAMPLE
“Do you...” + simple verb	“Do you feel safe here?”
“Is/Are the...” + noun + adjective	“Is the food good?”
“How...” + adjective + “is/are”	“How clean is this place?”
“Did...” + subject + simple verb	“Did staff help you?”
“Would you...” + simple verb	“Would you come back here?”

Structures to Avoid

AVOID THIS PATTERN	WHY IT’S A PROBLEM
“To what extent do you agree that...”	Indirect, long, and requires abstract thinking
“Please rate your level of satisfaction with...”	Too many words before the actual question
“On a scale of 1-10, how would you...”	Numeric scales are abstract for low-literacy readers
Negative phrasing: “Do you NOT feel...”	Double negatives confuse readers at all levels
Hypothetical: “If you could change one thing...”	Requires imagining scenarios, high cognitive load

Per-Question Audit Table

QUESTION #	WORD COUNT	≤ 10 WORDS?	ONE IDEA?	ACTIVE VOICE?	SIMPLE WORDS?	PASS?
Q1		Y / N	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N
Q2		Y / N	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N
Q3		Y / N	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N
Q4		Y / N	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N
Q5		Y / N	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N
Q6		Y / N	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N
Q7		Y / N	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N
Q8		Y / N	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N
Q9		Y / N	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N
Q10		Y / N	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N	Y / N

DOCUMENT 6

“Read-Aloud Friendly” Formatting Guide

Making surveys sound natural when spoken aloud — because many participants will read them that way

 **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Many people with low literacy read by subvocalizing (saying words silently or quietly). Others may have a staff member or peer read questions to them. This guide ensures your survey sounds right when spoken, not just when read silently. Test every question by reading it aloud before finalizing.*

Why Read-Aloud Matters

Research shows that adults reading below a 5th-grade level typically process text by converting it to speech internally. If a sentence is awkward to say out loud, it will be difficult for these readers to process. Additionally, in congregate settings like shelters and day centers, participants often read kiosk questions aloud to each other.

The Read-Aloud Test

For each question in your survey, follow this 4-step test:

STEP	ACTION	WHAT TO LISTEN FOR
1	Read the question aloud at normal conversational speed	Did you stumble on any words? Did you need to take a breath mid-sentence?
2	Read it aloud again, this time to someone else in the room	Did they look confused? Did they ask you to repeat it?
3	Ask the listener to repeat back what the question is asking	Did they capture the right meaning? Did they add or miss anything?
4	Read the response options aloud as part of the question	Does the full sentence (question + answer) make grammatical sense?

Formatting Rules for Read-Aloud Friendliness

<input type="checkbox"/>	Questions use contractions where natural (“Do you” is fine, but “Don’t you” may confuse — avoid negative contractions)
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<input type="checkbox"/>	No abbreviations or acronyms unless universally known (use “United States” not “U.S.” in surveys)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Numbers are written as numerals, not words (use “3” not “three” — faster to process visually)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Questions don’t start with “Please” or “We would like to know” — get to the point
<input type="checkbox"/>	No sentences require emphasis on a specific word to be understood correctly
<input type="checkbox"/>	Response options can be inserted naturally after the question stem (e.g., “Do you feel safe here? Yes / No / Not sure”)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Questions do not rely on visual formatting (bold, italics, underline) to convey meaning
<input type="checkbox"/>	Font size on screen is at least 18pt for question text, 16pt for response options
<input type="checkbox"/>	One question per screen on kiosk displays (never stack multiple questions on one screen)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Progress indicator is visual, not text-based (“Question 3 of 8” is fine; a progress bar is better)

Common Read-Aloud Problems and Fixes

✗ BEFORE (Complex)	✓ AFTER (Simplified)
“Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement:”	Remove entirely. Just ask the question directly.
“How satisfied are you with the quality of the food service provided at this facility?”	“Is the food good?”
“Rate the extent to which you feel your privacy is respected.”	“Is your privacy respected?”
“Thinking about your most recent interaction with staff, would you say...”	“Were staff helpful today?”
“Select all that apply from the following list of services:”	“Which of these did you use? (Pick all that fit.)”

