

Why Teacher Tapp Sometimes Asks WEIRD Questions

Do you ever read a Teacher Tapp question and think 'eh?' Yeah, us too!

Sometimes weird questions are a genuine mistake. Like you, we occasionally misspell or leave out a word and so a question no longer makes sense.

BUT a lot of the time there is a reason behind our weird questions, even if it's not immediately obvious.

Below is our guide to WEIRD Teacher Tapp questions:

1. Validated Scales (e.g. pre-tested by science)

Many psychologists spend years testing various iterations of questions so they learn the exact wording to give the most reliable and accurate version of a question. Unfortunately, what works for 'science' can sometimes feel a bit robotic. Such questions can end up sounding impersonal, dull or even a bit confusing.

However, once the results come out, these questions give the most robust data, especially across lots of contexts (e.g. not just teachers but also firefighters, office workers and pilots). They are therefore very useful if you are doing an academic research paper or trying to compare to other professions.

These sorts of questions are typically called 'validated scale' questions. They aren't very fun for Tappers though, so we try not to use lots all at once. But because we do contribute to lots of academic research, we use them occasionally.

2. Experimental Questions (e.g. we are testing IF a question works)

When using validated scales (see above), we ask Tappers questions that were already robustly tested to ensure their reliability. Sometimes, however, a validated scale doesn't currently exist - and so we might want to create one.

For example, let's imagine I want to check how 'curious' you are about teaching. There may not be any questions out there which can reliably tell us this. We may have a hunch of what sorts of questions will reveal your level of curiosity but we need to test them out. To do this we might ask several similar-seeming questions, with a view to figuring out which ones are most

accurate.

Other times it's simply that we can't quite figure out the best formulation for a question. Writing clear questions that are understood in the same way by every teacher – whether they teach year 9, or GCSE English, or a range of vocational subjects – is a skill.

We get it right most of the time but sometimes we try things and they don't work. That's just the way it goes! Many of you write to us via the 'Contact Us' button in the app's settings menu when this happens – and it's really useful. Because even though these types of questions are frustrating, they're vital for research. We can't learn about something until we figure out how to ask about it. Hence they're some of the most important questions we ask, even if you can't always answer them!

3. Jigsaw Questions (e.g. where it seems we are missing a key piece of info)

At Teacher Tapp we are committed to finding out what's actually happening on the ground in schools. Not just learning about opinions, but the reality of school: day-in, day-out. To do this we often ask very specific questions about things happening on a single day or in a single week. Many tappers end up worrying that we are going to miss important information because the thing we are asking about happened to them on a different day or week.

For example, we often ask about anxiety on a Tuesday. Teachers sometimes write to us to say that they always teach a favoured year group on Tuesdays, or have all of their PPA that day, and so it makes a difference to how they feel. 'You're not getting an accurate picture of how I feel on all the other days,' they say.

And they are right. But that is okay.

The great thing about a large Teacher Tapp sample is that it helps give us a clear picture 'on average'. For every person having an unusually cushy Tuesday we are likely to have someone who has an unusually anxious one – e.g. all their worst classes on that day! Furthermore, we have such a large number of data points that a few outliers make almost no difference. This doesn't mean that your answers don't matter. In truth, every answer matters – because it's the power of having lots of answers which makes the difference to Teacher Tapp. If we only had a few people then the outliers suddenly do influence everything a lot. But you don't need to worry with questions like this if you think the rest of your week, or a different month, would yield a different question. We know, and it's all okay!

Another type of Jigsaw Question is where we ask a single question and it may seem we are missing another piece of information to make sense of it. For example, we regularly ask teachers to estimate how many hours they worked last week. Teachers often write to us to say that while they only said a low number, e.g. 20 hours, it's because they are a part-time worker – and so this should be taken into consideration. Again – it's okay! If there is key information like this, we have often asked on another day and we then take it into account when doing detailed research.

4. Repeat Questions (e.g. we need to compare to a past point)

Aaagh, I already answered this question!

When people stop using Teacher Tapp we send out a survey (surprise!) via email to find out why. Sometimes people say they find the questions repetitive. We understand: at present we have around 8 questions that we repeat on a monthly basis, and many more that we ask on either a termly or annual basis.

BUT these are some of the most exciting and interesting results because they help us find out if things are changing in teaching.

How many times have you heard someone say 'kids behave worse now than 10 years ago'? Or 'teacher morale is at an all-time low'? We may feel this way - but how do we know if it's true? Teacher Tapp wants to be able to show whether these trends are real so we often ask questions at certain intervals so that we can track.

For example, we've been looking at anxiety across the pandemic. Each year we look at how many teachers leave their job. And we are watching behaviour very carefully.

So please - even if it's a bit dull - please, please, please keep answering these questions as they are the ones which will have the most power over time!

More to come...