

Using Moodle Surveys as an Active Learning Activity



Moodle surveys are a great tool for conducting surveys that can be discussed in class. I find them useful for large Gen Eds in which I have a lot of students who can be surveyed. As a linguist, I use the Moodle survey tool to create surveys that replicate published surveys in linguistics and to create my own surveys based on course readings and other materials. Moodle surveys can be used in any social science discipline for these same purposes.

Benefits

For Your Students

Rather than just reading about surveys done by researchers in your field, students can participate in modified versions of those surveys. This makes for interesting class discussions and gives students a chance to engage in a course activity that approximates participation in a research study. Students enjoy taking the surveys because they can compare their responses with those of other class members and respondents in published studies.

For the Instructor

Surveys can be used as an additional graded assignment in your courses, especially Gen Eds. They provide a fun and educational learning activity and a break from the usual routine. I also use them as an “easy” assignment that contrasts with more difficult analytical assignments.

Example 1: Replicating an Existing Survey

I use Moodle surveys to replicate existing surveys in the linguistics literature. One such survey is Dennis Preston’s “They Speak Really Bad English Down South and in New York City,” published as an essay in *Language Myths*.¹ (The essays in the book discuss common myths about language.) An interactive version of Preston’s survey is provided on the website for the PBS documentary, *Do You Speak American?*² I replicate the PBS survey in Moodle to collect student responses. After students complete the survey, we compare their responses with those of Preston’s respondents. This adds a unique and personal dimension to our discussion of Preston’s findings.

Example 2: Creating a Survey Based on Course Materials

I also use Moodle surveys to create my own surveys based on course readings and other materials. One example is a survey about women’s and men’s communication styles based on linguist Deborah Tannen’s best-selling book, *You Just Don’t Understand*.³ Tannen discusses how men and women are socialized to use talk in gender-specific ways.

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I created a survey in which I list thirteen of her statements about women's and men's socialization as it relates to talk and ask students whether they agree or disagree with those statements. I have two surveys with the same questions, one for male class members and one for female class members. I also have a comment question at the end of both surveys. After students complete the survey, we compare female and male class members' responses and comments. The differences in students' views spark thought-provoking discussions.

Tips

1. Although Moodle surveys record all students' responses, Moodle does not assign grades for completed surveys. You will need to check students' responses for completeness and accuracy and assign grades manually in the Moodle grade book. An easy way to assign grades quickly for this assignment is to use the "Bulk Insert" command in the grade book. Use it to give respondents who completed the survey as intended a full score and non-respondents a zero. (To find the "Bulk Insert" command, go to the Moodle grade book for your course, click "Single View," and click on your survey item. "Bulk Insert" will be at the bottom of the page.)
2. To make surveys more substantive, add a short essay question at the bottom of the survey asking students to comment on a relevant issue, such as what they learned from the survey, how it compares with their experience, etc. I always specify a minimum word count so that students know how much detail I am looking for, and I ask them to state their word count.
3. Announce surveys to your class and explain that they will not appear on their Dashboard page (their main Moodle page) like quizzes and other graded items do. Students need to enter the course page and find the survey there to complete it.
4. When you create Moodle surveys, make sure to add a completion message after the survey telling students that they have successfully submitted the survey. Emphasize that if they do not see the completion message, they did not successfully submit their answers, and they need to try again. (To add a completion message, go to "Edit Settings" for the survey and click "After Submission." You can add your message in the "Completion Message" cell.)

¹ Preston, Dennis. "They Speak Really Bad English Down South and in New York City." *Language Myths*, edited by Laurie Bauer and Peter Trudgill, Penguin, 1998, pp. 139-149.

² "Mapping Attitudes." *Do You Speak American?*, www.pbs.org/speak/speech/mapping/map.html. Accessed 25 April 2017.

³ Tannen, Deborah. *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*. Harper Collins, 1990.

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