
TIP SHEET: REPORTING ON SURVEY DATA

Once you have collected survey data, you need to decide how to communicate that data to others. This tip sheet covers some general reporting principles, then touches some specifics associated with survey data.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

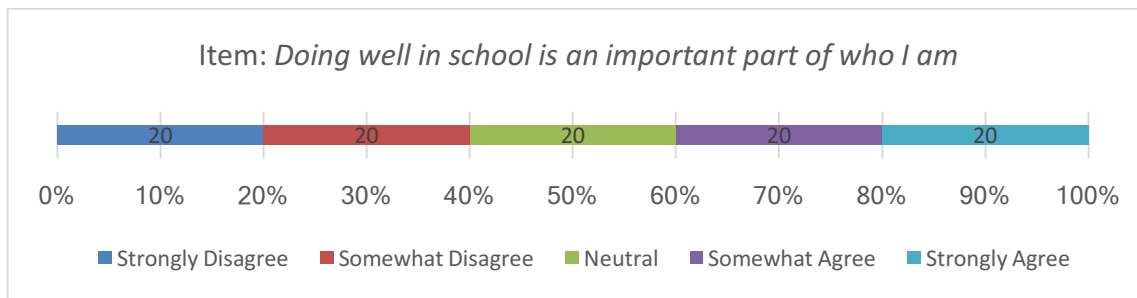
When reporting survey data, keep the following general principles in mind:

- **Balance narrative with evidence.** Use numbers to illustrate a point, but explain the point you are making using words. It can be tempting to let numbers “speak for themselves,” but it is helpful for your audience if you add some narrative.
- **Use tables, charts, and graphs appropriately.** These should be used when they clarify or illustrate a point better than words alone. Tables, charts, and graphs should be self-explanatory, but should also be referenced in the text of a report. Finally, use the right kind of visual display for your data. See our [tip sheet on reporting quantitative data](#) for more information.
- **Be careful about claims.** It is generally best to be clear that your information comes from a survey. Instead of saying “youth are...,” say “youth *report* that they are...”

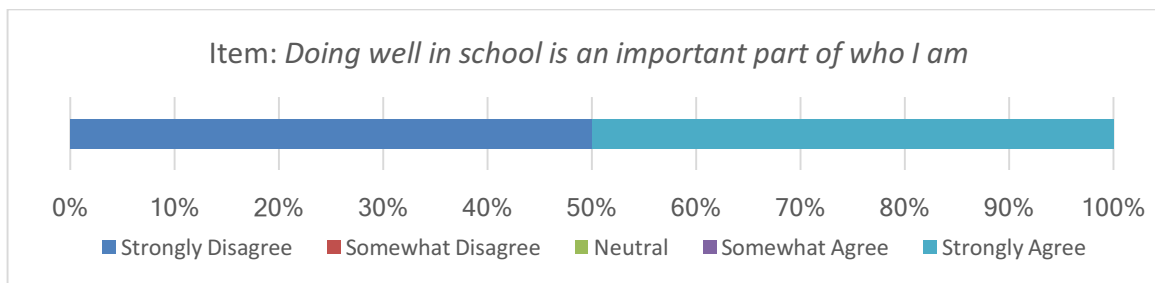
REPORTING ON LIKERT-TYPE ITEMS AND LIKERT SCALES

Likert-type items are a common feature of the surveys used to evaluate youth programs. These are items that present a question or statement and use a response continuum, such as Strongly Disagree – Somewhat Disagree – Neutral – Somewhat Agree – Strongly Agree or Never – Sometimes – Always. In scoring, responses are assigned a value, usually 1-5 for an item with five response options. In reporting on responses to these items, you can use averages, but you might also want to show the frequencies of different responses. In the example below, the averages are the same, but the *meaning* might be very different:

Example 1:



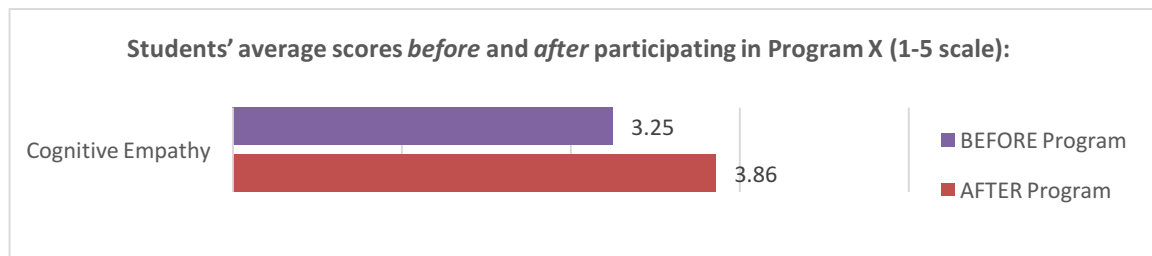
Example 2:



Likert scales combine similar Likert-type items to form a single concept which can be represented by a score (typically this is averaged across items). Below is an example of a Likert scale representing the concept of “cognitive empathy:”¹

	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
1. I can easily tell how others are feeling.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I can often understand how people are feeling even before they tell me.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I can tell when a friend is angry even if he/she tries to hide it.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I can tell when someone acts happy, when they actually are not.	1	2	3	4	5

The individual shown above would have a cognitive empathy score of 3.25 (a simple average across items). Scores like this one are not particularly meaningful in isolation, but can make for interesting comparisons. For example, one could look at between-group differences or at changes over time as shown below:



REPORTING ON RETROSPECTIVE PRE-/POST- ITEMS

Retrospective pre-/post- surveys are very commonly used to measure learning outcomes. They can do a better job of capturing changes in attitudes and behaviors since they are less susceptible to response shift bias than true pre-/post- surveys (see our [tip sheet on bias](#) for more information). One drawback to these kinds of surveys is that responses are generally positive, so in reporting it is important to show the *magnitude* of changes that respondents have experienced. It is also useful to report on how *many* respondents reported change or growth and/or how many reported that they progressed by a specified amount (for example, that they went from a “disagree” to “agree” response).

REPORTING ON OPEN-ENDED ITEMS

Qualitative information – collected from open-ended survey questions – can be more complicated to analyze and report. In general, you will want to group responses into categories, then describe your findings in terms of these categories. While you will want to summarize findings and report major themes in a narrative format, direct quotes can be used as evidence to support your conclusions; they can also make a report more interesting to read. For more information, see our [tip sheet on reporting qualitative data](#).

¹ This is one dimension of a multi-dimensional empathy and sympathy scale. See Vossen, H.G.M., Piotrowski, J.T., Valkenburg, P.M. (2015). Development and validation of the Adolescent Measure of Empathy and Sympathy (AMES). *Personality and Individual Differences*, 74, 66-71.