

Access to telecommunication systems

2001 Census question

16 Mark as many spaces as you need to show which of these is available here in this dwelling.

DON'T count anything that is disconnected or broken.

- a telephone (or a cell phone that is here all or most of the time)
- fax access
- Internet access
- none of these

Background

This topic is used to gather information about a range of communication systems and hence various levels of access to flow-on services. Information on access to a telephone was obtained from the census from 1966 until 1981 and again in 1996. In 2001 this topic was extended to cover telecommunication systems, acknowledging technological advances in telecommunications.

The *2006 Census: Final Report on Content* noted that during consultation there was concern about maintaining the consistency of the telecommunication question between censuses. However, suggestions were made about removing 'fax access' as a response option and to distinguish between cellphone and landline phone access. These suggestions were trialled during redevelopment, and the outcomes are discussed in the cognitive testing section below.

Development objectives/plan

The objectives identified for the 2006 development were to test:

- separate telephone and cellphone response options
- the removal of 'fax access' as a response option.

To meet these objectives a comprehensive programme of testing was conducted including cognitive testing, analysis of data from field tests and consultation with key stakeholders.

Cognitive testing

The cognitive testing programme was conducted between April 2003 and May 2005 with respondents of varied age, gender and ethnicity. Interviewers observed respondent form-filling behaviour and asked a series of follow-up questions.

The 'access to telecommunication systems' question was redeveloped and tested during rounds two, three and four of the cognitive testing programme.

Cognitive testing results

Round two: June to December 2003

Results from a small number of tests suggested that the response options were clear and self-explanatory to the respondents who were tested. Most respondents marked the cellphone response option. Only a few respondents did not mark 'cellphone', but all of those said they had seen that option. Results showed that all the tested respondents interpreted cellphone to include either their own personal cellphone or a cellphone that belonged to someone living in their household.

A recommendation was made to reinstate 'fax access' as a response option for those who use faxes as a means of communication, and those who have fax access via their computer and/or cellphone. This would also provide greater consistency with 2001.

The order of the telephone and cellphone response options was reversed to avoid respondent error. Listing the cellphone option first would prevent respondents who have a cellphone but not a landline from including their cellphone in the telephone category. This version was tested in round three.

Round three: March to July 2004

As found in the previous round the majority of respondents tested interpreted cellphone to include either their own personal cellphone or a cellphone that belonged to someone living in their household. However, about a quarter of the respondents tested felt that a cellphone was more of a personal item than a household item and said they would not have marked 'cellphone'.

The term 'cellphone' did not confuse any test respondents.

Results also indicated that almost all respondents interpreted Internet access to mean that they had a computer in their home. It appeared that respondents marked the 'Internet access' response option as intended without the need for more detailed information about Internet Service Providers either on the form or in the Guide Notes.

Round four: November 2004 to May 2005

For this round the question was amended by:

- adding the words 'mobile phone' into the cellphone response option for further clarity
- incorporating an extra instruction directing respondents not to count telecommunications equipment that could only be used for work.

Testing focused on what respondents understood the term 'mobile phone' to mean and ascertaining respondent understanding of the phrase 'available for personal use'.

Results suggested that the vast majority of respondents tested thought a cellphone and a mobile phone were the same thing (ie not a landline telephone). Most respondents described a mobile phone/cellphone as a phone that can go anywhere with you and that it is not plugged into a connection. A small number of respondents thought a mobile phone could be a cordless phone (ie a portable landline telephone).

Respondents were asked how they would answer if they were using a cellphone that belonged to somebody else. Results were mixed, with just over half saying they would not mark the cellphone option and just under half saying they would mark that option.

The concept 'available for personal use' appeared to be reasonably well understood with most respondents thinking it meant 'for my own use, it's not for work or business and it is available for me to use at any time, anywhere'.

Almost all respondents who marked the telephone response option said they had only counted their landline and had not thought about or counted cellphones.

During the latter stages of round four very limited testing of two stand alone cellphone questions placed on the individual form was undertaken to see if they would collect information in a reliable and consistent way. However, a separate cellphone question was not proceeded with for the 2006 Census due to conceptual problems around respondents' interpretation of cellphone use and data users' information need.

Even though a cellphone is generally used by an individual rather than all members of a household, it is similar to the concept of 'number of motor vehicles' collected via the dwelling form. Information is being collected about access to use these facilities, not determining what purpose the household uses these for or details of ownership. Retaining the cellphone category with the rest of the telecommunication categories allows analysis of how many dwellings are using cellphones as an alternative to landlines.

Field test results

Field test: June 2004

Results did not indicate any problems and therefore the question was working as intended.

Dress rehearsal: 8 March 2005

The changes in distributions between 2001 and 2006 were within real-world expectations. The question appeared to work well and respondents did not seem to have any issues understanding the 'cellphone/mobile phone' response option.

Changes made for the 2006 Census

17 Mark as many spaces as you need to show which of these are available here in this dwelling.

DONT count

- anything that is disconnected or broken
- anything that can be used ONLY for work

a cellphone / mobile phone (that is here all or most of the time)

a telephone

fax access

Internet access

or none of these

The telephone and cellphone response options have been separated for the 2006 Census. The term 'mobile phone' has been added to the cellphone response option. Fax access remains as a listed response option. Respondents are instructed not to count any telecommunication equipment that can be used only for work.

Future development

Analysis of the 2006 data will determine whether any redevelopment work may be required for 2011.

If a stand-alone cellphone question located on the individual form is to be considered for the 2011 Census a clear set of objectives will be required. Developing a new topic specification will enable a cellphone question to be developed that will meet the needs of data users and stakeholders.