

Readex Review

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Stressless Statistic Savvy

Use CASRO's list of standard details that should accompany statistic reporting to help you gauge how well the survey was conducted.

- Sponsorship of the study
- Description of the purpose
- The sample description and size
- The dates of data collection
- The name of the research firm conducting the study
- The exact wording of the questions

A Simple Strategy for Stressless Statistic Savvy

Statistics are everywhere, boasting this or lamenting that.

It has been said that statistics can be used to prove almost anything, so blindly accepting every statistical claim can backfire. Yet, for some people it's stressful just thinking about trying to figure out what's above board and what's suspect. Here's a simple way to judge whether a statistic means something... or nothing.

The Council of Survey Research Organizations (CASRO) created a list of the types of information that should accompany any public release of survey results. The list can help you gauge how well the survey was conducted and whether the statistic represents the group of people in the claim.

Some of the details simply provide context. Other specifics describe practices that impact data quality. Because this information should be reported along with the statistic, reviewing it should not be overwhelming. If some of the information is missing, feel free to

ask the sponsor or the company that conducted the survey for additional details.

The sponsorship of the study:

Knowing who paid to conduct the survey offers context to the presentation. There's no need to suspect the results if they went the

sponsor's way. The sponsor's transparency implies that the survey was likely conducted using high research standards.

A description of the purposes:

Background details about the sponsor's objectives help put the rest of the

details regarding the survey in context.

The sample description and size:

Sampling can get messy quickly. The most important thing about sample is that the the group of respondents must be similar, in general, to the group of people that the data is meant to describe. As for size, data based on more responses is more solid than data based on fewer responses. For example, maximum sampling error for 100 responses is plus or minus 10%; for 400 responses, about plus or minus 5%.



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The dates of data collection: How fresh or stale is the data? Do statements that the results are meant to support make sense given the timing of the survey? Responses regarding seasonal or significant events may differ depending on when people were asked.

The name of the research company conducting the study: If a reputable research firm conducted the study, you can be fairly confident that the survey involved proper survey practices. Professional researchers have the experience and knowledge to make considerations that novices frequently overlook. These considerations can impact the quality of the results. Furthermore, respectable research firms will not risk damaging their reputation by manipulating data to go a client's way.

The exact wording of the questions: An effective questionnaire requires much deliberation and thought

to create. The wording of a question can influence how respondents answer. Look for incomplete or leading questions. When questions are open for respondent interpretation, the results cannot represent a single idea. On the other hand, leading questions guide respondents to answer a certain way. A close look at the question offers insight to what the results actually mean or what they don't mean.

Keeping these ideas in the back of your mind when coming across a statistic will help you put it in perspective. Then you can decide for yourself if it's worth believing.

Future issues of the Readex Review will cover some of these topics a little more in depth to help increase your statistic savvy.

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