

How to Analyze Open-ended Responses

Open-ended questions should not be overlooked when assessing perceptions of the learning environment. While open-ended responses to questions are very time-consuming to compile or aggregate, one can get a complete sense of the learning environment by asking students, for instance, two questions:

- ▼ *What do you like about this school?*
- ▼ *What do you wish was different?*

Ask students, staff, and parents, these two questions—

- ▼ *What are the strengths of this school?*
- ▼ *What would make the school better?*

Sample student responses:

- ▼ What I like most about this school are the teachers. I like the way they have fun making us learn.
- ▼ What I wish was different is, I wish we didn't ever have to leave this school.

Sample staff and parent responses:

- ▼ One of our school's strengths is the good relationship/collaboration between grade-level teachers.
- ▼ Using positive reinforcement in the classroom would make the school better.

There is no fast or automated way to analyze open-ended responses. The best way to analyze open-ended responses is to type the list of open-ended responses (if they were not typed via the online administration route). Review the responses and add up the number of times students said the same thing. Place the number, in parentheses, after the statement, eliminate the duplicates, and revise your list. You will need to make judgment calls about how to collapse the items when parts of the responses are different. The table on the next page, *Aggregating Open-ended Responses*, shows the open-ended response list in the left-hand column. The other two columns show how the list can be condensed. Use *one* of these approaches—not two or three. The middle column, labeled “Eliminate Duplicates,” shows the number of times students wrote *teachers*—the main thought—and so forth. The right-hand column, labeled “Add Descriptors,” shows the number of times teachers were mentioned and in parentheses indicates the descriptions and the number of times the descriptors were mentioned. For example:

- ▼ Teachers (6) (caring, 3; nice, 2; good, 1)

Whichever approach you use is okay. It is important to capture the feelings of the respondents. The open-ended responses are very helpful in painting the picture of your school.

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Aggregating Open-Ended Responses

All Responses	Eliminate Duplicates	Add Descriptors
I like the caring teachers and the friendly school	The teachers (8)	The teachers (8) (e.g., nice, 2; respect/fair, 2; caring, 1; good, 1; way of learning, 1)
I like that our school is new and the teachers are nice	The principal (2)	The school (3) (e.g., friendly, 1; new, 1; nice, 1)
I really like our new principal and my friends	My friends (3)	The principal (2)
I have a good teacher and friends who treat me nice	The school (3)	My friends (3) (e.g., treat me nice, 1)
I like the way teachers make us learn things	My classes (2)	My classes (2)
I feel safe and treated with respect from teachers	Recess (2)	Recess (2) (e.g., playground equipment, 1)
I like my teacher and the principal	Social Studies (1)	I feel safe
My teacher treats me with respect	P.E. (1)	Social Studies
I like recess, social studies, P.E., and music	Playground equipment (1)	P.E.
I like my friends and my nice teacher	Music (2)	Math
I like recess and the slide and the swings	Reading (1)	Not too much homework
We have a nice school	Math (1)	Music (2)
I like reading and music and math	I feel safe (1)	Reading
Not too much homework	Not too much homework (1)	