Outside the Box:
A Multi-Lingual Forum

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What Are My Students Thinking?

Setting Up an Online Survey to Gather Student Feedback

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Ever wonder what your students are thinking? I certainly do. How do they feel about the textbook? The pacing? The level of vocabulary? The question that was recently on my mind was whether or not I use too much Japanese in my English classes. The easiest way to get an answer to this question would be to simply ask them, but I've found the majority of my 1st- and 2nd-year EFL students to be less than enthusiastic about sharing their opinions. And these are exactly the students I really want to hear from.

I created an online questionnaire that students completed on their smartphones to find out what they thought. The results were positive in that the online survey immediately gave me easy to understand results and since the responses were anonymous, I believe that students were giving me their candid opinions.

Here is the general process: (a) create an online questionnaire, (b) embed the link to that survey in a QR (abbreviation for Quick Response) code, (c) project the QR code on a screen or print it on a handout so students can access it with their smartphones, and (d) analyze the results.

Surveymonkey and Google Forms are two online platforms that I have had success with. Both get the job done, but Surveymonkey has less moving parts is probably easier for first-timers. The following steps and screenshots are based on Surveymonkey using the Mozilla Firefox web browser; however, the steps will be similar for Google Forms. The following steps include some of the highlights and potential snags you may encounter. Most of these steps are completed online so keep in mind that options and buttons may have

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changed slightly by the time you are trying this out.

Create a Survey

Go to www.surveymonkey.com and either create a new account (for free) or sign in with a Google or Facebook account.
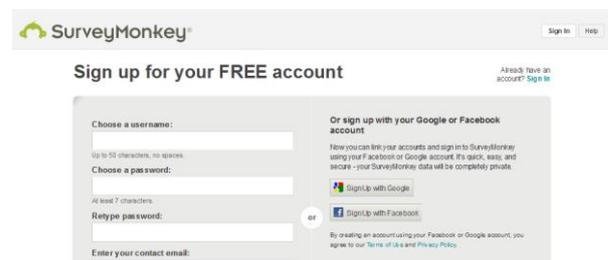
On the upper right side of the screen, click "create survey," which is labeled (1) in the image below.
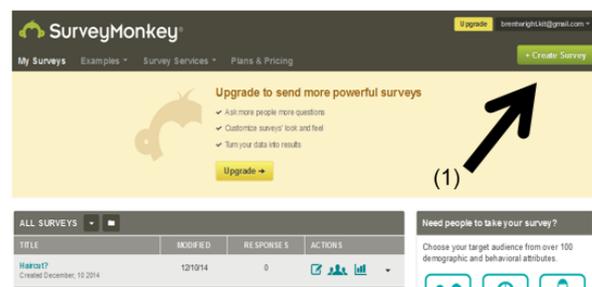
Enter the title of your new survey ("English Topics mid-term survey template") (2). Once you finish creating the survey, if you want to administer it to multiple classes and keep results separated by class then you can click the "Copy an existing survey" (3) button and give the survey a new title. The "Category" selection is optional. Click "continue" (4) and you're ready to begin building the survey.

Click "+ Add Question" (5) to enter your first question: "What do you think about the teacher using Japanese in the classroom?" (6).

Click "Save & Close" to finish the question. There is no limit to the number of questions on one page, but if there are too more than five questions, you may want to consider using multiple pages (using the "add page" button at the bottom) (10) so that students can focus on a few questions at a time. When you are finished adding questions, click "Send Survey" (11) at the bottom of the screen.

There over a dozen different question formats to choose from. For my question I'll choose a rating scale (7) (set to 5) and add descriptors for the ratings (e.g., 1 = Too much Japanese, 3 = Just the right amount, 5 = Not enough Japanese) (8). In addition, I can give the option for students to add text to elaborate on their choice. (9)

There will be a link created for your survey. Copy this link (12) to generate a QR code in the next step. One setting change that should be considered is whether or not the survey can be completed multiple times by the same device. The default is set to one device. (13)

This link to your survey will not change, even if you alter the content of your survey.

Create a QR Code

A QR code is a simple way of making a website link (or any text) into a picture so that a smartphone with a QR code reader can take a picture of it and be taken to that website. There are many websites that will allow you to create a QR code for free. Search for "QR code generator" using any search engine and choose one. (Most QR code generating sites will have similar features.) Here is one that has worked well for me: http://www.qr-code-generator.com/

Now, take the link you copied and paste it into the QR code generator. (14) Click "Create QR code" and you will see the QR code on the right side of the screen (15). Click "Download" to save it as an image to your computer. (16)

Show QR Code to Your Students

The next step is to show the QR code to your students. You can put it into your slide presentation for the day, print it on a handout, or simply enlarge it on your computer screen and have students snap a picture of it with their smartphones. The nice thing about having students complete the survey on their own device is that they are doing it on their own "turf", the smartphone they spend hours each day using to communicate with friends, play games, and obtain vital information. I like to think that this, and that the responses can be submitted anonymously, encourages students to respond candidly.

Analyze the Results

Analyzing the results is the easiest part of this process. Once students have completed the survey, click "My Surveys" (17) to see all of your surveys in a list. Click the one you want to analyze, and then click the "Analyze Results" tab (18). Surveymonkey lets you view numerical responses as several different

kinds of graphs and text responses either as individual responses or with all respondents' answers on the same page.


This is great for simple surveys if you only need to see tendencies or read individual responses. If you want to run statistics on collected data, then Google Forms will serve you better. Google Forms will take the results and create a spreadsheet file for each survey. You can either run your analysis in the Google spreadsheet program or download the file and open it on your computer. Surveymonkey will let you do this with its paid service.

I have had success administering dozens of surveys using this process. Once I knew the questions I wanted to ask, the first time setting up the survey and QR code took about 30 minutes. When you figure out which survey site fits your needs and you find a QR code generating site that works for you, it shouldn't take more than 5-10 minutes to create a short survey. This is much quicker, and more environmentally friendly, than printing and making copies of a survey. I appreciate the flexibility of being able to tailor my surveys up to the last second before students take the survey. If you have several different classes you want to give the survey to, use the same QR code to get aggregate results. Making a copy of a previous survey and generating a new QR code will let you keep class results separated. One important setting choice that can work to your advantage is whether you will allow one device to respond to the survey multiple times or not. The default setting for Surveymonkey is that one device can only complete the survey one time. Changing this setting will allow one device to complete the survey multiple times. This lets students who don't have a smartphone to use their classmate's to submit their responses.

What did I find out from my survey? Most students appreciated that I used a lot of Japanese in my lessons, and there were always a few (more than I expected) who thought I used too much Japanese. I most often resort to Japanese when I give instructions, so the results encouraged me to think of better ways to give my instructions in English.

If you are having trouble setting up your survey or generating a QR code, feel free to email me and I will gladly help.

If you have time, please leave me a comment here:
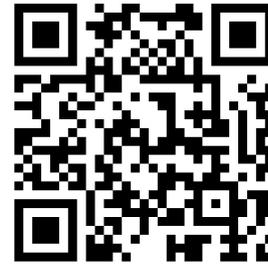
Happy surveying!

Websites

QR Code Generator. Available at http://www.qr-code-generator.com/

Survey Monkey. Available at http://www.surveymonkey.com

About the author: Brent Wright is an English language instructor at Kanazawa Institute of Technology. Before teaching in Japan, he taught Japanese as a foreign language in the United States. His research interests include computer assisted language learning, smartphone use in the classroom, and vocabulary acquisition.