DOCUMENT 7

Before/After Question Examples

Side-by-side comparisons of complex questions vs. simplified versions across common survey categories

 **INSTRUCTIONS:** Use these examples as templates when rewriting questions for your own surveys. Each example shows the original complex version, the simplified version, what changed, and why. These cover the most common question categories in human services feedback.

Overall Satisfaction

✗ BEFORE (Complex)	✓ AFTER (Simplified)
“Overall, how satisfied are you with the services you have received from our organization during this period?” (18 words)	“Are you happy with the help you got?” (9 words)
“Would you recommend our program to others who might benefit from similar services?” (13 words)	“Would you tell a friend to come here?” (9 words)
“To what degree has your overall experience met your initial expectations?” (11 words)	“Was this place what you expected?” (6 words)

Staff Interactions

✗ BEFORE (Complex)	✓ AFTER (Simplified)
“How would you rate the professionalism and courtesy demonstrated by staff members during your interactions?” (15 words)	“Are staff respectful to you?” (5 words)
“Were staff members responsive to your needs in a timely and appropriate manner?” (13 words)	“Did staff help you when you needed it?” (9 words)
“Please evaluate the cultural competency of staff in addressing your unique background and circumstances.” (14 words)	“Do staff respect your background?” (5 words)

Safety & Environment

✗ BEFORE (Complex)	✓ AFTER (Simplified)
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“How would you rate your perception of personal safety within the facility and its surrounding environment?” (16 words)	“Do you feel safe here?” (5 words)
“Is the physical environment of the facility maintained to a standard of cleanliness that meets your expectations?” (17 words)	“Is this place clean?” (4 words)
“Do you feel that your personal belongings are secure when stored in the designated areas?” (15 words)	“Are your things safe here?” (5 words)

Programs & Services

✗ BEFORE (Complex)	✓ AFTER (Simplified)
“To what extent have the therapeutic interventions and programmatic offerings contributed to your progress toward your identified goals?” (18 words)	“Is the program helping you?” (5 words)
“How adequate are the food service options in terms of quality, variety, and accommodation of dietary restrictions?” (17 words)	“Is the food good?” (4 words)
“Are the recreational and educational activities provided sufficient to support your well-being during your stay?” (15 words)	“Are there enough things to do here?” (7 words)

Communication & Respect

✗ BEFORE (Complex)	✓ AFTER (Simplified)
“Do you feel that you are kept adequately informed about decisions that affect your care and services?” (17 words)	“Do people here tell you what’s going on?” (8 words)
“Is your input solicited and incorporated into the development of your individualized service plan?” (14 words)	“Do you have a say in your plan?” (8 words)
“Are your privacy and confidentiality appropriately maintained by all members of the service team?” (14 words)	“Is your privacy respected here?” (5 words)

Open-Ended Questions

✗ BEFORE (Complex)	✓ AFTER (Simplified)
“Please describe any areas where you believe our organization could enhance its	“What could we do better?” (5 words)

service delivery to better meet your needs.” (19 words)	
“Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your experience that was not addressed by the preceding questions?” (20 words)	“Anything else you want to tell us?” (7 words)
“What aspects of the program have been most beneficial to your personal growth and recovery journey?” (15 words)	“What helped you the most?” (5 words)

Response Option Transformations

✗ BEFORE (Complex)	✓ AFTER (Simplified)
Strongly Disagree / Disagree / Neutral / Agree / Strongly Agree	☹ No way / ☹ Not really / 😐 Maybe / 😊 Yes / 😄 Yes, a lot!
Very Dissatisfied / Dissatisfied / Neither / Satisfied / Very Satisfied	☹ Very Unhappy / ☹ Unhappy / 😐 Okay / 😊 Happy / 😄 Very Happy
Never / Rarely / Sometimes / Often / Always	Not once / Once or twice / Sometimes / A lot / Every time
Not Applicable	Doesn't apply to me (or just: Skip)

DOCUMENT 8

Translation Readiness Checklist

Preparing surveys for accurate, culturally appropriate multilingual translation

INSTRUCTIONS: Complete this checklist BEFORE sending your survey for translation. A survey that is confusing in English will be even more confusing when translated. Simplify first, then translate. Never translate a survey that hasn't passed the Reading-Level Self-Check (Document 3) and the Question Length & Structure Checklist (Document 5).

