Online Polling [HPEC Fast Facts]

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CITATION

Moffett, Jenny (2020): Online Polling [HPEC Fast Facts]. Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland. Journal contribution. https://hdl.handle.net/10779/rcsi.12220634.v1

HANDLE

10779/rcsi.12220634.v1

URL

https://repository.rcsi.com/articles/journal_contribution/Online_Polling_HPEC_Fast_Facts_/12220634/1

HPEC Fast Facts

How to: online polling

HOW TO?
ONLINE POLLING

RCSI

Audience response technology has become a popular addition to the health professions' classroom. Whether through more traditional "clicker" systems, or newer online polling platforms, this approach can engage students in active learning and facilitate formative assessment. Studies have highlighted that audience response technology can boost learner attention and participation, and improve test performance (Kay & LeSage, 2009; Glass & Sinha, 2013; Lantz & Stawiski, 2014).

However, educators can be discouraged by the learning curve involved, and the time required to prepare questions. In this "How to?" guide, we look at simple, practical ways to get started with online polling in the classroom.

Before class

The vast array of available online polling solutions can be disorienting. Industry leaders include Mentimeter, Poll Everywhere and Kahoot. Each option has its own strengths and weakness. For the purposes of this guide, we will use Mentimeter. With this option, a free account allows you an unlimited

audience size and unlimited presentations, but you'll need to upgrade to a paid plan to increase the number of questions you want to ask.

To prepare your first online poll, create an account at Mentimeter.com, and click on "New presentation." From here, you can prepare the questions that you want to use. Click here for a step-by-step guide.

From a lesson planning perspective, consider what goals you want to achieve with your questions. Online polling can be used to hook attention, promote discussion, check understanding, and uncover misunderstandings. Careful question design can help you to meet these goals.

Consider also the "flow" of your questions. A couple of relatively easy starter questions can help your audience to engage with the software, before moving into more challenging questions or puzzles.

Common types of question include:

- Testing recall in current or previous teaching session
- Eliciting learners' pre-existing thinking
- Exploring learner perspectives, e.g., opinions, beliefs
- Testing conceptual understanding
- Provoking discussion
- Predicting results of a case study, role play, video
- Collecting student feedback around teaching

(For more specific guidance around types of questions, the University of Sydney has a useful resource here.) Educationalists recommend typically between two and five questions per 50 minutes of classroom time.

Finally, come up with a "plan B" to insure against an unforeseen problem with the technology. For example, hospital sites can have poor connectivity or barriers to external websites, whilst some classrooms have poor mobile network coverage. Can the questions be asked verbally, or is there an alternative in-class active learning strategy that can be used at short notice, if required?

In class

Prepare your audience for using polling software. It's likely that your learners have come across such technology before, but it's important to highlight how and why you plan to use it. Specifically, you'll want to let your learners know whether or not their responses will be anonymous.

This is the default position for Mentimeter but other "clicker" systems, e.g., those designed to monitor attendance, may link responses back to specific users. This will help students feel more comfortable participating and facilitate more honest responses.

You can choose to embed your poll question within a PowerPoint slide, but it's usually better to launch the software through your browser, and have this open in the background, ready for use.

When you're ready to use your questions, launch present mode. Use the toolbar to select either "hide" or "show" responses on the screen. It may be engaging to watch the responses come in, but these can influence the learners and how they vote, i.e., they may choose to "go with the crowd".

Don't under-estimate the thinking time required for responses. It can take a while for everyone to participate, especially in large group (100+) sessions. It's useful to watch the audience itself *and* the counter on the slide which shows you how many responses you have received. You may not get full 100% participation, but do make sure that everyone who wants to answer can.

To keep it brief, allocate a defined time "You have one minute for this question!", and/or add a verbal countdown. Remember to account for discussion time in your lesson plan too.

Don't be afraid to move around the room and listen in on discussions – this can be really valuable feedback to you as the educator.

After class

Take a moment to reflect on the class: what worked and what did not? Make notes on what you might do differently next time. Capture any data from the session that you need (available as a .pdf export on the free plan of Mentimeter), and then reset the results to use the presentation again.

Learn more

To discover more about online polling and how to integrate it into your teaching, here are more resources:

- Caldwell, J. E. (2007). Clickers in the large classroom: Current research and best-practice tips. CBE—Life Sciences Education, 6(1), 9-20.
- Clarke, SL. (2017). Building effective interactive polls for lectures. The University of Sydney.
- James, R. (2010). Using clickers in the classroom. [Video]
- McGivern, P., & Coxon, M. (2015). Student polling software: where cognitive psychology meets educational practice?. Frontiers in Psychology, 6, 55.
- Stevens, N. T., McDermott, H., Boland, F., Pawlikowska, T., & Humphreys, H. (2017). A comparative study: do "clickers" increase student engagement in multidisciplinary clinical microbiology teaching?. BMC medical education, 17(1), 70.

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