

Alcohol Timeline Followback (TLFB): Interviewer Administered Instructions for Completing the TLFB Calendar

Note: Research over the last 40 years has shown that most drinkers can complete a self-administered or Internet version of the TLFB. However, there are some individuals where an interviewer-administered version can aid in helping them complete the form.

The TLFB instructions in this form can be used when (a) a study protocol requires an interviewer to complete the TLFB with the person, (b) individuals have trouble reading the TLFB instructions, or (c) individuals cannot complete the TLFB on their own (e.g., older adults, cognitively challenged).

A shorter self-administered set of instructions is also available on our website at (<http://www.nova.edu/gsc>).

Introduction

- What want to do today is get an idea of what your drinking was like recently, and to do this we use a calendar like this one (**show sample calendar**).
- **Now, what I would like to do is to ask you about your drinking over the past XX days.** During this time period we want to get an idea of how much alcohol you consumed on each day
- **This is not hard to do, especially when we use a calendar to help you recall your drinking.**
- What we have found is that calendars are very useful in helping people recall their drinking and any drinking patterns they may have.
- On this sample calendar (**show person sample calendar**), as you can see, a number has been filled in for each day.
- The idea is to put a number in for **each day** on your calendar.
- On days when you did not drink **ANY** alcohol, not even a sip, you would write “0.”
- On days when you did drink, you would write in the total number of drinks consumed.

THE IMPORTANT THING IS TO MAKE SURE SOMETHING IS WRITTEN IN FOR EACH DAY ON THE CALENDAR!

Your Best Estimate

- In filling out the calendar, we want you to be as accurate as possible. However, we recognize that it is not always easy to recall events with 100% accuracy, whether it is drinking or anything else.
- If you are not sure whether you drank 7 or 11 drinks on a given day or whether you drank on a Thursday or a Friday, **GIVE IT YOUR BEST GUESS!** What is important is that 7 or 11 drinks are very different from 1 or 2 drinks or from 25 drinks. **The goal is to get a sense of how frequently you drank, how much you drank, and your patterns of drinking.**
- Also, if you are not sure whether you drank 15, 16, or 17 drinks, **choose the midpoint** of the range, so for 15 to 17 drinks, you would write “16” drinks.
- Again, the important point is that 15 to 17 drinks is very different than if you said you drank only 1 or 2 drinks or 30 or 31 drinks. Does that make sense?
- **So, in summary, what we want you to do is to use the calendar to help you better recall your drinking.**

Standard Drinks




In filling out the calendar, we ask you to report your drinking in what we call **Standard Drinks**. We use this because different types of alcoholic beverages—**beer, wine, and hard liquor contain different amounts of alcohol.**

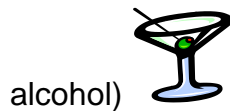
US Standard Drink Conversion Chart:

This card shows what a Standard Drink is (show the person the standard drink card).

One Standard Drink Is Equal To:

-  1 12 oz can of **BEER** (5% alcohol) 

- 
 5 oz of **WINE** (10% – 12% alcohol)
 
- 3 oz of **FORTIFIED WINE** (17% – 23% alcohol)
- 
 1-1/2 oz of **HARD LIQUOR or SPIRITS** (86 – 100 proof; 43% – 50%



alcohol)

- WINE:** 1 Bottle

25 oz./750 ml = 5 standard drinks

40 oz./1.5 liter = 8 standard drinks

25 oz. fortified = 8 1/3 standard drinks

- HARD LIQUOR:** 1 Bottle

12 oz. (mickey) = 8 standard drinks

26 oz. = 17-1/3 standard drinks

40 oz. = 26-2/3 standard drinks

The following questions should be asked before starting the TLFB calendar to make sure people understand how to use standard drinks to report their drinking.

