

Routing instructions

2001 Census routing instruction examples

New Zealand, go to **11**

yes, go to **17**

6 If this is a private dwelling such as your family's house or a council flat, go to **8**

7 If this is a non-private dwelling, such as one of those listed in this question, mark the space by the one that best describes it.

hotel, motel or guest house

home for the elderly

other such as boarding house, public hospital, etc. Print what it is:

no, go to **10**

Background

The appearance of the routing instructions used in 1996 was altered for the 2001 Census. Routing instructions were placed closer to the response option text and arrows were removed. Changes were also made to font colour and size. These changes were made in an effort to reduce 'clutter' in the form layout and make it easier and clearer for respondents to navigate through the form.

However, data analysis for 2001 suggested that for some questions these changes may have contributed to:

- a larger number of respondents missing routing instructions
- a higher level of non-response for questions that included routing instructions.

Development objectives/plan

The objectives identified for the 2006 development were to identify a routing format that best facilitated correct routing within the form and reduced errors.

To meet these objectives a comprehensive programme of testing was conducted which included 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 routing instructions were redeveloped and tested throughout all rounds of the cognitive testing programme.

Cognitive testing results

Round one: April and May 2003

In round one testing attempted to identify how well respondents were following routing instructions within the forms. Although routing behaviour was generally very good with few respondents routing incorrectly, this may have been because respondents were under observation and may have been paying more attention to the routing task than they would normally.

However, some questions appeared to be difficult for respondents. In particular, the complex routing required for the tenure series of questions on the dwelling form and the 'Māori descent' and 'iwi questions' on the individual form were the questions most likely to lead to routing mistakes.

Rounds two, three and four: June to December 2003, March to July 2004 and November 2004 to May 2005

A number of changes were made to routing instructions at the beginning of round two. These changes included:

- reintroducing arrows between response options and routing instructions
- adding prompts or 'just in time' instructions at the beginning of questions that required respondents to choose route
- expanding routing instructions to include a reminder to mark answers for the 'Māori descent' and 'iwi' questions
- adding a 'detection' statement within the 'sector of the landlord' question, to alert respondents who may have routed incorrectly
- using bracketed instructions within questions which contained a large number of 'go to' instructions, to reduce competing visual information and make instructions easier to read.

During testing these strategies appeared to be successful, with respondents more inclined to notice routing instructions and respond appropriately.

Comments from respondents confirmed that they had read and understood the prompts. However, testing also indicated that respondents soon began to ignore these statements and would forget to route in later questions. Comments also suggested that respondents found the statements annoying when used in every question. Consequently, the number of prompts was reduced and reserved for critical questions at key strategic points in the questionnaire.

Testing further suggested that the additional reminder to 'mark your answer' included within routing instructions for 'Māori descent' and iwi was working as intended, with few respondents forgetting to mark appropriately. However, the cognitive testing situation meant that respondents may have been more inclined to answer carefully.

The 'detection' statement used for the 'sector of the landlord' question was generally effective. This strategy involved the addition of the words 'If nobody here owns it' to the beginning of the question, so that respondents who owned their homes would be alerted to their mistake when reading the question. This statement had been used previously in the 1996 Census. Almost all respondents who reached this question via incorrect routing were prompted to stop and re-read the question. Many then reviewed their previous answers and corrected their mistake.

Field test results

Field test: November 2003

November test results indicated that routing errors had declined marginally for many of the major variables when compared with 2001, including the 'Māori descent' and tenure questions.

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 questionnaires. In version A the 2001 format was used. In version B new routing instructions were added to questions. Findings from this test indicated that the new routing instructions helped improve routing patterns. For example, a higher proportion of respondents answering the form with the new format routed correctly at the first question in the tenure series when compared with those answering the version with the 2001 format. However, overall there were generally higher item non-response rates than in 2001.

Dress rehearsal: 8 March 2005

Results from the dress rehearsal suggested that respondents were routing correctly for some questions, but not for others. Overall item non-response rates in the dress rehearsal were generally higher than item non-response rates in 2001.

Other testing

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

Changes made for the 2006 Census

Look for the 'go to' instruction after you answer the question.

→ go to 8

go to 22 at the bottom of this page

New Zealand → go to 11

mark your answer and go to 15

→ go to 28

For 2006 prompts have been added to the beginning of selected questions to alert respondents to routing instructions. For the 'Māori descent' and 'iwi questions' an additional reminder has been included in the routing instructions to encourage respondents to mark their answers before routing. Arrows have been reintroduced to make instructions more prominent for respondents, and to further increase the visibility of routing instructions there have been changes to the size, colour and fonts.

Future development

For the 2011 Census development it is recommended that the routing formats used in 2006 are further evaluated. The following suggestions are made:

- evaluate item non-response rates for 2006 data to fully assess the effectiveness of instructions
- evaluate 2006 data to see whether inconsistent use of strategies (ie used for only selected questions) caused any confusion for respondents
- where possible, avoid using questions that require routing.