14

Surveys and Choices

Moodle has two tools specifically designed for collecting ungraded feedback from your students: surveys and choices. Surveys are a set of predetermined questions already developed by the Moodle developers. Currently, there is no way to create your own survey questions in a survey. This option is planned, but it isn't yet ready. The current surveys focus on getting feedback from students about the nature of the course.

Choices are little, one-question surveys. They act as small web polls that you may have seen on other web sites. You can use a choice to get rapid feedback from your students about any topic you wish, as long as it's only once question long and has a maximum of six answers.

Creating Surveys

The limited nature of the surveys tool makes surveys very easy to create. Basically, you select the set of prewritten questions you'd like to give, edit the introductory text, and you're done.

There are three types of surveys you can give:

COLLES (Constructivist On-Line Learning Environment Survey)
> This is a set of 24 statements that asks students about the relevance of the course, provides opportunities for reflection and interactivity, provides peer and tutor support, and facilitates interpretation. These factors are based on social constructivist theory, as discussed in Chapter 1. Variations on the survey ask students to discuss their preferred learning environment or the actual learning environment. Moodle offers three types of COLLES surveys: preferred, actual, a combination of the two. The preferred COLLES survey asks students to discuss how they think they want to interact with a course, while the actual COLLES survey asks them how they are interacting currently.

ATTLS (Attitudes to Thinking and Learning Survey)
> ATTLS seeks to measure the quality of interaction within a course. It builds on the "separate and connected ways of knowing" scale, which we discussed in Chapter 12.

Critical Incidents
> The Critical Incidents survey asks students to consider recent events and answer questions about their relationship to those events. It is similar to the one-minute response paper we discussed in Chapter 8.

Once you've determined the type of survey you'd like to conduct, create the survey to make it available to your students.

To create a survey:

1.   Click Turn Editing Mode On.

2.   Select Survey from the Activities menu in the appropriate section in your course.

3.   From the survey-creation page, shown in Figure 14-1, give the survey a name.
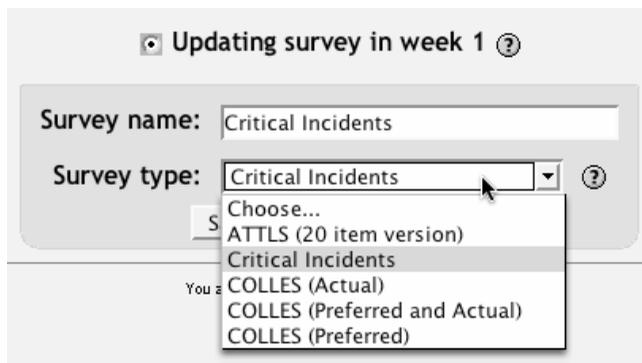

Figure 14-1. Survey creation page

4.   Select the type of survey you want to give from the dropdown list.

5.   Click Continue.

6.   On the following screen, edit the introductory text if necessary.

7. Click OK.

8. The next screen displays the question set you have chosen. Click Check and Continue at the bottom of the page.

Administering Surveys

Once you've created the survey, students can begin to give their feedback. They simply click on the survey name in the course section and answer the questions. Once students have begun to answer the survey questions, you can track the survey results by clicking on the name of the survey in the section.

The results section in each survey allows you to view the data by course, by student, or by question. You can also download the data to a spreadsheet.

> *Warning: Moodle surveys are* not *anonymous. While students cannot see each other's results, you can view each student's survey. There is no way to assure anonymity. If you are using these results for research, you must develop a scheme to download the data and assign participant numbers. You should also inform students of this limitation.*

