



UNC CFAR Social and Behavioral Science Research Core SABI Database

INSTRUMENT TITLE: *Alcohol Timeline Followback (TLFB)*

SOURCE ARTICLE: Sobell, L. C., Sobell, M. B. (1992). Timeline follow-back: A Technique for Assessing Self-Reported Alcohol Consumption. *Measuring Alcohol Consumption: Psychosocial and Biological Methods*. pp. 41-72. New Jersey: Humana Press.

RESPONSE OPTIONS: Number of Drinks

SURVEY ITEMS:

Instructions:

Using the attached calendar (download from http://www.nova.edu/gsc/online_files.html), we would like you to reconstruct your drinking for the time period indicated on the calendar. This is not a difficult task, especially when you use the calendar for reference. We have found calendars useful in helping people recall their *drinking*. The following are instructions and tips for completing the calendar.

1. It is important that for each day listed on the calendar, there is a number indicating the number of drinks you consumed. In reporting your total daily consumption, we would like you to report it in STANDARD DRINKS (use the standard drink equivalent card).
2. On the days that you did not drink any alcoholic beverages mark those days with a "0".
3. On the days that you did consume a beverage containing alcohol, write the total number of **Standard Drinks** that you drank on those days. This includes days of combined beverage use. For example, if you drank a glass of wine with dinner and a drink containing 1- 1/2 oz. of hard liquor after dinner, you would count that as 2 standard drinks for that day. **The important thing is to make sure that something is filled in for each day.**
4. In filling out the calendar, we would like you to be as accurate as possible. However, if you cannot recall whether you consumed an alcoholic beverage on Monday or Thursday of a certain week, or whether it was the week of November 9th or the week of November 16th, **give it your best shot!**

TERMS OF USE:

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The purpose of the calendar is to get as accurate a picture of what your drinking has been like for the indicated time period in terms of number of drinking days and number of drinks per day.

HELPFUL HINTS

- A) If you have an **appointment book** or a **daily diary** available, you can **use** it to help you recall your drinking.
- B) As you will notice, **standard holidays** are **marked on the calendar** to help you recall; you can also write in special holidays such as birthdays, vacations, celebrations.
- C) Some people have **regular drinking patterns** and this can help them in filling out the calendar. For example, you may have a **weekend/week day change** in your drinking or your drinking may be different depending on the season, or whether you are on holidays or business trips.

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR ASKING FOR TIMELINE FOLLOW-BACK

INFORMATION:

*Incarcerations or Confinements:

When interviewing alcohol abusers, if they mention hospitalizations, treatment stays, or jail periods that occurred in the recall period, it is often easy to start with those events as they are discrete and time bound.

For example, the interviewer can ask: "You said that you were in a hospital sometime in the last year. What were the dates you were there? Did you have anything to drink during this time?"

NOTE: Stays in jails, hospitals, or residential treatment programs do not preclude frequent drug or alcohol use. Thus, to obtain accurate data, it is important to assess alcohol use during periods

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of incarcerations. On the calendar, these days are coded as both incarcerated and an amount consumed is listed.

*Probing Extended Abstinent or Drinking Periods:

"Were there any times in this recall period when you had nothing at all to drink, not even a drop of alcohol?"

"What was the longest period of total abstinence during this time?"

"What was the next longest period of total abstinence?"

"What was the longest number of continuous days in a row you were drinking during this period?" (determine dates and amounts of alcohol consumed on each day)

"What was the next longest period of continuous drinking days?"

*Other Events:

Sometimes when being interviewed people will report not drinking during a particular period. For example, a person may say "I wasn't working during October, so I had no money to drink, but when I returned to work in May I started drinking." These time periods can be listed on the calendar and then questions can be directed to the time periods around such events.

Sometimes people drink routinely after or at particular events (e.g., bowling on Mondays; hockey on Thursdays; playing pool). To this end, the interviewer can specifically ask the person:

"Were there any times or events where you almost always drank alcohol? For example,"

*Completing the Calendar in a Flexible Manner.

Wherever people feel comfortable in filling out the calendar can be the starting date. People can go forwards or backwards from the interview date or jump around from month to month.

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If a person has trouble recalling his/her drinking, try working back from when the person entered treatment. Say 'What about this past month, what was your drinking like then?' The most recent months should be the most familiar, and the person might find it easier to reflect upon those periods. Ask questions about special occasions (**birthdays, weddings**) and use these days as anchors or reference points to help the person better recall his/her drinking.

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