


[MICROSOFT](#)



home

▶ Lessons at a Glance

Lessons

All About Me

Animal Logic

Bridging the Generation Gap

Buy Low/Sell High

Buying a Dream Car

Campaign Hot Buttons

Candy is Dandy

Celebrate the U.S.A.

Code Crackers Math Game

Creating Your Own Web Site

Don't Trash the Earth

Endangered Species

For the Record

It's All in the (Chocolate) Chips

Just Desserts

Making Ends Meet

Newsworthy Journey

Nutrition Track

Planning a School Event


Solving Polynomial Equations

Space Case

Three Squirrels and a Pile of Nuts

Traits R Us!

Understanding Poetry



Campaign Hot Buttons

Subjects: Social Studies, Language Arts, Science

Grade Level: High School

Required Software: Microsoft® Excel 97, Microsoft® Word 97, Microsoft® PowerPoint® 97

▶ [Teaching Guide](#)

▶ [Student Activity](#)

Teaching Guide

Summary

This simulation activity asks students to work as staffers for a politician (played by you). They are assigned to design, administer, and analyze a simple poll on an important community issue; to develop a position statement based on poll results; and to persuasively present the candidate's stand on the issue.

Objectives

To sharpen understanding of the role of public opinion polling in the political process, to develop data design, collection, and analysis skills using spreadsheet tools, and to provide practice with persuasive writing and public speaking.

Prerequisite Skills

Basic understanding of Microsoft Excel, familiarity with Microsoft Word, and ability to create basic slides using Microsoft PowerPoint.

Time Alloted

Three to six class periods; partners may supplement with work sessions outside of class

How to Begin

Introduce the topic by bringing into class several press reports about proposals by the President, your state's governor, or a local politician on important public issues. Ask students how they think such proposals are developed, and what role public opinion plays.

Introduce this simulation activity by telling students that you will be playing the role of a local politician and that they are your staff. Say that you are very interested in the problem of water pollution in your local area, and that you think your community needs a water purification program. (If there is another "hot button issue" actually being discussed in your community right now, you might want to substitute that for water quality.) But without a carefully developed campaign to win public support, nothing will happen on this issue. Tell students that you need their help in finding out how citizens feel about water quality and then in building a campaign based on their concerns.

Divide your class into pairs, and set deadlines for them to present their work to you after each step in the Student Activity.

Extension Activities

- Have students use Microsoft Publisher 97 to create pamphlets, posters, or ads based on their work in this activity.
- Have your students choose their own hot button issue to address in a repeat of the activity.
- Ask students to analyze survey results that they read in the news. How were the questions framed? Who was chosen to answer? Why are certain highlights chosen? If possible, send away for the actual survey report and take a closer look.



Student Activity

Description

For better or worse, politics has become entwined with public opinion polling. Politicians and their staffs work hard to identify "hot button issues"- topics that voters care passionately about - and craft positions and programs accordingly. For this activity, imagine you and your partner are key policy strategists for a local politician (played by your teacher). This politician has a hunch that water quality is an issue of great concern to citizens in your town, and that they might support a proposal to build small-scale water-purification plants at strategic locations. But similar proposals have failed in the past. It's up to you to make the difference.

STEP 1 *Brainstorming Polling Questions*

SOFTWARE: None

WHAT TO DO: Your candidate believes her water-purification proposal would have three important benefits: the protection of sources of drinking water, the rehabilitation of wildlife habitats, and the creation of a swimming and recreation area on the outskirts of your town. Your poll should help determine how the public feels about these three goals, and what problems they might foresee with your boss's proposal. The key is to design your questions so they can be analyzed statistically. That means asking questions that can be answered Yes or No; providing a scale for answers, such as 1 to 5, with 1 being Strongly Agree and 5 being Strongly Disagree; or providing multiple choice answers.

You'll also want to gather data about the people who will answer your poll, to help you better analyze your results. For example, you might want to record their age and gender, so you could later report that "new recreation facilities are especially important to males ages 14-16."

With your partner, brainstorm a list of at least three questions you'll want to ask.