The COLLES and ATTLS questions are five-point scales that range in responses from Almost Always to Almost Never. These results are reported in graphical form when you view them, as illustrated in Figure 14-2.
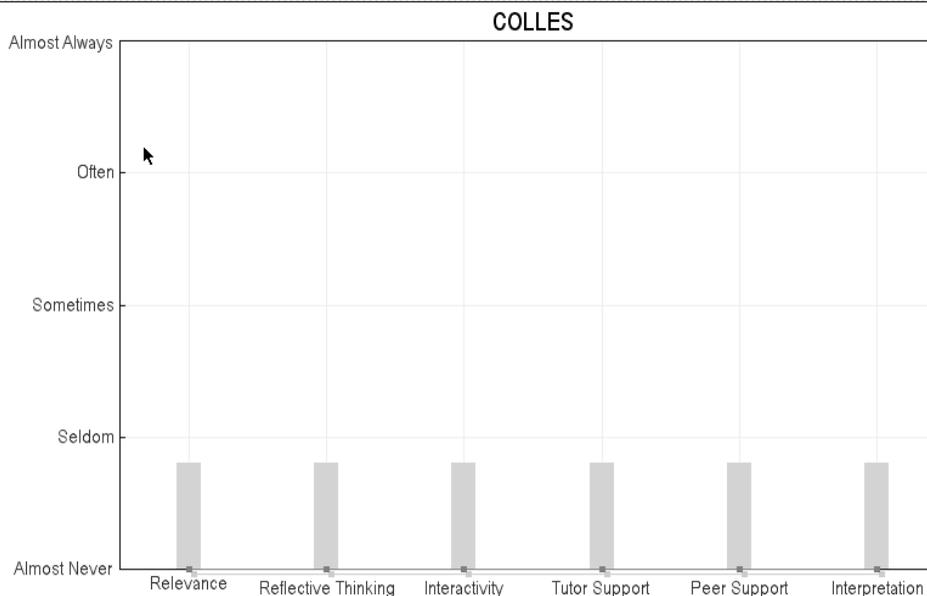

Figure 14-2. Survey results

The Critical Incidents survey is a free-response survey where students must type their answers. You can see what students have typed for each answer.

Later in this chapter, we'll discuss how to apply the data you gather. Now we'll move on to choices.

Creating Choices

Unlike Surveys, the choice tool allows you to ask any question you'd like, as long as it's multiple-choice. Once you've set up your choice, it acts as a rapid poll in your course. Students click on the choice and select their answer. You can choose when they see the results of the poll and even let them change their mind.

To create a choice:

1.   Click Turn Editing Mode On.

2.   Select Choice from the Activity menu.

3.   Give your question a name, then enter the question text in the Choice text area, as shown in Figure 14-3. You can give students a choice between one of six responses to your question.

Figure 14-3. Choice creation page

4. Set the options for your choice

    Restrict answering to this time period
        If you want the question to be available for a limited time, set a starting and ending time for the choice.

    Publish results
        You have four options for revealing the results of the poll to students:

        •   Never display the results

        •   Display the results only after the ending time for the poll (if you've set one above)

        •   Display the results only after they've answered

        •   Always display the results

    Privacy of Results
        Here you can choose whether to display the students' names with their response in the poll results.

    Allow choice to be updated
        If you want to allow students to change their minds after they've answered, set this to Yes. Otherwise, students will be able to answer the question only once.

    Show column for unanswered
        This option determines whether students will see the number of people who haven't answered the question when they see the poll results.

5. Click Save Changes.

Once you've created the choice it will be available to students after the starting time, if you've set one.

Administering Choices

After students have answered the poll, you can see the results by clicking on the choice name in the course section. You'll see the choice question and a link to view the students' responses. Unlike the students' view of the results, you'll see a column for each response with the student's picture and name, as shown in Figure 14-4.

Figure 14-4. Teacher's view of choice results

Using Surveys and Choices

Surveys and choices represent two different tools for gathering feedback data from students. Moodle surveys are formal and based in theory. Choices are quick and simple for both you and your students. They can both provide useful data about your course and your students' success.

Moodle surveys are a bit too long to be used frequently. They provide useful feedback if you want to revise your course to meet student needs, but answering a set of 24 questions on a regular basis can become tedious for your students. I recommend using the ATTLS or COLLES survey three times per semester (or twice a quarter if you're on the quarter system). You may want to deliver the first survey after the first few weeks to get some early feedback on student perceptions of the course, once at the mid-term to make adjustments for the second half, and once at the end of the course to get summative feedback to include in the next semester's course design.

Of the available surveys, the COLLES and Critical Incidents are the most useful for making decisions about your course design. In the COLLES survey, pay close attention to the relevance scores. Student perception of course relevance is very important in determining student satisfaction and learning. If a student believes a course isn't relevant to his life, he will have difficulty spending the time required to be successful. His performance will suffer, and his perception of the value of the course will diminish.

The Critical Incidents survey can provide useful feedback at the end of a topic or week. If you're trying something new, use this survey to get student feedback on the success of the topic. Because it's only five questions long, you can use it more frequently than the other two surveys.

Choices can be offered much more frequently. Many web sites use quick polls to inform or entertain their readers. Local and national news outlets run informal, nonscientific polls through their sites to gauge public opinion. You can use your choices to do the same. Choices could be about anything from course content to current school events. They can be a great way to keep students engaged in the class.