

**How Respondents Answer Questions:
Lessons from Three Decades of Cognitive Research**

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In the mid 1980's, survey methodologists and cognitive psychologists began to explore the cognitive and communicative processes underlying the question-answering process. Three decades after the conferences that initiated this collaboration, I review the key lessons learned. Drawing on survey and laboratory experiments, I highlight respondents' context sensitive construction of question meaning and the inferential processes involved in reports of opinions and behaviors, including predictions of the future and reconstructions of the past. The relative impact of different processes varies by culture and experimental findings indicate that contextual influences can profoundly affect cross-cultural comparisons within and between countries.