

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# POLLS

## Welcome to POLLS

Did you know that opinion polls affect all aspects of your daily life?. Some polls are conducted as market research. They help determine what snack foods you will be able to buy, or what the hot new styles will be, or what programs you will see on television. Some polls seek out political opinions. They help lawmakers decide what to do. You are about to learn valuable information about polls and pollsters. POLLS will help you to be a more informed consumer and citizen. You will learn how to recognize when polling is biased and when polling results are dishonest. You will also function as a real life researcher. POLLS is organized into three phases.

### Phase One — Learning about Polls

You will learn what polls are, how they are designed, how they are conducted, and how they are used.

### Phase Two — Designing and Conducting a Poll

Your team will determine the poll topic and devise the questions, then poll your selected population.

### Phase Three — Analyzing and Presenting Poll Results

Your team will analyze your poll results to make sense of the information you gathered and present your poll results to your class.

## Roles and Responsibilities

You will work in small teams and report back to your whole class. All team members must help one another to get the jobs done successfully and on time. Good cooperation is an essential life skill and a key component of POLLS. Researchers, like everyone else, must work together to complete tasks and meet deadlines.

### Leader

- Organizes the team for the day's tasks
- Runs the team discussions to solve problems or make decisions
- Collects materials and stores them for the next class
- Rotates to become the Recorder

### Recorder

- Records the team's written work (completing worksheets, writing questions, writing summary statements)
- Rotates to become the Peer-teacher

### Peer-teacher

- Peer-teaches the daily vocabulary and reviews vocabulary already presented
- Rotates to become team Member

### Every Team Member

- Takes turns filling named roles
- Assists other team members when asked or needed
- Participates in discussions and decision making
- Follows polling procedures carefully to ensure valid conclusions
- Acts as a statistician (tallying answers, analyzing results, and making graphs)



### What is a poll and how is it used?

A *poll* is a form of research that is used to find out people's *opinions*. It reveals people's preferences, habits, and tastes. Polls can also be used to collect information or to determine how often something occurs. A poll is a valuable tool used to gather information on almost any subject.

### How can polls and poll information help us?

- Determining popular opinions or trends
- Making predictions
- Making decisions
- Creating changes or assisting in plan development
- Learning something new
- Selling products or ideas
- Advocating a cause

### Who are some people or groups that use polls?

- Researchers and scientists
- Governments, public agencies, and politicians
- News and media groups such as TV, magazines, newspapers, etc.
- Small groups seeking information about an item of local interest
- Businesses, manufacturers, industries, and commercial firms

QUICK POLL

Do you or  
do you not?

YES

NO

### How are polls conducted?

*Pollsters* follow specific steps when designing and conducting polls. Proper procedures insure that the poll is fair, accurate, and worthwhile. Pollsters determine what they want to know, whom to ask, which questions to ask, and the procedures to follow. When the results are in, pollsters *tally* the answers and analyze the results. Finally they share the poll results and use the information they learned.

### What other information can polls provide?

Some polls ask more than opinions. They also ask *respondents* to mark their age, gender, income range, and so on. Pollsters use this additional *data* along with the respondents' answers to make more specific conclusions. For example, a poll asked 100 people, "Do you own a pet?" 80 of the respondents said "yes" and 20 said "no." Of the 80 who said yes, 60 were females. The answers together with the personal information reveal that most of the pet owners in this *population* are female. Advertisers could use this valuable information to develop new commercials that will appeal to women.



### When did polling get started?

There have probably always been informal polls. However, newspapers seem to have started the trend for commercial polls to *survey* large populations. Back around 1824, two newspapers, the Harrisburg Pennsylvanian and the Raleigh Star, conducted an election poll. In 1883, the Boston Globe sent reporters out to poll people at voting places. When other papers and magazines saw readers' increased interest, they also started using polls. First polls covered elections and political topics. Later *questionnaires* included social and economic questions. The US government began using polls before World War II. Soon the use of polls began to spread to other countries around the world. Today many organizations and companies develop and use polls in a variety of ways.



### Who is George Gallup?

One of the most famous polls is known as the “Gallup Poll.”

Pollster George Gallup developed the idea of *sampling* in the 1930s. He realized that to get the most accurate information, he would need to ask every single individual in a population. Needless to say, this would be too difficult. However, if he properly chose representatives from the population (called *random sampling*) he could get nearly the same results.

### What is wrong with some polls?

Most polls are conducted fairly, and the conclusions that pollsters make are accurate and accepted. However, some circumstances result in polls that are not accurate:

- Asking the wrong population
- Asking the wrong questions
- Too frequent polls that burden the public (telemarketers)
- A poor format that is confusing or difficult to read
- A bandwagon effect following a favorable news story or other polling result
- A catastrophic news story

Some circumstances result in polls that are not fair. For various reasons, some polls favor one outcome over another. This is called *bias*. The conclusions based on biased polls are inaccurate and may mislead the public. Bias can be found in questions, sampling, polling procedures, and analysis of results.

