



# FORM SURVEY QUESTIONS

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE FOR  
**Difficult Forms:**  
**How government agencies interact with citizens**

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REPORT BY THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL

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KEY

YES	Count (out of 549)	Per cent %
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1. Does the form have the name of the issuing government department on the front?

YES	385	70 %
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2. Does the name of the form appear on the front page?

YES	543	99 %
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3. Does the form have the logo of the issuing government department on the front page?

YES	285	52 %
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4. Does the form have any endorsement or quality marks from interest groups organisations NOT the government department issuing the form? (e.g. Royal National Institute for the Blind, Plain English Campaign)

YES	31	6 %
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5. Does the form specify on the front page where in the form you should write in CAPITAL LETTERS?

YES	162	30%
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6. Does the form specify on the front page what colour ink you should use?

YES	114	21%
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7. Does the form use shading contrast to make text boxes clearer that have to be filled in by you? (e.g. the text boxes may be shaded or the background around the text boxes may be shaded)

YES	166	30%
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8. Does the form indicate somewhere whether or not it is available in other languages for people whose first language is not English?

YES	21	4%
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9. Does the form indicate somewhere whether or not it is available in large print for people who are visually impaired?

YES	22	4%
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10. Does the form indicate somewhere whether or not it is available in Braille for people who are blind?

YES	17	3%
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11. Does the form leave adequate space so that you can distinguish easily between sections or questions?

YES	410	75%
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12. Does the form have any text boxes that are too small for relevant details to be written in without difficulty?

YES	178	32%
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KEY

YES	Count (out of 549)	Per cent %
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**13. Does the form provide guides or grids to make filling in numbers easier?** (e.g. National Insurance number)

YES	205	37%
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**14. Does the form provide reassurance or guidance for mistakes or crossing-out?** (e.g. comments such 'if you make a mistake, please cross out your mistake and re-write your answer')

YES	7	1%
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**15. Does the form clearly indicate fields that are for 'official use only' and should not be filled in by you?**

YES	182	33%
NO	78	14%
No official use sections	289	53%

**16. What type of section or question numbering does the form use?**

The form does not number any sections or questions	164	30%
The form uses composite numbering for sections and questions (e.g. 1(a),..1(b) OR 1.1,..1.2)	92	17%
The form uses full integers to number sections ONLY e.g. Section 1, Section 2, Section 3,..and so on)	242	44%
The form uses full integers to number ALL questions(e.g. 1,2,3,4,5,..and so on)	0	0
A mix of the above	51	9%
None of the above	0	0

**17. Does the form have design features that clearly signpost your appropriate path through the filling out process?** (e.g. statements next to individual questions such as 'if you fill out Section 6, YOU MUST FILL OUT section 7)

YES	157	29%
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**18. Does the form ask you to fill in the same information more than once?** (e.g. your address, your National Insurance number)

YES	135	25%
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**KEY**

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**IF YES to q18 above**

**What was the information that was asked for more than once?** (please list all information separated by commas)

Your name or somebody else's name	108
Your address or somebody else's address	26
Your date of birth or somebody else's date of birth	7
Signature	9
Other information	43

**19. Is the form organised in a forward progression so that you do not have to turn back and forward?**

YES	465	85%
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**20. Does the form have an index section at the front that gives an overview of contents of the form?**

YES	36	7%
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**21. Does the form have an orientation section at the front that clarifies which parts you need to fill in?** (this should be clearly labelled and should signpost which route you need to take through the form)

YES	115	21%
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**22. How many pages does the form have?**  
(NOTE you should count one side as one page)

1 to 4	411	75%
5 to 10	72	13%
11 to 15	25	5%
16 to 20	22	4%
21 to 25	8	1%
26 to 30	4	1%
31 to 35	1	*
36 to 40	2	*
41 to 45	2	*
46 to 50	1	*
More than 50	1	*

\* less than 0.5 per cent

**23. How many pages ONLY have notes with no text boxes to be filled in?**

1 to 4	155	28%
5 to 10	13	2%
11 to 15	2	*
16 to 20	2	*
21 to 25	1	*
More than 25	2	*
None	374	68%

\* less than 0.5 per cent

**KEY**

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**24. How many pieces of information does the form ask for?** (NOTE you should count maximum number of text boxes that can be filled in - count 'tick box' options which logically have one answer (e.g. Mr, Mrs, Ms, Miss) as one piece of information)

Less than 10	65	12%
10 to 20	139	25%
21 to 30	92	17%
31 to 40	54	10%
41 to 50	43	8%
51 to 60	25	5%
61 to 70	22	4%
71 to 80	13	2%
81 to 90	20	4%
91 to 100	12	2%
More than 100	64	12%

**25. Does the form have any blank text boxes that take up more than half a page?** (NOTE you should answer YES for text boxes that run onto another page and are longer than half a page in total)

YES	93	17%
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**26. Does the form refer you to relevant separate guidance to help you with filling in?**

YES	221	40%
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**27. Does the form give guidance broken down by individual sections or questions?**

No	222	40%
Yes, it refers to separate guidance NOT on the form itself	70	13%
Yes, it has question specific guidance on the form itself	257	47%

