

Guidelines for Academic Requesters

Version 1.1 (10/2/2014)

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Guidelines for Academic Requesters

About the project

Version 1.0

"Treat your workers with respect and dignity. Workers are not numbers and statistics. Workers are not lab rats. Workers are people and should be treated with respect." - turker 'T', a Turkothon moderator

This document consists of this main Guidelines for Academic Requesters page, and several subpages with important additional details, which are referenced with "Read more" links at relevant points throughout this main page:

- Basics of how to be a good requester
- Fair payment
- Resources for communicating with requesters
- Links to other resources on AMT and online research ethics
- Meta: Maintaining the guidelines

Use <http://guidelines.wearedynamo.org/> ^[1] as a shortcut to quickly reach this document.

As of August 21st 2014, the guidelines and all subpages are locked. To learn more about how future changes will happen, see Meta: Maintaining the guidelines

The full guidelines document, consisting of this page and all subpages, can be **Downloaded as a PDF** ^[2]. Print/download any individual pages using the options in the sidebar.

Goal: Guidelines that IRB will use to approve responsible AMT research

Plenty of academic research passes through AMT or is about Turkers, but ethics boards (IRBs) who review and approve research protocols often don't know how workers want to be treated. Turkers have collectively authored these guidelines to help educate researchers and let Turkers *hold them accountable to a higher standard*.

For Turkers: what can you do when these guidelines are violated?

If an academic requester is not being a positive member of the Mechanical Turk marketplace and community, Turkers may want to reach out to fix the situation. If a Turker wants to report concerns about a HIT that may be in violation, they can post details in a private thread (only readable by registered Dynamo members) in the Dynamo forum.

Dynamo members may then:

- Encourage the worker to email the requester, and to [CC ethics@wearedynamo.org](mailto:CC.ethics@wearedynamo.org) if the worker would like copies to be posted in a private Dynamo thread for ongoing feedback. Dynamo can help provide a template email to make sure it's framed well, and provide feedback.
- If there is no timely response or inadequate response from the requester, the Dynamo admins can help the worker adapt a template email to contact the requester's IRB.
- If there is no timely response or inadequate response from the IRB, and if it's a serious problem, the Dynamo community helps the worker adapt a template email to colleagues of the researcher, or to other administrators at the university, as appropriate. (Use this option sparingly!)

Resources and template emails for these communications are available here: [Resources for communicating with requesters](#)

These are suggestions and resources available for MTurk workers to utilize if and when they choose, not an obligatory plan of action.

Guidelines

Clearly identify yourself to give workers a sense that you are accountable and responsible

Your HIT should include a consent or intro page with the following information:

- the full name/s of the researcher/s responsible for the HIT's project;
- the university/organization/s they're affiliated with and its state/country;
- their department name, lab, project group, etc;
- a direct line of communication, including an email address to contact the IRB (phone calls may cost Turkers money)

Also, convey as much information as you can in your:

- requester display name
- HIT description
- HIT preview

Why? Workers generally are more willing to take a chance on a requester they're not familiar with (particularly one who hasn't yet been reviewed by any workers on Turkopticon). Academic requesters seem legitimate by virtue of their position. Also, academic requesters are part of a university 'chain of command' with IRB oversight and a means of redressing worker grievances should something go wrong.

What about my privacy? Turkers who want to know (for the above reasons) can often figure out much of this information for an academic requester who doesn't provide it; however, this takes workers' time and effort, and burns their good will.

Example: When a large batch of HITs was posted by a new requester with no Turkopticon reviews and whose only visible identification was their first-name-only requester display name, some Turkers hesitated, trying to decide if it was too risky to do more than a few. When a Turker was able to identify the requester's full name and affiliation with a major university, the Turkers felt more confident to do a larger quantity of those HITs.

Example: Researchers working on spam algorithms did not identify themselves in HITs. Turkers grew concerned that the HITs were coming from spammers trying to *bypass* filters. Turkers avoided doing the HITs and posted negative reviews and discussion comments.

Provide reasonable time estimates

State up front how long the task is likely to take for a careful person unfamiliar with the task. Know that task experts always underestimate how long it takes for novices to complete a task [Hinds 1999]. Err on the side of overestimation to avoid disappointment and frustration.

Why? Turkers calculate estimated earnings based on time estimates, and their target earnings inform their choice of HITs. If a HIT takes longer than estimated, Turkers may speed through it to keep it to the requester-provided estimate, hurting quality and damaging requester reputation. Read more

Approve work as soon as possible

Set your auto-approval time as short as reasonably possible. 7 days should generally be sufficient. Many requesters approve work in less than 3 days, and some in less than 24 hours. Many workers rely on MTurk to pay bills and manage their cash flow, so timely pay makes a big difference in their lives. [Read more](#)

Maintain worker privacy

Don't require workers to provide personally identifying information to complete your HITs. This includes:

- email address
- birth dates
- real names
- Facebook logins

Don't require workers to register on sites that require this kind of personal information to complete your HITs, or similarly require a Facebook login.

