

Highlights: Class surveys are fun and not overly challenging. They are very effective as icebreaking activities, especially at the beginning of a course. They also let learners know that class will be more than sitting at a desk and copying the teacher's words. It is important to do something with the survey information. Otherwise, there is no intrinsic reason for gathering the information. Therefore, plan ways to process the information.

Note: Make sure the survey questions are appropriate to the class. For example, if everyone in the group is from Mexico, then asking, "What country are you from?" will not be pertinent. Similarly, asking a group of elderly seniors, "How many of your children go to school?" may not be appropriate. Watch for American cultural taboos about age, money, religion, etc. Also, make sure not to inadvertently ask about an uncomfortable topic.

Materials: The teacher needs to make a survey form so learners can easily ask the question or questions and record answers. If the information is going to be gathered into a simple bar graph or pie chart, or recorded on flip chart paper, this needs to be ready in advance.

Procedure:

1. Build on what learners already know (e.g., the common question, "Where are you from?"). Therefore, pre-teach and practice the questions and vocabulary needed to answer the questions. For example, in a class where learners are collecting information about native countries, record the names of those countries in advance so that students have the information available to them.

2. Hand out the survey forms and explain the task to learners. (They need to walk around the room asking everyone the question and recording the answers).

3. Model the procedures with one or two learner volunteers and check comprehension of instructions. For example, ask, "What are the questions on the survey form?" "How many people will you talk to today?"

4. Once learners begin to complete the survey, monitor the process and be ready to assist learners if they ask for help. **Note:** Don't be alarmed if you see someone copying from another's paper or someone writing information down right on the questioner's sheet. The main idea is to get authentic communication going, and it is good for people to help each other. Do watch out for one person overpowering a quieter or less comfortable person; this would defeat the purpose of the exercise and be counter to the egalitarian structure of the class.

5. Discuss the information with the class. Using the information from the surveys (see below: *Sample Surveys*), you can ask questions such as, "How many people are from El Salvador? Bosnia? China?" or: "How many people watched TV more than 10 hours last week? What shows were watched the most frequently?" You can have learners work in small groups to categorize information, create graphs, or write sentences summarizing the information.

Note: The sample survey on the next page would typically be used at the beginning of a class cycle. Not only is it important for every student to know all the other learners' names (and at least an approximation of the pronunciation), but asking each other the question "What is your first name?" helps learners begin to navigate first name, family name issues, as a real life skill. Furthermore, in all facets of life learners must spell their names so they need to be familiar with the phrase "spell it, please." As learners spell their names and hear others spell theirs, they may solidify their alphabetic knowledge. Particularly with native Spanish speakers, understanding and applying the changes in vowel sounds from Spanish to English may take some time, but this survey provides a good start.

After the learners have written down all the names (including their own names), there are several ways to process the information:

1. The teacher can pass out another blank list and ask learners to work in pairs or small groups to alphabetize the first names and then to transcribe them again in alphabetical order. As the teacher demonstrates the process using several examples, the learners are continuing to memorize their classmates' names at the same time they are working on the basic skill of alphabetizing. Learners will be much more interested in this activity than if they were asked to alphabetize a list of words that had no meaning for them.

2. As an alternative, the teacher and the class can work through the alphabetizing as a group activity at the board or on an overhead or poster.

In the same class period or in the next class session, the teacher can demonstrate that she knows everyone's first name (a teacher needs to know all of the learners' names and be able to pronounce them by the end of the second or third class meeting). Then, teacher can ask for volunteers to see if they can say each classmate's name. This can be challenging, but several learners usually do volunteer and successfully remember all the names. This is an important activity because it validates skills that many literacy-level learners employ—careful observation and good memory.

Sample (Beginner Level)

	Name _____
	Date _____
Directions: Please ask the question of every student in class. Write down the names.	
What is your first name? (Spell it, please)	Where are you from?
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Sample (Intermediate - Advanced Level)

	Name _____
	Date _____
Directions: Please ask the questions of every student in class. Write down the answers they give you.	
What is your name?	How many hours did you watch TV last week?
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____