Pre-Translation Language Check

<input type="checkbox"/>	All questions have passed the Reading-Level Self-Check Rubric (Document 3) at the "Easy" level
<input type="checkbox"/>	All jargon and technical terms have been replaced using the Plain-Language Substitution Guide (Document 2)
<input type="checkbox"/>	No idioms, slang, or colloquialisms remain (e.g., "bend over backwards," "at the end of the day," "ball is in your court")
<input type="checkbox"/>	No culturally specific references that may not translate (e.g., "DMV experience," "like a Yelp review")
<input type="checkbox"/>	No contractions that could confuse translators (expand "don't" to "do not" for the translation version)
<input type="checkbox"/>	No pronouns without clear referents ("it," "they," "them" should clearly refer to a specific noun)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sentences follow Subject-Verb-Object order (simplest to translate across most languages)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Questions do not rely on word order for meaning (some languages have different syntax)

Translation Process Requirements

<input type="checkbox"/>	Translator is a professional human translator (not solely machine translation)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Translator is a native speaker of the target language AND fluent in English
<input type="checkbox"/>	Translator has been briefed on the participant population and context (not just the text)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Back-translation is planned: a second translator will translate the translated version back into English for comparison
<input type="checkbox"/>	A native-speaking community member will review the final translation for naturalness and cultural appropriateness
<input type="checkbox"/>	Translation instructions specify: translate for meaning, not word-for-word; match the reading level, not the vocabulary

Visual & Layout Considerations

<input type="checkbox"/>	Text expansion room: translated text may be 30–50% longer than English (especially Spanish, German, French)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Right-to-left (RTL) languages have been considered if applicable (Arabic, Hebrew, Farsi, Urdu)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Font supports all characters in the target language (test special characters, accents, non-Latin scripts)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Visual response scales (emojis, stars, thumbs) are culturally appropriate in the target culture
<input type="checkbox"/>	Number formatting follows target culture conventions (comma vs. period for decimals)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Date formatting follows target culture conventions if dates appear anywhere
<input type="checkbox"/>	Color associations have been reviewed (e.g., red may not mean “bad” in all cultures)

Post-Translation Quality Check

<input type="checkbox"/>	Back-translation matches the original English meaning (not word-for-word, but concept-for-concept)
<input type="checkbox"/>	A native speaker from the target population has reviewed and approved the translation
<input type="checkbox"/>	The translated survey has been read aloud to verify it sounds natural in the target language
<input type="checkbox"/>	All visual elements (emojis, icons, scales) render correctly in the translated version
<input type="checkbox"/>	The translated survey has been loaded onto the kiosk and tested for display issues (text overflow, truncation)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Response data from translated surveys can be correctly aggregated with English responses in reporting

Common Translation Pitfalls

PITFALL	HOW TO AVOID IT
Idioms translated literally (“fall through the cracks” → nonsense in other languages)	Eliminate all idioms before translation (see Pre-Translation check above)
Formal/informal register mismatch (e.g., Spanish “tú” vs. “usted”)	Specify which register to use based on your population; “usted” is safer for services
Gendered language issues (some languages gender nouns/adjectives differently)	Write gender-neutral English source text; brief translators on inclusive language goals

Machine translation used as final output	Use machine translation only as a starting draft; always have a human translator finalize
Single translator without review	Always use translator + reviewer (ideally + community member), minimum two people

Language Priority Worksheet

Identify which languages to translate based on your participant population:

LANGUAGE	% OF PARTICIPANTS	PRIORITY	TRANSLATOR IDENTIFIED?	TARGET DATE
		High / Med / Low	Yes / No	
		High / Med / Low	Yes / No	
		High / Med / Low	Yes / No	
		High / Med / Low	Yes / No	
		High / Med / Low	Yes / No	

DOCUMENT 9

Cognitive Load Reduction Checklist

Survey flow, pacing, length, and mental burden guidelines

 **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Cognitive load is the total mental effort required to complete a task. For participants with limited literacy, trauma histories, or cognitive impairments, every unnecessary demand on working memory reduces the quality of their responses — and eventually causes them to abandon the survey entirely. Use this checklist to minimize cognitive burden at every level.*

Survey Length

<input type="checkbox"/>	Total survey takes 2 minutes or less to complete on a kiosk (time it with a stopwatch)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Maximum 10 questions for kiosk surveys (8 is ideal; 15 is the absolute ceiling for any format)
<input type="checkbox"/>	A progress indicator shows how much is left (progress bar preferred over “Question 3 of 10”)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Participants can see the end from any point (“Just 2 more questions!” messaging helps)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Every question earns its place — if removing a question wouldn’t change your decision-making, remove it

Question Sequencing & Flow

<input type="checkbox"/>	Questions flow from easy/comfortable to harder/sensitive (start with satisfaction, end with open-ended)
<input type="checkbox"/>	The first question is the easiest and most inviting (not demographic, not sensitive, not complex)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Related questions are grouped together (don’t jump between staff, food, safety randomly)
<input type="checkbox"/>	No question requires remembering the answer to a previous question
<input type="checkbox"/>	No question requires calculation, estimation, or recalling specific dates or numbers
<input type="checkbox"/>	Topic transitions are smooth (a brief header like “Now about the food...” helps orient the reader)
<input type="checkbox"/>	The last question is positive or empowering (“Anything else you’d like to tell us?”), not sensitive

Response Option Design

<input type="checkbox"/>	All questions on the same screen use the same response scale (don't mix stars, emojis, and text)
<input type="checkbox"/>	No more than 5 response options per question (3 is ideal for lowest literacy populations)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Response options are mutually exclusive (no overlapping categories)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Response options are exhaustive (include "Other" or "Skip" when needed)
<input type="checkbox"/>	The order of response options is consistent (always left-to-right: negative → positive)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Visual scales use consistent visual language (same emoji set, same color scheme throughout)
<input type="checkbox"/>	"Skip" or "I'd rather not say" is always available and never penalized or highlighted differently

Visual & Screen Design

<input type="checkbox"/>	One question per screen (never stack multiple questions on one page of a kiosk survey)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Plenty of white space around the question text (not crowded with logos, instructions, or decorations)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Font size is at least 18pt for questions, 16pt for response options (bigger is better)
<input type="checkbox"/>	High contrast text (dark text on light background; avoid low-contrast color combinations)
<input type="checkbox"/>	No background images or patterns behind text
<input type="checkbox"/>	Touch targets for response options are large and well-spaced (minimum 48px, ideally 64px+)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Selected response state is clearly distinct (color change + border + size change, not just color)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Navigation buttons ("Next" / "Back") are large, clearly labeled, and consistently positioned

Reducing Recall Demands

<input type="checkbox"/>	Questions ask about the present or very recent past ("today" or "this week"), not months ago
<input type="checkbox"/>	Questions ask about general impressions, not specific incidents (unless critical for safety)
<input type="checkbox"/>	No questions require counting ("How many times...") — use frequency words instead ("How often...")
<input type="checkbox"/>	No questions require comparing this visit to a previous visit ("Compared to last time...")
<input type="checkbox"/>	No questions require imagining hypothetical scenarios ("If you could change one

	thing..." can be reworded to "What should we change?")
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Emotional & Psychological Load