If you don't follow the Terms of Service ^[3], particularly in the aforementioned ways that pose potential threats directly to workers, some workers will give your requester account negative Turkopticon reviews with flags for ToS violations, and report your HITs to Amazon. [Read more](#)

Abide by AMT Terms of Service

When you established a requester account with Amazon Mechanical Turk, you promised to adhere to Amazon's MTurk Terms of Service (ToS). *To conform with these guidelines, AMT academic researchers shall provide their IRB with a copy of the ToS, as a requisite part of submitting their application for IRB approval.*

The MTurk Terms of Service include some protections for worker privacy and systems. See a list of prohibited uses of Amazon Mechanical Turk in the MTurk 'General Policies' FAQ page ^[3] or in the 'General Policies' section of the MTurk Requesters FAQ page ^[4]. Note that requiring users to download software is against AMT's Terms of Service. Some workers are willing to download software, but others will refuse as it can be a security risk to their systems. [Read more](#)

Ensure conditions for rejecting work are clear and fair

Rejections leave workers with a mark counting against them on their 'permanent record' at MTurk that may take them below a qualification threshold necessary for certain other HITs. Before deciding a rejection is justified, be sure you've considered several factors:

- State any reasons for which you plan to automatically reject submissions.
- Test your instructions and attention checks with compensated workers to ensure they are not ambiguous or unclear.
- Make sure your survey will actually provide the promised completion code to workers who complete it, and that the code is correctly saved in your database. [Learn how to do completion codes well](#)
- Keep lines of communication with workers open through email and forums. Workers run into 'edge cases', particularly in large batch HITs.
- Don't reject workers solely based on majority rules, even if you use majority internally for your analyses.
- Reject work only as a last resort. Know how to undo a rejection ^[5] before you do. After thirty days, a rejection can never be reversed. Don't be in a hurry to pull the trigger.

Example: There have been several situations where requesters wrongly rejected large amounts of workers for 'incorrect completion codes'. The requester was randomly generating the codes and they were not being correctly stored in their database for matching.

Read more about ensuring rejections are fair

Do not block workers to avoid duplicate subjects

Blocks should only be used for bad-faith workers, as they can result in workers being suspended by Amazon. Suspensions of this type are equivalent to a permanent ban in most cases; this simple mistake can cost livelihoods.

Say up-front if you do not want duplicates. However, recognize that workers cannot easily remember whether they participated in your survey several months ago. There are several tools requesters can use when setting up their HITs to make this easier, rather than expecting workers to keep your records. Learn how to avoid duplicate subjects (retakes) fairly

Maintain a responsive line of communication with Turkers

Check the email account associated with your MTurk requester account frequently. Respond to messages from workers as quickly as possible, preferably in less than 24 hours. Visit worker forums to seek advice and find knowledgeable Turkers to vet your HIT.

Read more about how to communicate well with workers

Pay Turkers fairly. They are a workforce, not a volunteer study population

Crowdsourcing workers are a labor force. Many depend on income from crowdsourcing as critical income. Crowdsourcing workers are legally considered contractors and therefore are not protected by any minimum wage laws. When requesters pay a fair wage and treat workers like people, both sides receive positive results.

Pay (at least) community norms of minimum Turking wage

Many workers consider \$0.10 a minute to the minimum to be considered ethical, though many studies pay more and there are excellent arguments to pay more (Read more). Tasks paying less than \$0.10 a minute are likely to tap into a highly vulnerable work pool and constitutes coercion.

Since Turkers work independently, they are responsible for their own computers, electricity, taxes, health care, etc. Different workers consider fair pay anywhere from \$6 an hour to \$22 an hour. Learn why

If your task takes longer than you predicted, you can send workers bonuses to bring the wages up to ethical levels after the fact. In July 2014, a requester did this unexpectedly for workers who took one of their surveys, basing their target pay rate on Washington state's \$9.32/hr minimum wage.

Clearly communicate possible bonuses

Explain what the potential amount will be and how to earn it, and how soon workers should expect it to be paid. Pay promptly. Read more

Compensate for qualifier/screener surveys

If you are using qualifier surveys, compensate all those who correctly complete the survey. Read more

Do not experiment with forum relationships for research

Forums only work because of delicate relationships of trust and mutual aid among participants. Sociological experiments such as breaching experiments can sow discord and destroy relationships. Positivist research that attempts to control and measure a forums effects can confuse workers, create anxieties in the community, and drain community energy as members try to make sense of the unusual intervention. To learn how a forum works, talk to administrators about your project, goals, and a plan for creating mutually beneficial research with workers.

