

Rent paid

2001 Census question

11 Do you, or anyone else who lives here, pay rent to the owner (or to their agent) for this dwelling?

yes, go to **12**

no, go to **13**

12 How much rent does the household pay to the owner (or to their agent) for this dwelling?

\$

per

week

two-week period

four-week period

calendar month

other. Print period:

Remember to mark your answer like this:

Background

Five questions from the 1996 and 2001 Censuses covered the broad topic of tenure, including two questions on rent. In the 2001 Census revisions were made to the wording of these questions to address data problems identified in the 1996 Census. However, new data quality concerns were identified in the build-up to 2006 and redevelopment for this series of questions focused on assessing and improving data quality.

Rent indicator question

A number of problems with the 2001 question were identified:

1. In 2001 dwellings may have been incorrectly classified as 'rented' on the basis of tenants or flatmates paying rent to an owner-occupier. The 2001 wording encouraged respondents to focus on individuals within the household by using the words 'you, or anyone else who lives here'. This contradicted the objective for the question, which is to collect information about the rental status of the dwelling.
2. Data from 2001 had shown that around 5 percent of respondents who answered 'no' to this question subsequently provided a rental amount for the follow-up question. Wording may have created some confusion for respondents who did not pay rent directly to a landlord but instead paid rent through a third party, ie via pension deductions or family members etc.

3. Routing instructions may have contributed to item non-response rates in 2001. For example, respondents may have missed seeing and reading the routing instructions and continued to the next question. Alternatively, respondents may have missed marking the appropriate response because their attention was diverted to the routing task, or simply read the question as an 'instruction' that did not require an answer.

Rent amount question

The intention for this question was to collect whole-dollar amounts. However, a high number of respondents in 2001 supplied figures using both dollars and cents which created a problem when information was scanned. For example, \$100.00 was read as \$10,000.

Development objectives/plan

The objectives identified for the 2006 development were to:

- improve the quality of rental data by encouraging respondents to answer questions on the basis of dwelling status
- encourage respondents to enter whole dollar amounts for the rental amount question.

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 'rent paid' questions were redeveloped and identical questions were tested during all rounds of the cognitive testing programme with similar results, therefore results are discussed jointly.

Cognitive testing results

All four rounds: April 2003 to May 2005

To encourage respondents to answer correctly, the rental amount question was revised to replace the 2001 question wording 'Do you or anyone who lives here pay rent to an owner (or to their agent) for this dwelling?' with the words 'Does this **household** pay rent to an owner (or to their agent) for this dwelling?'.

Testing indicated that respondents were generally understood the word 'household' and the new wording helped improve respondents' comprehension of this question. When asked 'what did you understand the word **household** to mean?' respondents' answers confirmed that they were thinking of the people that lived within the dwelling as a 'group' and answered on that basis.

Further revisions to the rent questions included the addition of pre-printed zeros within the 'rental amount' question. These zeros were used to indicate to respondents that only whole dollar amounts should be listed. Testing results showed that respondents generally had a clear understanding of the purpose of the pre-printed zeros, and very few respondents included cents in their answers.

Additional improvements to these questions included revisions to routing instructions. Prompts were added at the beginning of the rental amount question to remind respondents to look for the routing instruction after answering the question, and a single bracketed routing instruction was added to reduce competing visual information, so that instructions would be easier to read. These revisions appeared to work well and few test participants routed incorrectly during testing. However, because respondents were being observed by an interviewer it is possible that they paid greater attention to the routing task than they would have under normal conditions.

Field test results

Field test: November 2003

November test results were comparable with 2001 results. Results also suggested that the number of routing errors had declined slightly when compared with 2001 data.

Field test: March 2004

A split-test format was used to test new routing instructions in the March test. This test involved fielding two different versions of the census forms. In version A the 2001 format was used. In version B new routing instructions were added to the questions. Routing behaviour for this question was influenced by changes to routing formats in earlier questions. However, findings tended to suggest that the new format had helped improve routing accuracy. Fewer respondents routed incorrectly when answering the form using the new format, compared with those answering the form using the 2001 format.

Dress rehearsal: 8 March 2005

The response distributions obtained for this question were not strictly comparable with 2001 results, as a new question was included on the dress rehearsal form to collect information about properties held in trust. However, distributions approximated those observed in 2001.

A lack of attention to skipping instructions continued to be a problem in the dress rehearsal, although the number of routing errors reduced overall.

Other testing

Testing of the rental questions also involved some qualitative testing using eye-tracking software to understand how respondents read and followed routing instructions. The number of tests conducted was small and therefore results were indicative only. However, a comparison of formats between the new and old versions of the question suggested that respondents were more likely to read and respond to routing instructions when completing a form that had the new format.