<input type="checkbox"/>	Sensitive questions are preceded by a brief, warm framing statement ("We care about your safety...")
<input type="checkbox"/>	No question requires disclosing trauma, abuse, or personal crises (use indirect indicators instead)
<input type="checkbox"/>	The survey does not ask about topics the participant has no power to change (this creates frustration)
<input type="checkbox"/>	The survey tone is warm and respectful throughout, not clinical or bureaucratic
<input type="checkbox"/>	The closing message thanks the participant and affirms their contribution matters

DOCUMENT 10

Pilot Testing Worksheet

A comprehension-focused testing protocol — because understanding matters more than completion

 **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Traditional survey pilots measure completion rates. This pilot protocol measures comprehension — whether participants actually understand what each question is asking. A survey that gets 100% completion but 50% misunderstanding is worse than one that gets 70% completion with 100% understanding. Run this pilot with 5-10 participants from your actual population before going live.*

Pilot Setup

Survey Name	
Pilot Date(s)	
Pilot Facilitator	
Number of Testers	Target: 5-10 from actual participant population
Testing Location	
Testing Format	On kiosk / On paper / Both

The Think-Aloud Protocol

This is the core testing method. Sit with each participant one-on-one. Ask them to read each question aloud (or read it to them), then tell you in their own words what they think the question is asking. Do not correct them — just listen and record.

STEP	SAY THIS	RECORD THIS
1	“Please read this question out loud (or I’ll read it to you).”	Did they struggle with any words? Which ones?
2	“In your own words, what is this question asking?”	Does their paraphrase match the intended meaning?
3	“How would you answer this?” (Let them answer.)	Did they understand the response options? Did they hesitate?
4	“Was anything confusing about this question?”	What specifically confused them? Word? Structure? Options?
5	“How would you say this question in your own	Their version may be better than yours — write it down.

words?"	
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Per-Question Comprehension Log

Record results for each question across all testers:

Q#	UNDERSTOOD CORRECTLY (# OF TESTERS)	CONFUSED BY WORDING	CONFUSED BY OPTIONS	SUGGESTED REWORDING	ACTION
Q1	__ / __	Yes / No	Yes / No		Keep / Revise / Cut
Q2	__ / __	Yes / No	Yes / No		Keep / Revise / Cut
Q3	__ / __	Yes / No	Yes / No		Keep / Revise / Cut
Q4	__ / __	Yes / No	Yes / No		Keep / Revise / Cut
Q5	__ / __	Yes / No	Yes / No		Keep / Revise / Cut
Q6	__ / __	Yes / No	Yes / No		Keep / Revise / Cut
Q7	__ / __	Yes / No	Yes / No		Keep / Revise / Cut
Q8	__ / __	Yes / No	Yes / No		Keep / Revise / Cut
Q9	__ / __	Yes / No	Yes / No		Keep / Revise / Cut
Q10	__ / __	Yes / No	Yes / No		Keep / Revise / Cut

Overall Survey Observations

Average completion time (stopwatch)	
Did any tester abandon before finishing? How many?	
Which question caused the most confusion?	
Which question got the best comprehension?	

Did testers understand the response scales?	
Did testers understand the survey was anonymous?	
Did any tester express discomfort with any question?	
What feedback did testers give about the overall experience?	

Comprehension Threshold

Your survey is ready for launch when:

<input type="checkbox"/>	80% or more of testers correctly paraphrase every question's meaning
<input type="checkbox"/>	No single question confuses more than 1 out of 5 testers
<input type="checkbox"/>	Average completion time is under 2 minutes
<input type="checkbox"/>	Zero testers express confusion about how to use the response scale
<input type="checkbox"/>	Zero testers express concern that the survey is not truly anonymous
<input type="checkbox"/>	All questions that failed comprehension have been revised and re-tested

Sign-Off

This survey has completed pilot testing focused on comprehension and meets all thresholds for launch.

Pilot Lead: _____ Date: _____

Approver: _____ Date: _____

End of Toolkit

For implementation support, contact your Pulse For Good account manager or visit pulseforgood.com

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