Example: One academic experiment simulated requesters with varying ratings in Turkopticon to measure the effects of ratings on worker behavior and outcomes. Turkers found some of the requesters and smelled something fishy but did not know if it was a scam, academic research, vandalism, or something else; through what amounted to at least 50 hours of sleuthing over two days, Turkers across reddit and turkopticon-discuss hypothesized that this was a research project. The researcher wanted to make positivist knowledge claims about ratings, workers, and the economics of Turking, but neither he nor the IRB understood that:

- simulating fabricated requesters and reviews broke the fragile trust that makes Turkopticon ratings meaningful to workers
- that worker harm includes not only unpaid wages in AMT, but also the time they spent anxiously trying to track down these mysterious apparitions

Links to other resources on AMT and online research ethics

Epigraph

"Turking is work, even if it is for science, and academic researchers shouldn't assume that people are happy to do it for fun. They should pay and respect people's time." - Dr. Lilly Irani (of Turkopticon), Department of Communication, University of California at San Diego

"What we need to do is teach requesters about the human side of Mturk. Mturk encourages anybody that uses Mturk to think of us as little computing units, not as people." - Project2501 (a Turker)

"Dehumanization is the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanize the oppressed. Because it is a distortion of being more fully human, sooner or later being less human leads the oppressed to struggle against those who made them so. In order for this struggle to have meaning, the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity (which is a way to create it) become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity of both. This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: liberate themselves and their oppressors as well." - Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

"Turkers are people, the work they do might feel like magic at times but at the end of the day we can't forget that they're human beings just like you and me." - William Kyle Hamilton

Signatories: Ratify these guidelines

Workers, to lend the strength of your support to these guidelines, please click on the "Sign" button in the Dynamo ^[6] signing campaign, to sign with a pseudonym. (You will need to submit a HIT on MTurk ^[7] to receive a code to register for a Dynamo account, ensuring there is one Dynamo account per worker.)

Researchers, to show your agreement to follow these guidelines in your future research, please send us an email at info@wearedynamo.org so we can add your signature. Please email us from your academic email account to help verify your identity.

Signatures from MTurk Workers

The following pseudonyms each represent one individual Turker who has completed at least 100 approved HITs.

1. Gorgeous monarch butterfly (14 August 2014)
 2. Courageous cockroach (14 August 2014)
 3. Fancy cod (15 August 2014): I support this
 4. Faithful fly (15 August 2014)
 5. Dark bird of paradise (15 August 2014)
 6. Elated sea urchin (15 August 2014)
 7. Lonely wombat (15 August 2014)
 8. Amused hedgehog (15 August 2014)
 9. Jolly otter (16 August 2014)
 10. Terrible cat (16 August 2014)
 11. Funny giant panda (16 August 2014)
 12. Obedient otter (16 August 2014)
 13. Determined firefly (16 August 2014)
 14. Glamorous mollusks (16 August 2014)
 15. Bad cat (21 August 2014)
 16. Elated mongoose (23 August 2014)
 17. Innocent widow spider (24 August 2014)
 18. Outstanding swan (24 August 2014)
 19. Brainy coyote (24 August 2014)
 20. Jolly blue jay (24 August 2014): Yes!
 21. Cheerful panda (24 August 2014)
 22. Elegant peacock (25 August 2014)
 23. Grumpy asian elephant (25 August 2014)
 24. Lovely spectacled bear (25 August 2014)
 25. Bad siberian husky (25 August 2014)
 26. Talented pigeon (25 August 2014)
 27. Wandering bandicoot (25 August 2014)
 28. Black dragonfly (25 August 2014)
 29. Gleaming boa (25 August 2014)
 30. Vivacious widow spider (25 August 2014)
 31. Frightened owl (27 August 2014)
 32. Evil coyote (27 August 2014)
 33. Amused gazelle (27 August 2014)
 34. Stupid basilisk (27 August 2014): I really hope academic researchers and microtask firms become aware of turkers as human beings and respect the work we do. the wages some of them offer are completely unfair.
 35. Vast anaconda (27 August 2014)
 36. Splendid raccoon (27 August 2014)
 37. Gifted green fly (27 August 2014)
 38. Wandering cat (27 August 2014)
 39. Frantic prawn (29 August 2014)
 40. Disturbed cat (29 August 2014)
 41. Inquisitive falcon (29 August 2014): I 100% support this.
 42. Lovely cat (30 August 2014)
 43. Jittery orangutan (30 August 2014)
 44. Angry monkey (30 August 2014)
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45. Elegant owl (30 August 2014)
46. Jealous tiger (31 August 2014)
47. Nutty buck (31 August 2014)
48. Handsome donkey (31 August 2014)
49. Oldfashioned cray fish (31 August 2014)
50. Splendid bird of paradise (1 September 2014): I've been using mechanical turk for years now and seen plenty of workers and researchers alike have bad experiences that turn them off from the platform. i hope these guidelines serve as a resource to help improve the mturk experience for all.
51. Poor camel (1 September 2014)
52. Innocent scorpion (1 September 2014)
53. Innocent turtle (1 September 2014)
54. Poised seal (1 September 2014)
55. Crazy wallaby (1 September 2014)
56. Awful blackbird (1 September 2014)
57. Eager yak (1 September 2014)
58. Better hippopotamus (1 September 2014)
59. Lazy llama (1 September 2014)
60. Hungry chupacabra (1 September 2014)
61. Jolly bull frog (1 September 2014)
62. Healthy leatherback sea turtle (1 September 2014)
63. Vivacious warbler (2 September 2014)
64. Calm meerkat (2 September 2014)
65. Nasty dog (2 September 2014)
66. Comfortable lemur (2 September 2014)
67. Creepy wolf (2 September 2014)
68. Glamorous ferret (3 September 2014)
69. Homely lemming (4 September 2014)
70. Famous bee (4 September 2014)
71. Innocent boa (10 September 2014)
72. Blue vervet (22 September 2014)

