

The Three-Legged Stool Is Now A Four-Legged Chair: Specification Guidelines for Blaise Survey Instruments

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Much has been written and presented in past IBUC's about the integration and use of good screen design, programming guidelines, and consideration of data out and documentation; the three-legged development stool (e.g. Couper 2000). This paper will focus a fourth aspect The University of Michigan's Survey Research Center has put a considerable amount of effort into developing; Guidelines (or Standards) for creating specifications for Blaise survey instruments.

From 1999, when SRC started developing with Blaise, until the release of the aforementioned publication, the disparity of specifications used in the SRC was very wide ranging and basically up to each survey manager's style, experience, and time available to develop. There were some general rules of thumb that were basically followed; but, in many ways, it was like the Wild West when it came to how specifications for Blaise survey instruments were written. Adherence to screen design standards and programming standards was marginal at best.

In 2007, a proposal was written and funded to develop and publish a book of standards for use in the Survey Research Center that encompassed all of the items listed above; screen design, programming, data documentation, and finally writing specifications for Blaise survey instruments.

This paper will discuss the development of that publication and the specifications chapter in particular. Besides discussing the process and content of the book, samples of it will be included as well as a discussion on the desire to design an experiment which would measure and confirm the anecdotal evidence that has been received since the publication of the book.

Reference

Couper, Mick P. 2000. Development and evaluation of screen design standards for Blaise for Windows. Paper presented at the 6th International Blaise Users Conference, Kinsale, May.