

SSI POV: Online

Survey Drop Rates

- **When designing a sample plan for any research project and estimating the project feasibility, it is important to include the likely drop rate in the calculation.**

“Drops” refer to people who start a survey but stop before they reach the end of the survey (or before they are screened out).

What Are Drops and What Causes Them?

SSI defines drop rate as:

$$(1 - ((\text{Completes} + \text{Screenouts} + \text{OQs}) / \text{Survey starts})) * 100$$

People may drop from a survey for one or more of the following reasons:

- **Technical issues:**
 - o The survey pages load too slowly, due to inadequate server capacity, or a graphic-rich survey instrument or slow participant connection speed.
- **Survey programming issues:**
 - o No “none of the above” or “other” option, means the participant is unable to continue.
 - o Question wording or instructions are confusing.
 - o Instructions for submitting data at the end of the survey are not clear.
- **Survey experience:**
 - o The survey topic is not interesting, questions repetitive or topic not relevant.
 - o The survey is challenging, requiring participants to reveal sensitive information or to download software or videos.
- **Demographics of the universe under study:**
 - o Some groups, such as children and young people, have a shorter attention span.
- **Length of time in field:**
 - o A study with a very short field time (less than 3 days) puts more pressure on the participant to respond at a time which may not be convenient.
- **External issue:**
 - o The participant is interrupted by a home or work responsibility.

SSI’s experience is that when a survey provides a good participant experience, the topic is interesting, the reward is appropriate and there are no technical, or design issues, the drop rate will be about 5%.

(continued)

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SSI Recommends

- Always “soft launch” the project so any design or technical issues can be identified and server capacity can be tested.
- Take advantage of SSI’s iTest, which allows pre-testing to determine best question design.
- Return people to SSI via an automatic link immediately after the last question on the survey. Do not include a thank you page or request to click a button to record answers.
- Allow 7 days field time if possible, and remind participants that they can return to complete the survey later.
- Ensure that correct expectations are set at the beginning of the survey (including accurate estimated survey length and an appropriate reward).

If the survey is of average length, difficulty and topic, and there are no technical challenges, SSI will use an estimated 10% drop rate when estimating feasibility.