

# Online Surveys: An Engaging Teacher Tool

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Online surveys have become quite common, and we've all submitted our responses to SurveyMonkey.com on various topics. Online surveys can also be used as an engaging tool for language development, teaching academic skills, and developing critical thinking skills (Lebedev, 2009). However, teaching survey writing can involve certain challenges. How can we help students formulate survey questions that elicit meaningful answers? How can we frame the survey assignment and final projects in a way that will engage student interest?

**Target Audience:** intermediate/advanced ESL students in secondary/higher education

**Learning Outcomes:**

At the end of this unit, students should be able to:

- Write simple surveys on a topic
- Discuss survey results in small groups
- Write and discuss an interpretation of the survey results

The survey assignment was divided into preparation activities, online activities, and the analysis and product stage. We spent considerable time working with the language components involved in writing successful survey questions and responses. For example, we asked students to consider the type of information they wanted to elicit from their survey: numbers, opinions, reasons, ways, or likes. We discussed question types such as how closed-ended questions have a fixed set of answers. We introduced vocabulary for these questions such as adverbs of frequency. For example: "How often do you.....? Daily, weekly, monthly, never." (See Figure 1 for a sample survey question.)

For final products, students presented survey results in both a written analysis and an oral presentation. They had four areas to include in their interpretation. The first was the topic of their survey. Next, they explained what methods were used to gather the data. For example, did students ask yes/no questions or questions that

	Actors/actresses	Plot/Story	Cultural/social themes	Special effects
Excellent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Very Good	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fair	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Poor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Figure 1. Sample survey question using SurveyMonkey.com

required the participants to complete a rating scale such as excellent, good, or poor?

The third area was the findings section. For example, “50% of the participants rated the film as excellent.” Finally, the students had to use critical thinking skills to discuss the implications of their surveys. Table 1 below shows the different activities in the project.

In sum, *SurveyMonkey.com* provides an instructional scaffolding approach to promote language learning by offering a compelling software tool, survey templates, and partial completion of the data manipulation tasks for the student. Zorfass & Copel (1995) write that if practice activities used in class have a product or performance focus, they will be more meaningful to students. Publishing and presenting the survey analyses personalized the projects and made them engaging for our students.

## References

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- Zorfass, J., & Copel, H. (1995). The I-search: Guiding students toward relevant research. *Educational Leadership*, 53 (1), 48-51.
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**Table 1. Survey-related activities by type**

<b>Preparation Activities</b>	<b>Online Activities</b>	<b>Analysis and Product</b>
Take model online survey.	Write survey questions, answers and discuss with partner and instructor.	Introduce/review graph interpretation language.
Learn <i>SurveyMonkey</i> software, process vocabulary.	Create survey with free online survey tool: <i>SurveyMonkey</i> .	Discuss survey results in pairs or small groups.
List information to elicit through survey questions.	Write polite email message to request survey responses.	Write first and second drafts of survey analysis including topic, methods, findings and implications.
Study closed-ended and open-ended question types, adverbs of frequency, wh-questions, verb tenses, vocabulary for scale answers.	After instructor approval of survey questions, answers and email messages, send messages to collect responses.	Final products: Post survey analysis on student/class web page. Present survey analysis to class.