

TABLE S7-26

Correct answers to individual factual knowledge questions: 1985–2018

(Percent)

Question	1985 (n = 1,986)	1988 (n = 2,041)	1990 (n = 2,005)	1992 (n = 1,995)	1995 (n = 2,006)	1997 (n = 2,000)	1999 (n = 1,882)	2001 (n = 1,574)	2004 (n = 2,025)	2006 (n = 1,864)	2008 (n = 2,021)	2010 (n = 1,932)	2012 (n = 2,256)	2014 (n = 2,130)	2016 (n = 1,390)	2018 (n = 1,175)
The nine questions used to calculate the average factual knowledge measure																
<i>The center of the Earth is very hot. (True)</i>	na	80	79	81	78	82	80	80	78	80	84	84	84	84	85	86
<i>The continents on which we live have been moving their locations for millions of years and will continue to move in the future. (True)</i>	79	80	77	79	78	78	80	79	77	80	78	80	83	82	81	79
<i>Does the Earth go around the Sun, or does the Sun go around the Earth? (Earth around Sun)</i>	na	73	73	71	73	73	72	75	71	76	72	73	74	76	73	72
<i>All radioactivity is man-made. (False)</i>	na	65	63	73	72	71	71	76	73	70	71	67	72	72	70	68
<i>It is the father's gene that decides whether the baby is a boy or a girl. (True)^a</i>	na	na	na	65	64	62	66	65	62	64	62	61	63	59	59	59
<i>How long does it take for the Earth to go around the Sun? (One year)^b</i>	na	45	48	46	47	48	49	54	na	55	52	52	55	54	51	54
<i>Antibiotics kill viruses as well as bacteria. (False)</i>	na	25	30	35	40	43	45	51	54	56	54	50	51	55	51	50
<i>Electrons are smaller than atoms. (True)</i>	na	43	41	46	44	43	46	48	45	53	54	51	53	51	48	46
<i>Lasers work by focusing sound waves. (False)</i>	na	36	37	37	40	39	43	45	42	45	49	47	47	50	45	44
Other questions																
<i>The universe began with a huge explosion. (True)^c</i>	na	54	32	38	35	32	33	33	33	33	33	38	39	42	39	38
<i>Human beings, as we know them today, developed from earlier species of animals. (True)^d</i>	45	46	45	45	44	44	45	53	42	43	46	47	48	49	52	49
<i>It is the mother's gene that decides whether the baby is a boy or a girl. (False)^e</i>	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	72	na	na	na	na	na

na = not applicable; question was not asked.

^a Question was asked of 1,506 survey respondents in 2008.

^b Question was asked only of survey respondents who answered correctly that the Earth goes around the Sun. Individuals who responded incorrectly that the Sun goes around the Earth also counted as having responded incorrectly to the question on the length of the Earth's revolution around the Sun.

^c Question was asked of 1,558 survey respondents in 2004, 1,152 respondents in 2012, 457 respondents in 2016, and 404 respondents in 2018.

^d Question was asked of 1,558 survey respondents in 2004, 1,152 respondents in 2012, 704 respondents in 2016, and 794 respondents in 2018.

^e Question was asked of 515 survey respondents in 2008.

Note(s)

Responses of "don't know" and refusals to respond are counted as incorrect and are not shown.

Source(s)

National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, National Science Foundation, Survey of Public Attitudes Toward and Understanding of Science and Technology (1985–2001); University of Michigan, Survey of Consumer Attitudes (2004); NORC at the University of Chicago, General Social Survey (2006–18).

Science and Engineering Indicators