- What type of alcoholic beverage do you typically drink? (**e.g., person says beer**)

- So if you had 6 beers on a given day, how many standard drinks would that be? **(person should say 6 standard drinks)**
- Now if you drink more than one type of alcoholic beverage using Standard Drinks is also easy. For example, if you had two regular beers and three 5-oz glasses of wine, how many Standard Drinks would that be? **(person should say 5 standard drinks)**
- Do you think you understand how to report you drinking using Standard Drinks? **(person replies)**

Starting the Calendar: Review the Sample Calendar First

Before starting, let’s look at what a completed sample calendar looks like

2014	SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
						1 8	2 0
S	3 7	4 Labor Day 0	5 3	6 8	7 1	8 0	9 11
E	10 2	11 2	12 0	13 3	14 5	15 14	16 4
P	17 2	18 0	19 0	20 0	21 0	22 2	23 13
T	24 0	25 0	26 6	27 0	28 0	29 0	30 2

- Let’s begin! What we want you to do is use the calendar to record your drinking over the past **## days**.
- The time period we are talking about on the calendar is from _____ to _____
- As I said before, **in estimating your drinking we want you to be as accurate as possible.**
- Let’s start with yesterday (**insert date**) and go back # # days—those dates are (**insert date**) through (**insert date**). **(Interviewer marks these dates on the actual TLFB calendar and shows the calendar to the person)**

- Do you have any special holidays or dates you want to mark on the calendar to help you better recall your drinking during the past **## days**? **(person replies and the interviewer enters the days in the calendar as appropriate)**
- When did you last drink in this **## day** period? **(person replies with a date)**
- How many standard drinks did you drink on that day? **(person replies with an amount, and interviewer puts that number in on the calendar for the appropriate date)**
- **What was the greatest number of standard drinks you consumed on any given day during this period?** Do you recall when this occurred? **(person replies with an amount and a date and interviewer puts that number on the calendar)**
- **What was the least number of standard drinks** during this period? **(Person replies with an amount and a date and interviewer puts the date and number on the calendar)**
- As mentioned earlier, some people will have patterns to their drinking that can help them recall their use. Do you have any notable patterns to your drinking? **(person replies)**

Probing Extended Abstinent or Heavy Drinking Periods

1. During this period, did you have any extended periods of abstinence of 7 days or more when you did not drink any alcohol at all, **not even a drop?** **(person replies and interviewer writes in the dates and “0” for each of these days on the calendar)**
 - What was the longest period of total abstinence during this time?
 - What was the next longest period of total abstinence?
2. During this period, did you have any extended periods of heavy drinking of **(insert whatever number for how the study defines heavy drinking)?** **(person replies)**
 - What was the longest number of continuous days in a row you were drinking heavily during this period? **(interviewer determines the dates and amounts of heavy drinking on each day and writes this on the calendar)**
 - What was the next longest period of continuous heavy drinking days?

3. When the person does not have any more extended periods of heavy drinking or abstinence, you can go back and fill in the rest of the calendar with them.

The Calendar Can Be Completed in a Flexible Manner

- People can start from either end of the calendar and work forward or backward, or jump around from month to month, week to week.
- If someone has trouble recalling his/her drinking, try working back from today's date. Say, "What about this past month; what was your drinking like then?" The most recent months are often most familiar, and the person might find it easier to reflect upon those periods first.
- Several memory aids were developed to help people recall their drinking using the TLFB. Descriptions of those memory aids appear on the next pages.
- **Important Last Reminder:** Before letting the person leave, **double-check that ALL days have been filled in on the calendar.**

More Helpful Hints for Completing the TLFB

There are a few other tips that people can use to help them better recall their drinking using the calendar.

- If you have an **appointment book**, a **daily diary**, or **smart phone** you can use **them** to help you recall your drinking.
- **Holidays** such as Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas **are** marked on the calendar to help you better recall your drinking. Also, think about how much you drank on personal holidays and events such as birthdays, vacations, or parties. You can also write in personal holidays and events such as birthdays, vacations, celebrations, major sporting events, and so on.
- People who have fairly **regular drinking patterns** can use them to complete the calendar. For example, you may have a different **weekday vs. weekend drinking pattern**, or you may drink more in the summer or on vacations or holidays, or on a certain day you always drink while doing something (e.g., playing sports or cards).

Alcohol Timeline Followback Recall Aids

DAILY CALENDAR: The daily calendar provides a temporal framework for recalling events and patterns related to a person's use of alcohol. Some people have found it useful to consult their personal appointment or date books or smartphones as aids in completing the calendar. **Use of aids is encouraged.** Calendar aids have also been used to help people recall relapse episodes.

