

Appendix B: Card Sort Protocol

1. Introduction

[Before the sort begins, make sure that cards are shuffled, and that there are enough group cards and subgroup cards available].

Thank you for agreeing to help us out today.

My name is _____ [introduce others observing, taking notes, etc.] I work at Westat, which is a social science research company located in Rockville MD. We are conducting this study for the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Today, we are looking at the categories used by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, or BLS, to classify products and services that people pay for. We're going to ask you to sort a set of cards, each card lists a product or service the BLS is interested in. Be assured that this is not a test of you or your skills in any way and there are no right or wrong answers here.

We will look at how you sort cards and get your feedback on the process. This study will help the BLS improve their surveys.

2. Informed Consent

There are some points I need to cover about your participation.

Purpose and Task: We are inviting you to participate in a research activity. The research involves sorting cards of expenditure items into categories. The information from this study will help BLS design more effective questionnaires. There are no right or wrong sorts – we are interested in how you think the cards should best be sorted.

Sponsorship: Westat is conducting this project on behalf of, and funded by, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). The OMB control number for this study is 1220-0141 and expires on February 29, 2012.

Voluntary Nature: Your participation in this research project is voluntary, and you have the right to stop at any time or to refuse to answer any question. The session will take approximately 60 minutes.

Risks: We would like to record the interview. Sometimes it is helpful to review a portion of a recording as we make recommendations for improving the survey. If the recording is reviewed later, it will only be by a few Westat staff and possibly the client, BLS.

You will never be identified by name. The things you say may be put in a written summary of this discussion, but there will be no way to identify who said what, and your name will not be used anywhere.

The only cost to you is the time and effort to answer questions. You may skip any question that you do not want to answer, both in the questionnaire and in the discussion afterwards. The recordings will be destroyed within 6 weeks of the end of the study.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. However, you will be helping with an important research project.

Questions: If you have questions about the project, you may call the Task Manager, Pat Dean Brick, at 800-937-8281, Ext. 4196. For questions about your rights and welfare as human subjects in this study, you may call the Institutional Review Board at Westat at 301-610-8828.

Incentive: You will be paid \$40 cash for completing the session.

3. Instructions

Here's how the process will work. In front of you is a stack of cards. These cards represent categories of products and services that people pay for. Your task is to sort the cards into groups that make sense to you. What we're interested in is seeing how you group these cards and why they belong in the same group. Here are some specific instructions:

- Put all the cards into groups that seem to make the most sense to you.
- If a word or term written on the card is unclear, please let us know as you work.
- Once your groups are established, use these [group cards] to give each group a name that makes sense to you.
- You are allowed to make sub-groups within a bigger group if you feel that's appropriate. You can have as many sub-groups as you'd like but each sub-group must contain at least two cards. After creating a sub-group, use these [sub-group] cards to give the sub-group a name that makes sense to you.
- Groups can include as many or as few cards as you wish.
- Please create as few groups as possible.
- If you can't decide which of two groups you want to put a card into, please tell us and then put the card into whichever group offers the better fit, however slight.
- Throughout this exercise please share with us your thought process and logic for the decisions you make. Along the way, I may also ask you some additional questions. Meanwhile, you can feel free to ask questions during the exercise if you feel the need. I can't guarantee that I can answer them immediately, but I'll do my best to answer them when you're finished.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

4. Card Sort Activity

Participants will now sort the cards.

Participants may be prompted to express what they are thinking if they look confused or frustrated or pause the sort for a length of time. However, it is important to only have participants do what comes naturally to them, as forcing them to talk more than is natural for them would hinder their sorting ability.

5. Debriefing

1. How comfortable did you feel with your ability to sort cards overall?
2. Could you very briefly describe your general approach to sorting your cards?
3. Which cards were easiest to group? Why?
4. Which cards were hardest to work with? Why?
5. Which was the most challenging group for you? Why?
6. Did you find yourself changing your general strategy at any point? Why?
7. How easy or difficult was it to come up with the labels for your groups?
Why was it [easy or difficult]?

Thank you all very much for your time.