Signatures from Academic Researchers/Requesters

1. Niloufar Salehi, Stanford University, Department of Computer Science (Light dragonfly) (13 August 2014)
 2. Lilly Irani, University of California at San Diego; Turkopticon co-founder (Tense ringworm) (13 August 2014)
 3. Michael Bernstein, Stanford University (Excited iguana) (14 August 2014)
 4. William Kyle Hamilton, University of California at Merced (Lazy urchin) (20 August 2014)
 5. Ali Alkhatib, Stanford University (Tired cricket) (25 August 2014)
 6. Katharina Reinecke, University of Michigan School of Information (1 September 2014)
 7. Nicole Ellison, University of Michigan (1 September 2014)
 8. Jessica Hullman, University of California Berkeley (1 September 2014)
 9. Niki Kittur, Carnegie Mellon (1 September 2014)
 10. Miriam Cherry, Saint Louis University School of Law (1 September 2014)
 11. Emilee Rader, Michigan State University, Department of Media and Information (1 September 2014)
 12. Rick Wash, Michigan State University, School of Journalism and the Department of Media and Information (1 September 2014)
 13. Jeffrey P. Bigham, Carnegie Mellon University. (1 September 2014)
 14. D. Yvette Wohn, New Jersey Institute of Technology, Department of Information Systems (1 September 2014)
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15. Christopher Cox, University of Wisconsin--Madison, Psychology Department. (1 September 2014)
16. Dr David Brake, Professor of Journalism, Humber College, Dep't of Media Studies & Information Technology (1 September 2014)
17. M. Six Silberman, Turkopticon and University of California, Irvine (1 September 2014)
18. Chris Callison-Burch, University of Pennsylvania (1 September 2014)
19. Julie Kientz, University of Washington (1 September 2014)
20. Besmira Nushi, on behalf of Systems Group, Department of Computer Science, ETH Zurich (2 September 2014)
21. Don Norman, Director, Design at UC San Diego: Think Observe Make, Prof. Emeritus Cognitive Science & Psychology, UC San Diego (2 September 2014)
22. Maxine Eskenazi, Carnegie Mellon University (2 September 2014)
23. Sara C. Kingsley, University of Massachusetts Amherst (September 16, 2014)
24. Ayhan Aytes, American University of Paris (September 18, 2014)
25. Pao Siangliulue, Harvard University (September 24, 2014)
26. Kenneth Arnold, Harvard University (September 30, 2014)

References

- [1] <http://guidelines.wearedynamo.org/>
- [2] http://wearedynamo.org/Guidelines_for_Academic_Requesters.pdf
- [3] <https://www.mturk.com/mturk/help?helpPage=policies>
- [4] https://requester.mturk.com/help/faq#restrictions_use_mturk
- [5] <http://mechanicalturk.typepad.com/blog/2013/01/reverse-rejected-assignments-in-the-requester-user-interface.html>
- [6] <http://www.wearedynamo.org/>
- [7] <https://www.mturk.com/mturk/searchbar?selectedSearchType=hitgroups&requesterId=A2XJMS2J2FMVXK>

Basics of how to be a good requester

"Treat your workers with respect and dignity. Workers are not numbers and statistics. Workers are not lab rats. Workers are people and should be treated with respect." - turker 'T', a Turkopticon moderator

There are many basics to being a good requester and getting good results. Several sources for additional opinions on how requesters can effectively use MTurk, including specifics of HIT creation, are linked here: Links to other resources on AMT and online research ethics.

Clearly identify yourself

This ideally should include: the full name/s of the researcher/s responsible for the HIT's project; the university/organization/s they're affiliated with and its state/country; their department name, lab, project group, etc; and any direct contact information you're willing to provide. The more places that more of this information is clearly provided, the better; requester display name, HIT description, HIT content text visible in preview, and survey consent/intro page (in order of increasing amount of information that would be appropriate there).

Workers generally are more willing to take a chance on a requester they're not familiar with (particularly one who hasn't yet been reviewed by any workers on Turkopticon) if they know it is an academic requester, because it is a sign of legitimacy, and because the university 'chain of command' and IRB oversight are one of the few means of recourse workers have if something goes wrong on MTurk. Amazon takes a very hands-off approach to issues workers may have with unfair requesters.

Turkers who want to know (for the above reasons) can often figure out much of this information for an academic requester who doesn't provide it, but this takes time and effort that could be better spent on other things if the

requester would provide it.

For example, when a large batch of HITs was posted by a new requester with no Turkopticon reviews and whose only visible identification was their first-name-only requester display name, some turkers hesitated, trying to decide if it was too risky to do more than a few. When a turker was able to identify the requester's full name and affiliation with a major university, the turkers felt more confident to do a larger quantity of those HITs.

And as another example, due to a lack of obvious indications of its identity/legitimacy, an academic research project trying to improve spam-filtering caused concerns for some turkers that it may have been posted by spammers trying to use MTurk to improve their own spam to bypass filters; until they became aware of the academic nature of the HIT, concerned workers avoided doing the HIT, and posted negative reviews and discussion comments.

