Survey vs questionnaire

One page: what each word means, which one to use, and how to say it in a report.

The short answer

A questionnaire is the list of questions. A survey is the whole study: who you ask, how you ask, the questionnaire itself and what you do with the answers. Every survey uses a questionnaire (or an interview script), but not every questionnaire is part of a survey.

Side by side

Compare	Questionnaire	Survey
What it is	A set of questions in a set order, with instructions	A study that collects answers from a group and analyses them
Scope	One tool	The whole process: plan, who to ask, questions, collection, analysis
Who answers	One person or many	A group, often chosen to stand for a larger group
What you get	Each person's answers	Counts, percentages and patterns across the group
Can it stand alone?	Yes: an intake form or a health history questionnaire	No: every survey needs a questionnaire or an interview script
Example	A 12-question course feedback form	Sending that form to all 80 students and reporting what they said

Which word to use

- Questionnaire: the form or document that holds the questions.
- Survey: the project of asking a group and reporting the results.
- Poll: one or two quick questions to take a pulse. Survey researchers often use poll and survey for the same kind of study.
- Interview: questions asked out loud, one person at a time. A survey can run as interviews (phone or in person) or as a questionnaire people fill in themselves (paper or online).

Say it right in a report

- We surveyed all 80 students at the end of the spring term.
- The survey used a 12-question questionnaire with rating scales and two open questions.
- Of the 80 students invited, 52 completed the questionnaire. The full questionnaire is in Appendix A.

Sources: AAPOR, The Code of Professional Ethics and Practices (June 2026); Pew Research Center, Writing survey questions. Quotes and links are in the post.