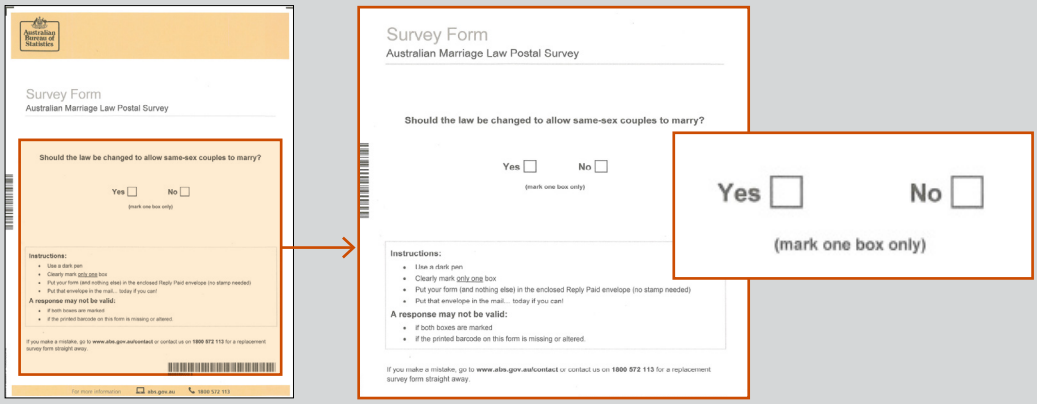
Australian Bureau of Statistics

Guidelines for automatic coding of survey forms

1. Form is recognised, and
2. Form ID validates, and
3. One only of the Yes or No boxes is marked, and
4. The question or the response box words have not been altered, and
5. There are no marks in the blank spaces to the left or right of the response boxes.

Example



Auto-coded	Response coded as
Yes ☑ No ☐ (mark one box only)	Yes
Yes ☒ No ☐ (mark one box only)	Yes
Yes ■ No ☐ (mark one box only)	Yes
Yes ☐ No ☑ (mark one box only)	No
Yes ☐ No ☒ (mark one box only)	No
Yes ☐ No ■ (mark one box only)	No

Australian Bureau of Statistics

Guidelines for manual coding of survey forms

1. The overarching principle for manual coding of survey responses is to determine whether the intent of the respondent is clear.

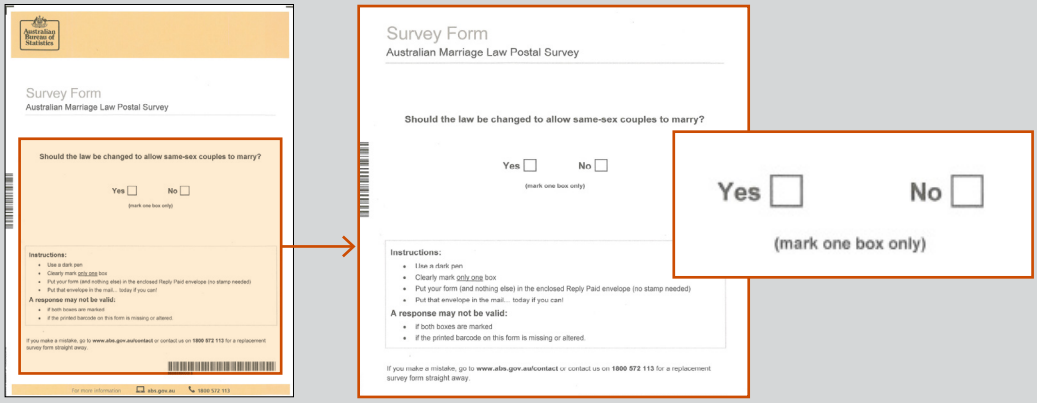
2. Where ticks and crosses are used on the same form, it is reasonable to interpret the tick as the preference and the cross as the last choice.

3. Where numbers are used, it is assumed a lower number (e.g. 1) represents the first choice.

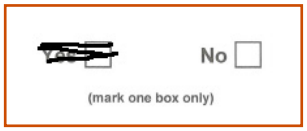
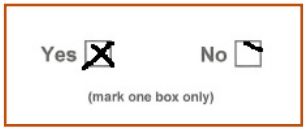
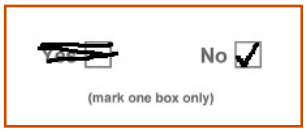
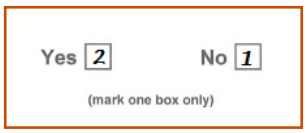
4. If the combination of written text and marks in the response boxes makes the intent of the respondent unclear, the response is coded as 'Response not clear'.

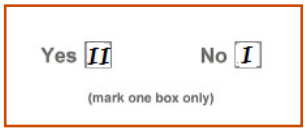
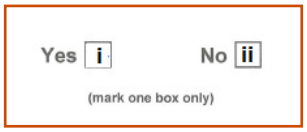
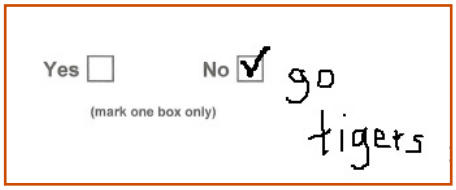
5. If the operator is unable to make a determination on the clarity of response, the record/form is escalated to a supervisor for review.

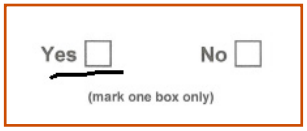
Example



Manually coded	Response coded as	Reason
Yes ☐ No ☐ (mark one box only)	Blank	No clear response
Yes ☒ No ☒ (mark one box only)	Response not clear	No clear response
Yes ☑ No ☑ (mark one box only)	Response not clear	No clear response
Yes ☑ No ☒ (mark one box only)	Yes	Clear intention
Yes ☒ No ☑ (mark one box only)	No	Clear intention
~~Should the law be changed to allow same-sex couples to marry?~~ *<respondent inserts a different question or tampers with question wording>* Yes ☐ No ☐ (mark one box only)	Response not clear	Question text altered to modify meaning of the question
Should the law be changed to allow *marriage equality* ~~same-sex couples to marry~~? Yes ☑ No ☐ (mark one box only)	Yes	Intention of the question is maintained, so the response is clear

Manually coded	Response coded as	Reason
	No	The question has been added to but the intention of the respondent is still clear
	Response not clear	Unclear intent
	No	If response text left intact this is considered valid marking of the 'no' response
	Yes	The mark in the 'no' box is small and likely to be a mistake
	Yes	Clear intent
	Yes	Clear intent
	Yes	Clear intent
	No	Clear intent
	No	Clear intent
	Yes	Clear intent

Manually coded	Response coded as	Reason
	No	Clear intent
	Yes	Clear intent
	Yes	Clear intent with written text No box looks like a scribble
	Response not clear	Unclear intent
	No	Clear intent Self-identification does not invalidate the response (unlike an election)
	No	Clear intent
	Response not clear	Unclear intent
	No	Clear intent Extraneous text ignored

Manually coded	Response coded as	Reason
	No	Clear intent Extraneous pictures ignored
	Yes	Clear intent
	No	Clear intent

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