Always use a consent/intro page or paragraphs

It seems many universities currently exempt online surveys from many or all IRB requirements, or at least exempt online studies from certain departments which don't cover sensitive topics. Even if your university doesn't force you to, it's always a good idea to use a consent/intro page at the beginning of a survey, and/or paragraphs in the HIT content text for non-survey tasks.

- clearly identify yourself
- clearly state the pay to be expected (and make sure this statement of pay matches what the HIT is currently posted for; some consent pages accidentally state a higher pay than the HIT's actual current MTurk pay), and how soon approval can be expected;
- clearly state any possible bonuses and/or follow-up studies you may qualify for, and how soon their issuance can be expected;
- state the number of minutes you expect it to take a worker to complete the study; state any reasons for which you plan to automatically reject submissions;
- and state a title for the study and however much description of it you reasonably can without compromising it.
- provide an email address to contact the IRB since Turkers live in many places and may not be able to afford non-local phone calls

Provide reasonable time estimates and limits

Clearly state up-front a fair expectation of how long it will take for someone who's not already familiar with it to thoroughly read and answer everything in your survey or task. Err on the side of overestimation, to avoid disappointment/frustration if it takes someone more than the estimated time, a situation which can encourage some workers to rush through the rest of it to reduce the decline in their effective pay rate. Other workers will return the survey in protest, losing out on all the compensation. Displaying an accurate progress bar as workers move through the survey helps them know when they're nearing the end.

Set the 'Time Allotted' limit for your HITs to an amount of time much longer than the expected amount of time needed to complete the survey or task. Workers like to have leeway in case your time expectation was underestimated, and to have time available if needed to deal with interruptions that occasionally come up, like ISP/browser malfunctions, restroom breaks, phone calls, visitors or family members needing attention, and such.

Approve work as soon as possible

Some requesters try to compare MTurk approval times to the time between paychecks at a traditional job, to say that they think workers shouldn't complain about waiting for payment. But with a traditional job, a worker knows they'll get paid for the time they've reported working, even if they don't get the pay until days/weeks after they did that work, and they'll know for sure how many days/weeks that wait should be. Even if the employer fires the worker in the meantime, the employer is still legally obligated to pay what the worker earned. With MTurk approval times, a

worker is actually waiting to see *if* they'll get paid at all for the work they've done, and if so, will it be at the end of the auto-approve time (which the worker may not know) or at some point sooner.

Set your auto approval time as short as reasonably possible for the time you'll need for any checking of the work; 7 days should generally be more than sufficient, and it's better if it's less than that. Many requesters approve work in less than 3 days, some in less than 24 hours.

One of the configuration options when requesters create a HIT group is the 'Auto-Approve' (AA) time, which is the amount of time from the point a worker submits a completed HIT, to the point at which the MTurk system will automatically move the HIT into 'Approved' status for the requester, if the requester hasn't manually approved or rejected it prior to that point. This setting defaults to 30 days, which is the maximum allowed. That 30 days is generally regarded by workers as a very long time to potentially have to wait, and generally makes your HITs much less desirable to workers who know how to check the AA time setting, if they don't find out from other workers that you have a history of approving much earlier than the AA time. Set your AA time as short as reasonably possible for the time you'll need for any checking of the work; 30 days is very seldom necessary or appropriate; no more than 7 days should generally be more than sufficient, and it's better if it's less than that. Many requesters approve work in less than 3 days, some in less than 24 hours.

Communicate with workers promptly and politely

Check the email account associated with your MTurk requester account frequently. Respond to messages from workers as quickly as possible, preferably in less than 24 hours.

Some current IRB guidelines for MTurk use have suggested that responding within 7 days is considered good promptness. Most workers would find that to be unacceptably slow in many situations. Even 24 hours usually wouldn't be anywhere near fast enough to get clarification on a partially-finished HIT before it's long since expired.

Understand that when a worker goes out of their way to take the unpaid time and effort to send you a message through MTurk, and reveal their MTurk-associated name and email address to you in the process, it's usually going to be for a good/important reason.

Some requesters are concerned about keeping up with the volume of email they might receive from workers. In cases where a worker contacts you to let you know about a problem they were concerned might cause their work to be rejected, a prompt approval may be sufficient reply. The more a requester proactively follows the other guidelines discussed herein (including providing reasonable time limits, approving work as soon as possible, being clear about bonuses, avoiding duplicates/retakes, avoiding completion code malfunctions, and avoiding other causes of unfair rejections such as unclear instructions), the fewer reasons workers will have to email you. Providing a comments box at the end of your survey will also allow workers to share feedback with you without expecting a reply.

Don't ignore messages and be one of what seems to be at least half of requesters currently who don't respond to most workers' messages at all. And when you do respond, don't be one of the occasional requesters that workers have complained about being unnecessarily harsh / insulting / condescending / rude to the workers.

Also note that the worker's MTurk worker ID# will be automatically included in all messages you receive through MTurk, labeled as 'Customer ID:'. So unless a worker directly emailed a requester instead of using MTurk's 'Contact Requester' feature, the requester shouldn't need to ask the worker for their ID again to address what they contacted you about.