STEP 2 *Designing Your Poll Form*

SOFTWARE: Microsoft Excel

WHAT TO DO: You will be creating a basic spreadsheet document that you can print out for conducting your poll and then enter your collected data into.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	Poll on Water Quality						
2							
3	On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1= not at all and 5 = extremely						
4	Q1: How important is having pure drinking water?						
5	Q2: How important is rehabilitation of wildlife habitats?						
6	Q3: How important is a new swimming pool/recreation area?						
7							
8	First Name	Age	M/F	Q1: 1-5	Q2: 1-5	Q3: 1-5	
9							
10							
11							
12							

Use printouts of a blank *Excel* worksheet to collect data in a poll of your classmate and peers on your chosen hot topic. Here's how:

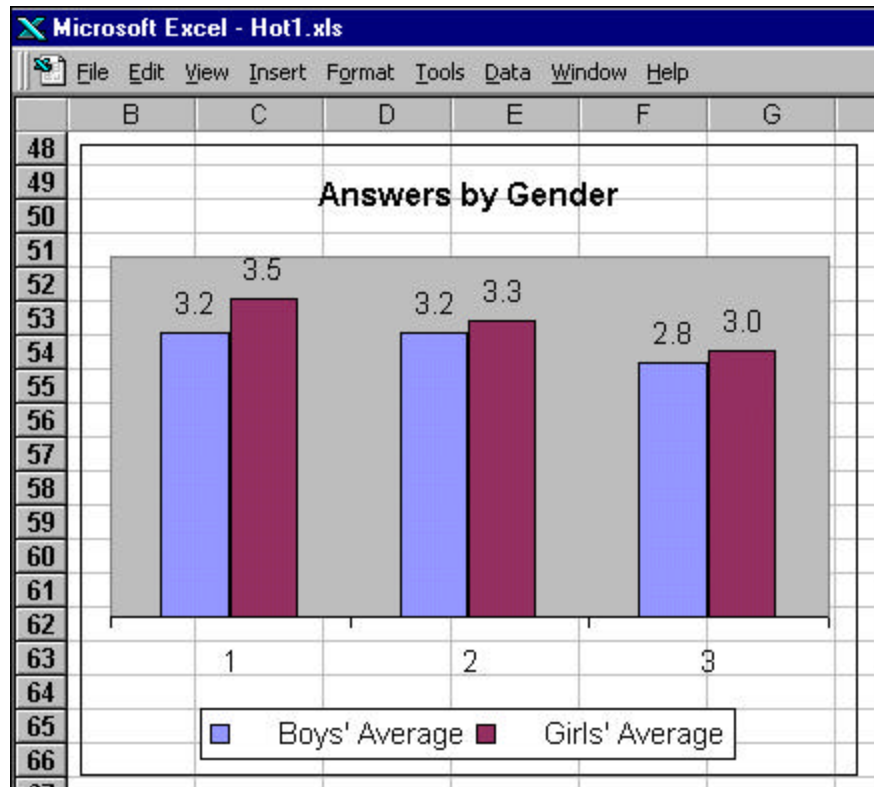
1. Open Excel. In cell A1 of the blank worksheet, enter a title such as "Poll on Water Quality". Select cells A1:F1 and click the Merge and Center button on the Formatting toolbar.
2. Skip a row, then type in your survey questions and the answer scale (for example, 1 = not at all, 5 = extremely). You'll be using a copy of this worksheet as a script when you survey, so make certain your wording is clear.
3. Type in column headings for the data you want to gather from each participant (such as Name, Age, M/F, and the numerical answer for each question).
4. Use Format to adjust the row heights and column widths to make it easier to write in while you're polling.
5. Highlight the answer area, go to the Format menu, choose Cells, and click on the Borders tab. Select inside and outline borders to create a neat grid.
6. Save and print.
7. Now poll your classmates. Pencil in the information under each heading, including the numerical answer to each of your survey questions.

STEP 3 *Analyzing Your Data*

SOFTWARE: Microsoft Excel

WHAT TO DO: When your polling is complete, follow these steps:

1. Open your worksheet. Enter and save your data.



- To find the average answer to your questions, select a blank cell at the bottom of each column and type = to indicate a formula. Go to the Insert menu, choose Function, and select Average. Highlight the range of cells, for example, =AVERAGE(D9:D18). Press Enter. Drag the fill corner to F19 to copy this formula.
- To find the percentage represented by each answer, first find the total number of answers by having Excel count them. Select a cell below any column of numbers - for example, B19 - and type the formula =COUNT(B9:B18). On a separate area of your worksheet, set up a table that shows the frequency of each answer from 1 to 5 for Question 1, and have Excel divide each frequency by your total number of answers (such as =4/B19).
- Create a graph of your percentages by selecting your percentage cells, choose ChartWizard button on the toolbar.

