Pitfalls in Survey Research

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Survey Research Methods

Introduction

- Who I am

- Should take my class

- My experience falling into these pits

Question Design Pitfalls

- Goal in question design is to create a standardized stimulus that is understood in the same way by everyone and that you have a method for systematically recording answers.

    – Not knowing your specific analytic objectives interferes with writing an appropriate question

    – Using someone else's measures blindly

    – Not pretesting

More Question Design Pitfalls

- Structural Pitfalls in Question Design

  - Not including enough choices

  - Writing scale choices that are "uneven"

  - Not writing balanced scale choices

More Question Design Pitfalls

- ## Content Pitfalls

  - Putting two questions (or more) in the same question.

  - Using Technical Terms without definitions

  - Using Jargon/Slang

  - Leading Respondents

Avoiding Question Design Pitfalls

- **Pretest**

- **Pretest**

- **Pretest**

Data Collection Pitfalls

- **Accepting low response rates to mail surveys because that's what everyone else gets**

  - Pitfall: Increasing sample size instead of increasing response rates.
    - Reminders work
    - Incentives work
    - Using both works better
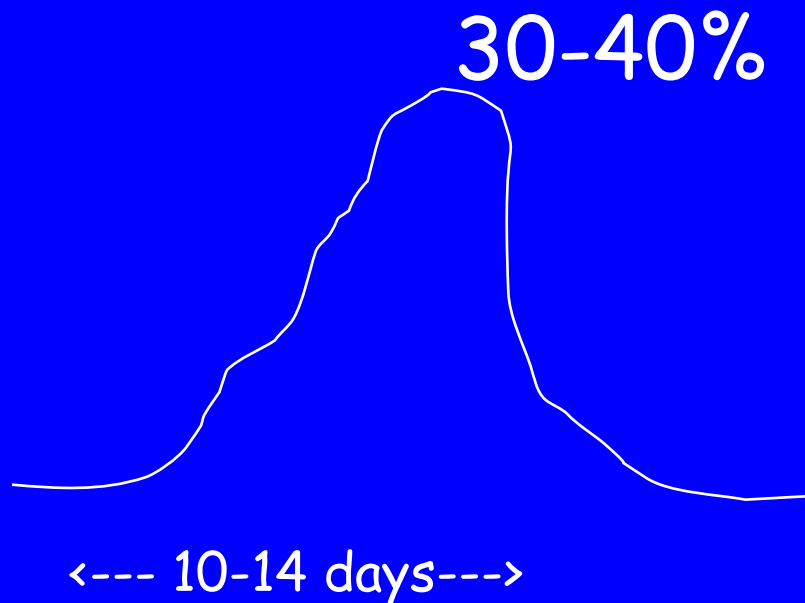
Good Mail Survey Procedures: Reminders

- Pattern of reminders are: Initial mailing, 1st reminder letter (or postcard), 2nd reminder includes replacement copy of survey; 3rd reminder is a letter or postcard

- Send reminders only to those who haven't sent back survey yet. This means you have to have an ID number on survey.

  - Sending to all is weak because you start out with an apology to those who have already returned; plus some who have returned think you really know which survey is theirs so they send in a second one!