Forums:

Workers share information, establish norms, and build community through platforms like (in alphabetical order): CloudMeBaby ^[1], mTurk Boards ^[2], mTurk Forum ^[3], mTurk Grind ^[4], mTurk Wiki Forum ^[5], Reddit's /r/mturk ^[6] and /r/HITsWorthTurkingFor ^[7], Turker Nation ^[8], and Turkopticon ^[9]

These forums generally welcome requesters to communicate with workers about their HITs, responding to questions, suggestions, and complaints. They may have specific rules that they ask requesters to follow to participate there.

Some welcome researchers into select areas, while closing off other spaces so workers may speak freely. Follow all rules on the forums in which you choose to participate.

Don't violate workers' trust and the MTurk Terms of Service

Don't require workers to provide personally identifying information to complete your HITs; common problems include asking for email addresses (requesters can use MTurk to send messages to workers without having the workers' email addresses), exact birthdates (year alone, or month and year, should be sufficient), or real names.

Don't require workers to register on sites that require this kind of personal information to complete your HITs. If a requester has a project that requires workers to register on a special site the requester set up just for the HIT, let workers use their MTurk worker ID# or a username of their choice as the unique login identifier, instead of unnecessarily expecting an email address be provided for this purpose.

Many workers also object to HITs that require the use of Facebook accounts, which are intended to be quite personally identifiable.

The MTurk messaging system can be inefficient when contacting large numbers of workers through the GUI; rather than requiring workers to provide their email addresses in your HITs to try to get around this, you should set up and familiarize yourself with how to send bulk messages to workers using one of the many open-source HIT management tools^[10] available for requesters to access the Requester API^[11]. There has been at least one incident where a requester carelessly exposed hundreds of turkers' email addresses that the requester had collected. Use of the MTurk messaging system avoids this risk.

Don't require workers to download software programs or apps to complete your HITs (this includes Java programs and plugins such as Inquisit). This can be a major security risk for workers, particularly if the program comes from an unofficial source set up just for the HIT. It became known in 2014 that an academic researcher had performed a study on MTurk intended to see how low of pay levels would still convince workers to download and install a program that pretends to be malware, so many workers who are aware of this study are now even more hesitant to go along with download-requiring HITs even from seemingly legitimate requesters.

If you don't follow the Terms of Service, particularly in the aforementioned ways that pose potential threats directly to workers, some workers will give your requester account negative Turkopticon reviews with flags for ToS violations, and report your HITs to Amazon. (Amazon instructs workers to report ToS violations.)

Be clear about bonuses

If a bonus is offered, state as clearly as possible what the potential amount will be (or range of possible amounts and expected mean) and how to earn it, and how soon workers should expect it to be paid. Pay in as timely a manner as possible.

When requesters send out bonuses, the only information workers receive about the bonus is an email from MTurk containing the requester's display name (does not include the unique requester ID#), a 'HIT' ID that is meaningless to workers (representing the worker's unique HIT assignment, not the HIT group), and whatever comment message the requester chooses to provide. Many provide no comment at all (resulting in a message that says "No comment provided by Requester."), or a minimally-informative comment, leaving the worker to try to figure out what the bonus was from.

Due to this limited information, workers sometimes have to ask other workers if anyone remembers what a bonus they received might have been from, and how it was determined. Workers are always glad to receive bonuses at all, but ideally your comment should clearly state the title of the HIT (and the topic of the study if this wasn't stated in the HIT title; some just say generic things like "Take a quick survey"), state the date the worker completed the relevant HIT/s or the range of dates the HIT/s was available, and briefly re-explain how the bonus was earned/calculated.

If doing a random bonus lottery/drawing/sweepstakes, be aware that some workers are skeptical about these, since it would be easy for a requester to never award one to anyone, and the workers would never know. This concern can't be entirely averted, but it helps if you clearly state the number of participants that you plan to recruit in this pool, the number and dollar amount of bonuses you will be awarding, and as specifically as possible when you plan to be awarding the bonuses (and stick to it). Requesters could even consider sending a small bonus (even as little as \$0.01, but more would be nice of course) to everyone else when the big bonus/es are awarded, as both a small consolation prize and a notification that the lottery has concluded, so workers know that at least the requester didn't just forget about it.

Avoid duplicates/retakes in fair ways

Please don't block workers through MTurk just to prevent retakes! Being blocked by requesters can put a worker's MTurk account at risk of being suspended (banned from all future work on MTurk), based on some rather murky factors that are not presented clearly to workers or requesters. Blocking should generally only be a last resort against an occasional worker who submits such terrible work that they're clearly not trying, but even that situation can be remedied without blocking in some cases by increasing your HITs' qualification requirements, or by using custom quals that you can either assign, revoke, or change the scores on for repeatedly-unsatisfactory workers.

If you only ever post your survey in one HIT group, and just increase the amount of assignments available in it as needed, you can simply configure MTurk to only allow each worker to accept the HIT once.