The screenshot shows a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet titled "Hot1.xls". The spreadsheet contains a poll on water quality with the following data:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	Poll on Water Quality--TOTALS						
2							
3	On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1= not at all and 5 = extremely,						
4	Q1: How important is having pure drinking water?						
5	Q2: How important is rehabilitation of wildlife habitats?						
6	Q3: How important is a new swimming pool/recreation area?						
7							
8	First Nam	Age	M/F	Q1: 1-5	Q2: 1-5	Q3: 1-5	
9	Maggie	13	F	4	3	2	
10	Eddie	14	M	3	3	4	
11	Tyler	14	M	4	4	4	
12	Kate	15	F	3	3	5	
13	Ramon	13	M	5	4	3	
14	Spencer	15	M	2	2	2	
15	Patrice	15	F	3	5	1	
16	Michael	16	M	1	1	1	
17	Junior	13	M	4	5	3	

5. To experiment with other ways of analyzing your data - by respondents' gender and age - use the Filter function under Data. Highlight the label cell on any column, go to the Data menu, select Filter, and choose AutoFilter. This creates a pull-down menu of all the variables in your data (such as M and F for gender). When you select a filter, Excel will show only the rows that match. You can then average these subsets, find their percentages, or create charts for them using the same steps you followed above.

STEP 4 *Developing a Briefing Paper*

SOFTWARE: Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel

WHAT TO DO: Your next task is to brief your boss, the politician, on the results of your poll and how best to present the water-purification proposal to the public. Review your data and decide which two or three conclusions are most important - and what strategies you recommend as a result.

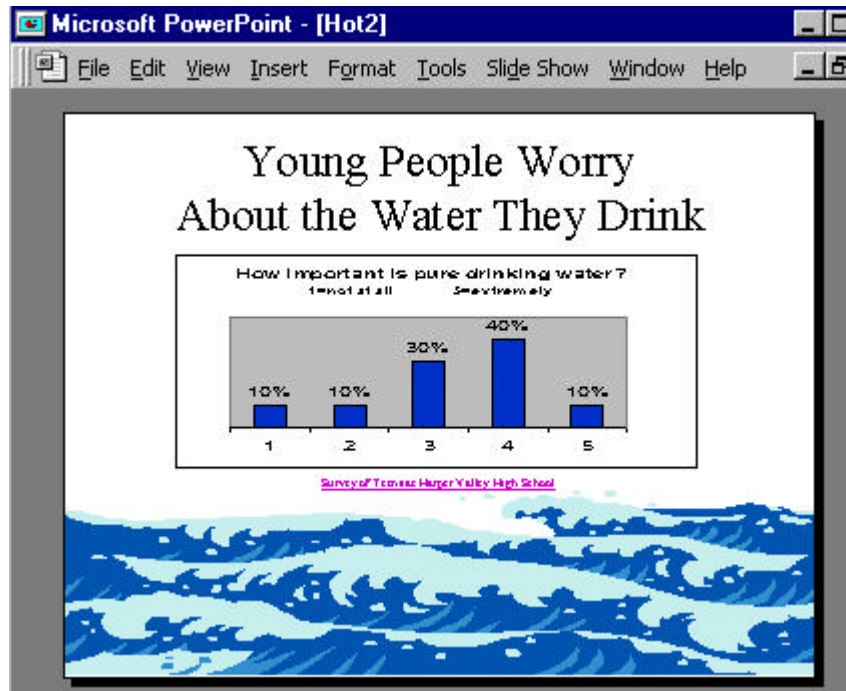
For example, if a large percentage of your respondents are very concerned about water quality, you'll want to suggest emphasizing this when talking to the public and the press. If more males than females seem to care about protecting wildlife, the politician may want to create a special "save the animals" pamphlet targeting males.

Write up your recommendations in a two-page briefing paper; import spreadsheet data and charts as needed.

STEP 5 *Presenting Your Campaign*

SOFTWARE: Microsoft PowerPoint

WHAT TO DO: Congratulations! Your boss, the politician, was very impressed with your poll and analysis. She even agreed with all of your recommendations! Now she wants to take her water-purification campaign public. She has scheduled a press conference and asked you to create a presentation. You'll need at least one PowerPoint slide for each recommendation.



1. Launch PowerPoint, open a new file, and choose Blank Presentation.
2. Go to the Format menu, click on Apply Design, and see if any of the styles there fit your message. Or you could look through clip art files from Office 97 and Microsoft Publisher for a water-related graphic that you could import into the Master slide as a motif that appears on all of the slides in your presentation.
3. To create eye-catching graphic headlines, go to Insert, choose Picture, and click on WordArt.
4. Bring in graphs from the Excel worksheets you developed in Steps A-C. This creates a Hyperlink to take viewers back to the Excel files.
5. Use the Animation function to create lively, attention-getting sounds and transitions from slide to slide.

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