KEY DATES: Use of holidays, birthdays, newsworthy events and other personal events that are meaningful to people can assist recall of their alcohol use. In this regard, the TLFB calendar and computerized program displays standard holidays on the calendar and, as part of the instructions, people can be asked to identify their own personal holidays and significant events. These latter events may be generic (e.g., major sporting event, major news events) or idiosyncratic events (e.g., person's own or others' birthdays, dates of important personal events such as changing jobs, buying a house).

BLACK AND WHITE DAYS: People are asked to recall lengthy periods of time when they completely abstained or used alcohol in a very patterned manner (e.g., 5 drinks every day; one to two drinks every Wednesday; eight beers routinely on Fridays and Saturdays), or drank heavily regularly for an extended period of time.

DISCRETE EVENTS AND ANCHOR POINTS: Like holidays, use of specific events such as arrests, hospitalizations, illnesses, employment, and treatment participation can be used to help people identify periods of extended alcohol use or abstinence. Anchor points can be used to identify use that occurs during, before and after events (e.g., job loss, marital breakup) or notable drinking episodes (e.g., started using after the death of a close relative). We have found that people remember what they were doing around these anchor dates and can reconstruct their drinking for substantial periods based specific dates.

ALCOHOL USE BOUNDARIES: A boundary procedure establishes upper and lower amounts of use for the recall interval under consideration. When starting the interview, the interviewer can ask about the highest number and lowest number of standard drinks consumed on any day in the reporting period. Reporting the highest number of standard drinks consumed gives the person permission to admit to high levels of use.

EXAGGERATION TECHNIQUE: To avoid vague or nondescript alcohol use descriptions (e.g., "I drank a lot", "I didn't drink very much") people can be presented with an exaggerated minimum or maximum value to help define the amount. This technique is designed to target approximate levels of consumption in difficult cases. For example, if a person reports having drunk "a lot" of beers on a day, but claims an inability to specify


what "a lot" means, the interviewer can ask the person "Does 'a lot' mean two beers or 30 beers?" A typical response to this question might take the form of "certainly not 30 beers, more like 12 to 14 beers."

STANDARD DRINK CONVERSION: Alcoholic beverages vary in their alcohol concentration and drink size. In addition, many drinkers report combined beverage use (e.g., two beers and one glass of wine). Thus, it is important when collecting drinking data to agree on what constitutes a "drink." This problem has been addressed by asking people to report their drinking using a standard drink conversion. Cards showing standard equivalences should be used when completing the TLFB.

WHAT IS A STANDARD DRINK?

A standard drink (SD) is any drink that contains about 14 grams of pure alcohol (about 0.6 fluid ounces).

Below are different standard drink equivalents for different alcoholic beverages. Because there are many types of alcoholic beverages and brands, the exact content will vary.

Standard Drink Equivalents (% alcohol content)	Approximate Number of Standard Drinks in Different Beverages
Beer^a or Wine Coolers (~5%) 	12 oz. can or bottle = 1.0 16 oz. can or bottle = 1.3 24 oz. can or bottle = 2.0 40 oz. bottle = 3.3
Malt Liquor (~7%) 	12 oz. can or bottle = 1.4 16 oz. can or bottle = 1.9 24 oz. can or bottle = 2.8 40 oz. bottle = 4.7
Table Wine^a (~12% - 14%) 	5 oz. glass = 1.0 25 oz. bottle = 5.0 40 oz. bottle = 8.0 Fortified or sweet wine (18% - 20%) 1 SD = 3 oz.
Hard Liquor/Spirits (~40%; 80-proof) 	1.5 oz. spirits in a straight drink = 1.5 1.5 oz. spirits in a mixed drink = 1.5 12 oz. (mickey) = 8.0 25 oz. bottle = 17.0 40 oz. bottle = 27

^a For light beer or light wine, standard drinks (SDs) are calculated in terms of a ratio (e.g., 12 oz. of 2.5% light beer = 0.5 SDs; 12 oz. of 4% light beer = 0.8 SDs).