If your survey will be posted more than once (preferably only do this when the rounds will be several months or at least weeks apart, so workers don't have to keep trying to figure out if they've done it before or not, over and over again, as it keeps popping back up), and if you don't want retakes, say so up-front - and use one of the several free online retake-prevention methods/services or self-hosted open-source HIT management tools to ensure this. Options include:

- Providing a list of worker IDs who've taken previous postings of the survey, and telling workers to search it for their ID before accepting - either directly in the preview page of the HIT, or in a document hosted elsewhere that is linked from the preview page. This is the simplest method, but less reliable than the other options below; and since worker IDs can be connected^[12] to identifying information in some workers' Amazon.com profiles, please try to ensure it is posted in a way that won't be indexed^[13] by search engines such as Google.
- Using functionality within Qualtrics (at no additional cost if you're already using Qualtrics): tips^[14] and more tips (pdf)^[15]
- Detecting the Worker ID and using Javascript^[16] to compare it to a predefined list of previous takers
- Using the Unique Turker service^[17], created by a researcher at Cornell University (see also tips^[18], more tips^[19])
- Using the Turkitron service^[20], created by researchers at Georgia Institute of Technology and Victoria University of Wellington
- Using the TurkCheck service^[21], created by a researcher at Georgetown University (see also tips^[22])
- Using TurkGate^[23], TurkGateManager^[24], and other open-source HIT management tools for requesters^[10]

Workers who are concerned about potential rejections for unintended retakes may avoid working on HITs that warn about rejecting duplicates and don't provide one of those ways for workers to immediately verify their status. If a worker feels they have to resort to contacting a requester to ask if they're allowed to take a HIT, the HIT will likely no longer be available by the time (if ever) the requester replies.

If you do repost, use the same requester account, and the same or very similar HIT title, HIT description, and preview content when reposting, if at all possible. You can indicate in the description and preview text when it was previously posted (e.g. "If you took this study in March 2014 or June 2014, please don't try to retake it."). In addition to situations where several weeks or months have passed between postings, it may occasionally be necessary to take down and repost a HIT to make changes to settings such as its pay or qualifications, if you unintentionally didn't use

optimal settings the first time.

If your motivation for frequently reposting the same survey in new HIT groups was to cause your HIT to pop back up at the top of the 'HIT Creation Date (newest first)' list repeatedly, please consider that if you simply pay a fair rate for a well-structured survey, word will be spread for you quickly on worker discussion forums to bring your HIT to the attention of more workers; you may even want to post about it yourself on some forums. Note that every time you repost the same study as a new HIT group, it also means any direct links to your previous HIT posting that workers may have already shared will no longer work.

Compensate for qualifier/screener surveys

Some requesters want to determine if workers fit specific criteria/demographics for their survey, without revealing those criteria in advance to potentially bias the answers. Some requesters handle this by expecting workers to take a qualifier/screener survey HIT that pays \$0.00, or telling them to return the main survey HIT unpaid if they don't match the initial screener's criteria.

Turkers sometimes consider this acceptable for a qualifier of just a few questions, but instead consider handling it like this to be more fair:

Post a qualifier survey for a small but appropriate fee for the time needed to complete it. Pay that fee to everyone who completes the qualifier survey. For people who fit the criteria you're looking for, either immediately redirect them to the full survey and pay them a bonus appropriate for the additional time needed to complete the full survey (both the amount of the bonus and the time the full survey will take should be clearly stated up-front); or else assign a custom qualification to the workers who fit the criteria, and tell them to take the full survey in another HIT that requires that custom qualification.

Avoid completion code malfunctions

Make sure your survey will actually provide the promised completion code to workers who complete it; this is a problem turkers encounter quite frequently. When the code is provided, clearly state it on a separate line by itself rather than buried in the midst of a paragraph of more text, and ideally in a different color, larger font size, and/or bold formatting.

Besides using a static code or generating a random code, another option is to provide a box for workers to type in their own completion code they make up, and tell them to type in the code they chose in the HIT to submit it. If you use randomly-generated codes, make sure they are being accurately recorded in your database; there have been several situations where requesters wrongly rejected large numbers of workers for 'incorrect completion codes' due to a mistake like that.

Avoid other causes of unfair rejections

Rejections leave workers with a mark counting against them on their 'permanent record' at MTurk that may take them below a qualification threshold necessary for certain other HITs.

Make sure your instructions are written very clearly and comprehensively, particularly for batch HIT groups; workers often run into 'edge cases' the requester didn't consider/cover in the instructions, and have to either take a risk and guess how to handle it, return the HIT with no compensation, or contact the requester about it and hope the requester responds before the HIT expires.

If using Attention Check questions (ACs), make sure the 'correct' answers are accurate and not vague/ambiguous; and try not to reject based on missing just one, as there are multiple potential downsides to doing so. Another option to consider: some requesters pay a certain base pay amount for everyone who completes their survey, and promise a bonus for each of the ACs a worker answers correctly. And if you set your qual requirements high enough, you

might not need to rely on ACs at all to get good data (see "Reputation as a Sufficient Condition for High Data Quality on MTurk" [25]).

You can choose to not use some workers' data without rejecting their work on MTurk, when appropriate. If you want to use 'majority rules' (plurality) to evaluate the data you receive from batches, it's okay to use that for internal analysis if that's what you want, but be very hesitant to actually reject workers' HITs based on 'majority rules' results. Many of the better workers try to avoid 'majority rules' HITs, since they will often catch something that other less attentive/experienced/knowledgeable workers might miss, but be rejected for being in the minority.

