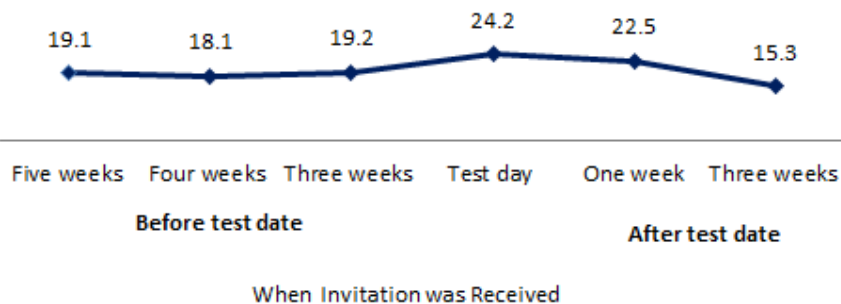


How the Timing of Survey Invitations Affects Student Response Rates

RAEAL MOORE, PHD

Students who took the ACT® test in April 2016 were invited to participate in an online survey about themselves and their educational experiences.¹ A total of 9,856 students participated in the survey.²

Survey Participation by Timing of Invitation



Note: Invitations were also sent two weeks after the test date. Results for this period are not presented due to a survey administration error.

The graph illustrates that the timing of the survey invitation is related to the rate at which students respond. This study suggests it is advantageous to:

- **Survey students on the test day.** Students who received the survey invitation on the day they took the ACT test responded at a higher rate (24.2%) than did those who received the invitation on the other dates (15.3%-22.5%). Research³ shows that participants are more likely to respond when they have a personal relationship with the surveyor. These results suggest surveying participants when their relationship to the surveyor is strongest; e.g., on test day.

- **Avoid surveying students three weeks after the test day.** The smallest response rate (15.3%) was three weeks after students completed the ACT test. This is a noteworthy reduction, especially since just two weeks prior the response rate was 22.5%.
- **Survey students as early as five weeks before the test, if surveying before the test date is necessary.** Response rates before the test day did not vary much, with 18.1% of the students who received the invitation four weeks prior to the test date participating, compared to response rates of 19.1% and 19.2% for those students who received the invitation five and three weeks before the test date, respectively. ■

Raeal Moore is a senior research scientist specializing in survey methodological research and research on education best practices in P-12 schools.

Acknowledgement

Thank you to Jeff Schiel and Jeff Allen for their technical assistance.

¹ To study the relationship between timing of the invitation and survey participation, 45,000 students were randomly assigned to one of six groups, based on when an invitation message would be sent. The first set of invitations was sent five weeks prior to the April 9th, 2016 test date, which coincided with the final day to register for the test. The last set of invitations was sent three weeks after the test day. The survey remained open for two weeks for each group.

² Participants include those survey respondents who self-identified as the person registered to take the ACT and who answered at least one survey question.

³ Gueguen, Nicolas, and Celine Jacob. (2002) Solicitation by email and solicitor's status: A field study of social influence on the web. *CyberPsychology and Behavior* 5(4): 377-83.