Good Mail Survey Procedures: Reminders

- **Timing of reminders is the key.**

    - You want to build motivation from previous mailing so you can't wait too long

    - If you send too soon however you waste resources on those who would return anyway
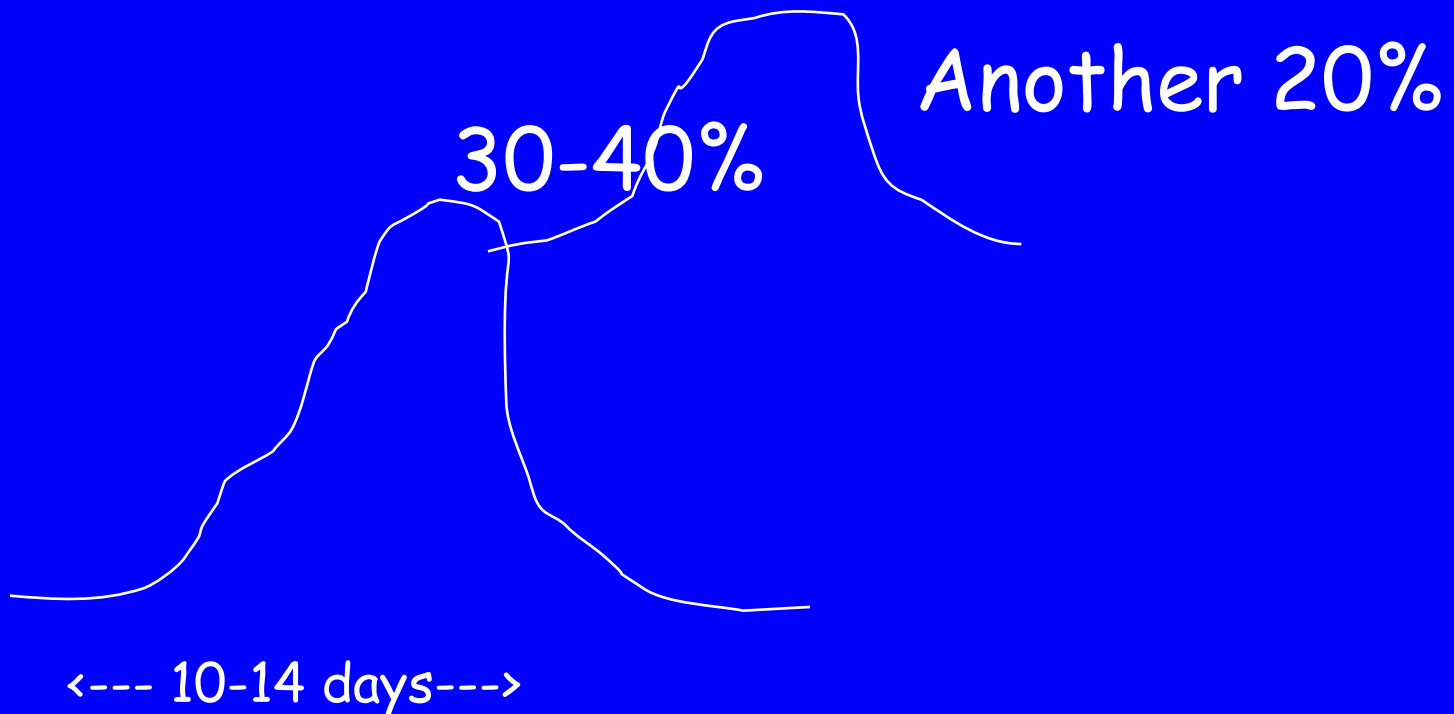
Good Mail Survey Procedures: Reminders
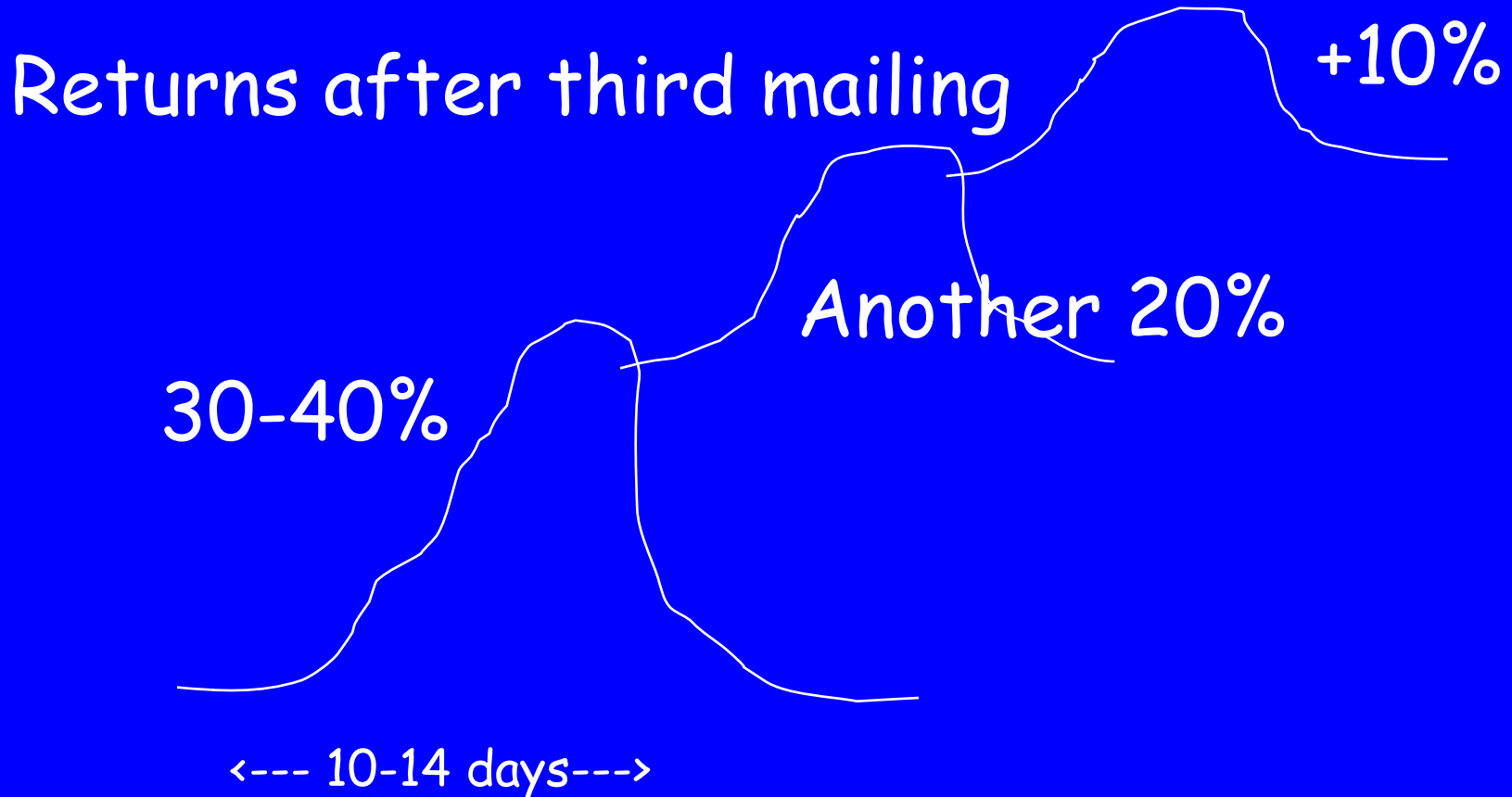
Returns after first mailing

