

# Rating Scales

## Overview — Two Places, One Setting

A **rating scale** is the set of options a respondent picks from when answering a rated survey question, and the numeric values NSCAT uses to average and trend those answers.

The scale is configured in **two places**, and they do different jobs:

| Where               | What it sets                                                           | Reached from                                                   |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Manage Utility      | The <b>default</b> for activities created from now on in that utility. | <b>Administration</b> → <b>Utility</b> → <b>Manage Utility</b> |
| Activity Properties | The scale used by <b>one specific activity</b> .                       | The activity's menu → <b>Properties</b>                        |

**HEADS UP** The utility setting is a **default applied at creation time**, not a live link. Changing it never updates an existing activity. If you need to change an activity that already exists, do it on that activity's **Properties** page.

## The Two Scales

NSCAT offers a choice of two, and only two, scales.

| Scale   | Positions                                                                                                                     | Values used in calculations |
|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 3-Point | Negative, Neutral, Positive                                                                                                   | -1, 0, +1                   |
| 7-Point | Strongly Negative, Moderately Negative, Slightly Negative, Neutral, Slightly Positive, Moderately Positive, Strongly Positive | -3, -2, -1, 0, +1, +2, +3   |

The values are fixed. You can rename any position, but you cannot change what a position is worth — averages, theme scores, CPRO rankings, and trend lines are all computed from these numbers.

**GOOD TO KNOW** Both scales are symmetrical around a **Neutral** midpoint of **0**. That is what makes a positive or negative average meaningful in reports, and it is why the position count is fixed at 3 or 7 rather than freely configurable.

**PRO TIP** Choose 7-point when you want to distinguish strength of feeling and expect enough responses to make the finer gradations meaningful. Choose 3-point for shorter surveys, hard-copy collection, or when respondents are unlikely to use seven positions consistently. Whichever you pick, keep it consistent across activities you intend to trend together.

## Setting the Utility Default

In **Manage Utility**, the **Default Rating Scale Configuration** panel sets what new activities inherit. Full detail is on **Utilities**; in brief:

- The **Rating Scale** toggle picks 3-Point or 7-Point.
- **Customize Rating Labels (Optional)** replaces the wording for any position.
- **Preview: How ratings will appear to users** shows the result live.

You may edit it when you are a **COG Admin** (any utility), or a **Utility Admin** whose own utility is the one on screen. Otherwise the panel shows "**You have read-only access.**"

**PRO TIP** Set the utility default once, before the first activity is created, and leave it alone. Every activity then starts consistent, and cross-activity reports stay comparable without anyone having to remember to adjust each one.

## Setting an Activity's Scale

Open the activity's **Properties** page. The **Rating Scale Configuration** section works the same way as the utility panel — a scale toggle, optional per-position labels, and a live preview.

[image.png](#)

*Rating Scale Configuration on the Properties page.*

On success you get **Rating Scale Saved** — "*The activity rating scale has been saved successfully.*"

# Who can change it

All three conditions must hold:

1. The activity is **not locked**.
2. You are a **COG Admin**, or a **Utility Admin** whose utility matches the activity's utility.
3. The activity has **no recorded responses** (see below).

**GOOD TO KNOW** A locked activity disables the scale controls along with everything else, and locking also hides **Properties** from the activity's menu entirely. A COG Admin must unlock the activity first — see **Manage Activities**.

## The responses lock

**Once an activity has any recorded response, its scale type is frozen.** Attempting to switch it snaps the toggle back to its previous value and shows:

image.png

**Cannot Change Rating Scale** — *The rating scale type cannot be changed because this activity already has recorded responses.*

You may still see a related message on the survey side:

**Cannot Change Rating Scale** — *The rating scale cannot be changed because responses have already been submitted.*

**HEADS UP** This lock is deliberate and cannot be overridden — not by a COG Admin, not by unlocking the activity. A response recorded as "+2 on a 7-point scale" has no honest equivalent on a 3-point scale, so NSCAT refuses rather than silently reinterpreting your data. **Fix the scale before you distribute the survey link.**

**GOOD TO KNOW** The lock is on the **scale type** — the choice of 3 versus 7. It does not stop you from correcting **labels**. Renaming a position only changes displayed wording; the underlying values, and therefore every existing response, are unaffected.

**PRO TIP** If an activity is already collecting responses on the wrong scale and the data so far is expendable, the only route is a **new activity** created with the correct scale. Decide early — the cost of starting over grows with every response.

# Switching scale clears the labels

Changing between 3-Point and 7-Point on an activity **discards any custom labels** you had entered. This is unavoidable — the two scales have different numbers of positions, so old labels cannot be mapped onto new ones.

**PRO TIP** Settle the scale type **first**, then write the labels. Doing it the other way round means typing them twice.

## Customizing Labels

Both panels list one field per position, numbered, with the standard wording as the placeholder and the position's numeric value shown as a hint. Fields are colour-coded — red for negative, grey for neutral, green for positive.

Leave a field empty and that position falls back to its standard wording. You can rename some positions and leave the rest alone.

[image.png](#)

**GOOD TO KNOW** Custom labels change only what respondents and report readers **see**. A position renamed from *Slightly Positive* to *Somewhat Agree* is still worth **+1** in every calculation.

**HEADS UP** Keep custom labels in the same **direction and order** as the positions they replace — position 1 is always the most negative. Labelling them out of order will not change the maths, but it will make every report read backwards.

**PRO TIP** Custom labels are the right tool when your organization has house wording for survey scales, or when a translated survey needs phrasing the standard labels do not give. Check the result in the preview panel — it renders exactly as respondents will see it.

## Common Problems

| What you see                                                              | What it means                                                                                            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Cannot Change Rating Scale</b> — <i>already has recorded responses</i> | The scale type is frozen. Labels can still be edited; the type cannot. A new activity is the only route. |
| Scale toggle snaps back on its own                                        | Same cause — the activity has responses.                                                                 |

|                                                           |                                                                                                |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| " <b>You have read-only access</b> " on the utility panel | You are a Utility Admin viewing a utility that is not yours.                                   |
| Scale controls greyed out on <b>Properties</b>            | The activity is locked, or the activity's utility is not yours.                                |
| <b>Properties</b> missing from the activity menu          | The activity is locked. A COG Admin must unlock it.                                            |
| Custom labels vanished                                    | You switched scale type. Labels are cleared on switch — re-enter them after settling the type. |
| Changed the utility default; existing activity unchanged  | Expected. The default applies at creation time only.                                           |
| Two activities won't trend together sensibly              | They likely use different scale types. Trend activities that share a scale.                    |

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