Preparing Online Surveys on Sona Systems

You can now create online surveys that will be administered by our new research participation management system, Sona. This document will outline the basics of survey creation. When participants sign up for an online study, they will take it immediately. You can create surveys with an unlimited number of questions, although participants must complete it in one sitting, so reasonable lengths are recommended.

Survey items must be in either multiple choice or free-entry form. Responses to free-entry items can be up to 255 characters.

It is important to note that Sona cannot support certain tasks. It will not record reaction times and will not do branching, where the questions that a participant sees will depend on previous responses. If you need these features, you can build your survey on another program and it can be linked to Sona as an external online study.

Creating an online study

1. Complete the ethics verification form and the researcher registration and checklist, as you would for any other study.

2. Make sure you are added as a researcher by the administrator

3. After logging in, click on "add a new study"

4. Select "online survey study"

5. Complete the basic information including name of the study, duration, and number of credits

6. Complete the advanced information

    a. If you want participants to have completed the pre-test, this is indicated under "pre-requisites"

    b. If you want to exclude people who have completed another study, this is indicated under "disqualifiers"

    c. IMPORTANT: Clicking "yes" after "Should survey participants be identified only by a random, unique ID code?" will assure that your data does not contain names. If you keep "no" (the default setting), then each line of your data will contain the participant's username.

    d. Sign-up and cancellation deadlines are not relevant to an online study. Participants will be able to sign up as long as you have not reached your maximum number and the survey is still open.

7. Once you have put in the basic and advanced information, click "add this study."

8. Now you can create your actual survey. Click on "Update Online Survey."

9. Complete the survey information page.

   a. In the "Introductory Text" block, enter the information that you would like the participants to see before starting the survey. Informed consent information should be put here. IMPORTANT: *all* IRB-approved studies require informed consent. It is essential that you included the standard informed consent statement at the beginning of your online study. In lieu of a signature, participants will click the "yes, start study" button.

   b. In the "Closing Text" block, enter the information that you would like the participants to see on completion of the survey. Debriefing information can be put here.

   c. You will probably want to create your survey in sections. Each section may be a specific questionnaire, for example. Under "Display Sections in Random Order?" you can indicate if you want the system to always use a set order or if you want the sections presented randomly. The system, however, will NOT keep track of the random ordering for each participant.

   d. Click "Save and Continue" to enter your items

10. You will probably now want to add a new section.

    a. Each section can have its own instructions. Enter those in the "introductory section text" block.

    b. Click "add section"

    c. Now you can put in your first question. If you want the system to do any summing or averaging for you, you will need to make sure that you reply "yes" to "are all choices numeric?"

    d. Once you have the question and the choices entered, click "Save changes."

    e. Enter all the items for that section. Once you are finished with the section, click on "section list". This will take you to a screen where you can add another section. Also on this page is a link titled "Preview Section." Clicking on this will allow you to see what your participants will see. Check to make sure each item looks correct.

11. When you are satisfied with all of your sections, click on "Final Review". If you are ready, you can request to make the study active. If you would like to edit it further at a later time, make the study inactive. Note: only the administrator can make the study active.

Some important general guidelines:

- It is difficult to change the order of items, so make sure you have your study carefully planned on paper before entering items.

- Once you have collected participants, it will not be possible to make certain changes to your survey. Make sure you are satisfied before making it available to participants.

- Our students should be learning through research participation, as such please make sure that you include an informative debriefing statement that clearly describes the research questions and hypotheses.

- If you have questions, you can consult the manual, the GA, or Shannon.