30-40%

<--- 10-14 days--->

Good Mail Survey Procedures: Reminders

Returns after second mailing

Another 20%

30-40%

<--- 10-14 days--->

Good Mail Survey Procedures: Reminders

Returns after third mailing

+10%

Another 20%

30-40%

<--- 10-14 days--->

Good Mail Survey Procedures: Reminders

5-10%

+10%

Returns after 4th

Another 20%

30-40%

<--- 10-14 days--->   <--- 10-14 days--->   <--- 10-14 days--->   <--- 10-14 days--->

Good Mail Survey Procedures: Incentives

- **The promised reward**
  - You return survey we will send you reward
  - Least effective

- **Lottery**
  - A conditional promised reward (big prize)
  - Somewhat better than small promised reward

- **Up-front incentive**
  - Include with survey
  - Most effective (boosts response by 15 - 30%)
  - Doesn't have to be that much but $5 to $10 is common

Good Mail Survey Procedures: Incentives

- **Money is best**

- **Other incentives**
  - movie passes
  - gift certificates
  - gifts of value (mugs, pens)
  - books of postage stamps

Pitfalls in Interviewing

- Using untrained interviewers

- Using interviewers who are not used to academic quality (interviewing dynamics or response rates)

- Using interviewers who do not expect to do well

  - **Smooth George**

  - **Spunky Cynthia**

Sampling Pitfalls

- Random sampling is the method of choice because it potentially allows you to estimate the degree of precision to your measurements and is more generalizable

- Several Pitfalls Interfere with this Goal
  - Using a list to sample from that does not correspond well to the population you want to generalize to.

  - A sampling frame (list) that is out-of-date

  - Not using stratified sampling procedures