

# SurvConf

## Data collection on MTurk/Prolific: Tips

I've recently used SurvConf for the first time for a study on negotiations. Piloted both MTurk (through CloudResearch) and Prolific Academic. Ended up running it on Prolific because I just couldn't get turkers to take it (maybe they're more hesitant of a live video chat? idk). Anyway, there are things I wish I had known in advance (could've saved me a lot of money!), so I'm writing them here in case it can be of use to anyone.

If you have any comments, tips to share, or feedback, please reach out at [dean.baltiansky@columbia.edu](mailto:dean.baltiansky@columbia.edu)

## Details of data collection

### Payment

The negotiation was just one on one. So the payment scheme was as follows:

1. \$1: Participants who started the survey but weren't matched with another participant. All they did was read instructions and wait two and a half minutes for someone else.
2. \$3: Participants who were matched with another participant and completed the negotiation.
3. \$3 + up to \$2-bonus: Participants who were matched with another participant, completed the negotiation and got value (in points) from the negotiation.

So, pragmatically, it's \$3 base pay + bonus, with optional partial payment if not matched. But because neither Prolific nor MTurk had an option to partially pay participants (give them less than was promised in the study), they both recommended posting the HIT as a \$1 study for three minutes, give bonuses as needed, and be clear in the description. This is what it looked like on Prolific:

What is the title of your study?



Live Video Chat (13m for \$3 if matched)

Give your study an internal name (only visible to you)



Live Video Negotiation BATCH 15

Describe what participants will be doing in this study. [Read our tips](#)

H<sub>1</sub> H<sub>2</sub> B / U S

In this study, you will interact in a LIVE VIDEO CHAT with another participant. We will assign roles to each of you in a fictitious negotiation and grant bonus pay based on your performance. We will then ask you to complete several measures about the negotiation. The \$1 rate applies only if you're not matched with another participant. If matched, the rate is \$3 + up to \$2 performance-based bonus.

STUDY COST

How long will your study take to complete?

1 Max. time: 23 mins

Participants are paid according to your estimated study completion time. If the median completion time exceeds your estimate we will ask you to make additional payments. [Read more about study completion time](#)

🕒 3 minutes

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⌵

How much do you want to pay them?

\$ 1.00

20.00/hr

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⌵

Hourly rate

\$8.00

\$20.00 Great!

## Participation

Our target N was 75 negotiations. But to get to that, we had to throw out a lot of data/money. A total of 302 participants completed at least part of the survey. Of those, 186 were matched with another participant. 116 were unmatched and received \$1. That gives us 98 negotiations, but of those, only 68 were eligible. We discarded negotiations for the following reasons:

1. Sound issues in the video-chat;
2. One participant dropped out as soon as they realized what's happening;
3. Participants who didn't understand the task at all;
4. Participants who discussed point values;
5. Participants who took the survey in a previous batch (happened twice because of an error on prolific).

So, yeah, that's a lot of money wasted. ~60 participants got paid the full amount (sometimes with bonus) and we couldn't even use their data. That's a bummer. Reasons 1 and 2 (from above) were the most prevalent.

The good news, though, is that there's interest in these studies on Prolific. All it takes is making sure the tech works and increasing the likelihood of participants taking the survey simultaneously.

## Rate-limiting feature

Prolific has a rate-limiting feature that is enabled by default. It spaces out participation by not showing the HIT to everyone all at once, giving less experienced users the opportunity to participate. That's great for most surveys, but not great for a study that requires simultaneous participation. So I asked them to disable it for me, and they eventually agreed.

## Batches

Users are sometimes notified when HITs are published. HITs also appear on the board by the order in which they were published. So the longer a study is up, the sparser the responses will be. That's why I ran one-hour batches instead. After an hour, regardless of participation, I stopped the survey. You can also monitor it and see if people are still taking it and getting matched. If they are, totally cool to let it keep going.

## Monitoring the messages

It was important to be available for participants in case they had questions about pairings, etc. So I tried to be available to them through the Prolific messaging system. Most of the issues were concerns about payment, so I just reassured them they they'll get paid+bonus as promised.

## Why not MTurk?

I piloted this a few times with MTurk (through CloudResearch) as well. Filtering participants and setting scheduling studies is easier than Prolific, but for some reason, I just couldn't get enough traffic. It may just be the case the MTurk participants are more reluctant to participate in video chat HITs.

## Lessons learned

### Screener

Some of the participation problems can be solved with a simple (and cheap) screener. This screener can also (tentatively) schedule their survey at certain times of day, so that we'll be able to get more people who are interested to take the study simultaneously. One thing I'll try to test out is to have two sessions a day (morning and afternoon) for prescreened participants who indicated availability. They'll be notified separately when it's time to participate, join, and get matched more easily with willing participants.

### CloudResearch tools?

I might try to establish a CloudResearch panel for participants who are willing to participate. That could be a great use of their resources. With that panel, we can schedule data collection sessions.

### Pay

Asking people to go on live video chats is a lot, compared to what they're used to. I think paying well can really help.