**28. Does the form explain obscure terms or language that may not be widely understood?** (NOTE explanation should appear on the form itself or it should refer specifically to guidance notes)

No	179	33%
Yes	74	13%
There are no such terms	296	54%

**29. Does the form explain bureaucratic terms or technical jargon?** (NOTE explanation should appear on the form itself or it should refer specifically to guidance notes)

No	202	36%
Yes	63	12%
There are no such terms	284	52%

**30. Does the form explain what acronyms or abbreviations stand for?** (NOTE you should not count the department form code here - explanation should appear on the form itself or it should refer specifically to guidance notes)

No	142	26%
Yes	41	7%
There are no acronyms or abbreviations	366	67%

**KEY**

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**31. In which person does the form address you?**

1st person ('I' or 'we')	13	2%
2nd person ('you')	317	58%
3rd person ('the applicant')	83	15%
3rd person plus (e.g. 'the person who is applying for welfare')	136	25%
A mix of the above	0	0
None of the above	0	0

**32. In which person does the issuing government department refer to itself on the form?**

The department's name (e.g. The Inland Revenue)	325	59%
1st person plural (e.g. 'We' or 'us')	149	27%
1st person singular ('I' or 'my')	7	1%
A mix of the above	68	12%
None of the above	0	0

**33. Does the form provide explanation for conditions that determine whether or not you fill in a box? (e.g. does it explain statements such as 'only fill in this box if you were born before 1960')**

Yes	55	10%
No	266	48%
There are no such conditional statements	228	42%

**34. Does the form set time limits for any information that has to be recalled in the past? (e.g. if the form asks about past illness, does it specify a limit on how far back you have to think...look out for statements such as 'Do not tell us about any illness you had more than five years ago')**

No	446	81%
Yes	103	19%

**35. Does the form ask you to make estimates on things that seem hard or misleading to quantify? (e.g. how long does it normally take you to get dressed in the morning?)**

YES	50	9%
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KEY

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36. Does the form require any mathematical calculation?

No calculation required	423	77%
Basic addition, subtraction, multiplication, or division	122	22%
More complex calculation using formulae or other non-standard terms	4	1%

37. Does the form reassure you that you can leave boxes blank if you do not know the answer? (e.g. it might say 'do not worry if you have to leave this box blank')

YES	76	14%
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38. Does the form make it clear whether or not you are legally required to fill it in? (e.g. tax return)

YES	51	9%
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39. Does the form generally deliver some positive financial value or benefit to you? (e.g. welfare payment)

YES	176	32%
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40. Does the form generally deliver some positive value or benefit to you that is not financial? (e.g. licence or permit)

YES	290	53%
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41. Is the form designed specifically for surveillance or assessment by the state with no other direct benefits to you? (e.g. census return)

YES	115	21%
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42. Does the form have a pledge or promise that the department will deal with your application or claim inside a particular time period?

YES	52	10%
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43. Does the form state whether or not there are time deadlines that you must comply with for returning relevant documentation?

YES	77	14%
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44. Does the form have a checklist at the end? (NOTE this should refer specifically to a 'checklist' or a 'list of things to remember')

YES	80	15%
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45. Does the form require official documents to be submitted? (i.e. passport, driving licence)

YES	182	33%
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**KEY**

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**46. Does the form provide you with assurance about how official documents will be returned to you? (i.e. passport, driving licence)**

YES	21	12%
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**47. Does the form threaten legal penalties for false or inaccurate entries? (NOTE this may include wording such 'it is a serious offence to...' or 'you risk prosecution...')**

YES	133	24%
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**48. Does the form threaten financial penalties for false or inaccurate entries?**

YES	75	14%
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**49. Does the form threaten financial penalties for late submission?**

YES	26	5%
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**50. Does the form require a photo of the applicant?**

No	526	95%
Yes BUT without countersignature	9	2%
Yes AND with a countersignature	14	3%

**51. Does the form require a signature from you?**

No	86	16%
Yes WITH restrictions on how you write your signature (i.e. going outside the box)	100	18%
Yes WITHOUT restrictions on how you write your signature (i.e. going outside the box)	363	66%

**52. Does the form require a signature from a witness or a counter-signatory?**

YES	38	7%
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**53. Does the form require a signature from a third party who is not a witness? (NOTE this might be a professional or someone who knows you well)**

YES	103	19%
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**54. Does the form give you the option to have somebody else sign on your behalf?**

YES	158	29%
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**55. Does the form have a separate section telling you what you should do with the completed form?**

YES	223	41%
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**KEY**

<b>YES</b>	<b>Count</b> <i>(out of 549)</i>	<b>Per cent</b> <b>%</b>
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**56. Does the form indicate a telephone helpline number?**

<b>YES</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>30%</b>
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**57. Does the form indicate where you can get guidance on the Internet?**

<b>YES</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>15%</b>
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**58. Does the form have a data protection statement?**

<b>YES</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>28%</b>
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**59. Does the form have an opt out clause for you to sign in order to stop your data being shared with other government departments?**

<b>YES</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
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