

Response Bias

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Response bias occurs in a study when a participant provides a response that does not reflect their true thoughts, feelings, or behavior. These inaccurate or inadequate responses can negatively impact study results. One type of response bias is the social desirability effect, in which people tend to respond in ways that makes them look good. Participants may be reluctant to admit information that is embarrassing or illegal. People may underreport drug use or driving while intoxicated, for example.

In another form of response bias, participants may choose only the extreme answer choices (the highest and lowest points of a scale, for example) and avoid the midpoint of the scale, or they may stick to the middle and rarely choose the high or low scale points.

Response biases are sometimes due to a participant's personality, but researchers can reduce the likelihood of response bias by changing the construction of the measurement instrument or by making other improvements to the study design. The social desirability effect can be controlled somewhat by allowing participants to complete the study anonymously and by assuring confidentiality of responses