If you do reject workers unfairly, know how to undo it. (See the official MTurk blog [5] and documentation [26]. You only have 30 days from the time the HITs were submitted to reverse their rejections. The workers would prefer to have it done as soon as possible, though, not getting anywhere near that 30-day limit. Some requesters have reportedly taken so long to read and respond to a worker's message about a rejection that the 30-day limit ran out before they got around to trying to address it. Trying to make up for a rejection by issuing a bonus, but without reversing the rejection, leaves workers with a mark counting against them on their 'permanent record' at MTurk that may take them below a qualification threshold necessary for certain other HITs.

It may be fair to reject some work in some situations; most turkers work conscientiously (demonstrated in studies such as "The promise of Mechanical Turk: How online labor markets can help theorists run behavioral experiments" (pdf) [27] and "Separating the Shirkers from the Workers? Making Sure Respondents Pay Attention on Self-Administered Surveys" (pdf) [28]), but there are some who don't. Before deciding a rejection is justified, just be sure you've considered the above factors (completion code malfunctions, ways you could help workers avoid accidental retakes, clarity of instructions, accuracy of ACs, and preferably not basing the decision solely on 'majority rules'), and that your HITs weren't malfunctioning in some other way.

References

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- [2] <http://mturk.boards.net/>
- [3] <http://mturkforum.com/>
- [4] <http://www.mturkgrind.com/>
- [5] <http://mturkwiki.net/forum>
- [6] <http://www.reddit.com/r/mturk/>
- [7] <http://www.reddit.com/r/HITsWorthTurkingFor>
- [8] <http://www.turkernation.com/>
- [9] <http://turkopticon.ucsd.edu/>
- [10] <http://www.mturkgrind.com/threads/25492-Mechanical-Turk-Software-Beyond-Scripts?p=264884&viewfull=1#post264884>
- [11] http://docs.aws.amazon.com/AWSMechTurk/latest/AWSMTurkAPI/ApiReference_NotifyWorkersOperation.html
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- [14] <http://thebehaviorallab.wordpress.com/2012/10/08/excluding-mturk-workers-from-surveys-in-qualtrics-and-elsewhere/>
- [15] <http://experimentalturk.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/screening-amt-workers-on-qualtrics-5-2.pdf>
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- [25] <http://experimentalturk.wordpress.com/2013/12/11/reputation-as-a-sufficient-condition-for-high-data-quality-on-mturk/>
- [26] <http://docs.aws.amazon.com/AWSMechTurk/latest/RequesterUI/ReversingRejectedAssignment.html>
- [27] http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~drand/rand_jtb_2011.pdf
- [28] <http://www.michelemargolis.com/uploads/2/0/2/0/20207607/screener.pdf>

Fair payment

Fair payment

Crowdsourcing workers are a labor force. While we cannot speak for all crowd workers, many depend on income from crowdsourcing as a supplementary or primary income. Crowdsourcing workers are legally considered contractors and therefore are not protected by any minimum wage laws. When requesters pay a fair wage and treat workers like people, both sides receive positive results.

Many workers consider \$0.10 a minute to the minimum to be considered ethical, though many studies pay more and there are excellent arguments to pay more (see below). Tasks paying less than \$0.10 a minute are likely to tap into a highly vulnerable work pool and constitutes coercion.

Posting to Turk is not just like collecting a survey

Posting an academic survey on Amazon Mechanical Turk is different than traditional forms of survey collection. Workers presume that they will be paid a fair wage and do not respect requesters who offer an extremely low rate, though what that means for different crowdworkers (India vs. US) may be different. Unfortunately some requesters may interpret this to mean they are allowed to pay extremely low rates and consider this to be "the norm of the market". This is not acceptable to the majority of the established worker community. These requesters survive because of the constant influx of new workers who have not established themselves in the workplace and the large population of international workers who view these lower payments as acceptable.

What is ethical pay for Turkers in studies?

Consider the estimated duration and difficulty of your task when deciding about payment. On many turker forums a rate of \$0.10 per minute is considered the bare minimum that most workers will work for. Although this is only \$6 per hour and far below minimum wage standards in Western countries, it is the current guideline presented to requesters across a number of forums. Many more experienced and knowledgeable Turkers, by contrast, refuse to work for less than \$0.15-\$0.20 per minute or more.

To date, many academic requesters' published papers, and many of the few university IRB websites that have any specific guidelines about MTurk, have stated that they paid or recommend paying rates equivalent to \$2-\$3 or less per hour (\$0.03-\$0.05 or less per minute) on MTurk, because it's slightly better than or similar to reported average rates (perpetuating the status quo), and sometimes mention reasoning such as that they think the workers all either don't really need or care about the money or are in low-income countries where this seems like a lot of money. There is a large US university that has routinely posted survey HITs for *less than \$0.01* per expected minute. There has been a lot of debate in turker forums about what a fair, or even acceptable, rate of pay is or should be. So far, the most commonly mentioned rate among workers as a suggested minimum has been \$6/hr (\$0.10/min), largely not because this is what most workers really prefer and are satisfied with, but as an easy-to-remember figure and a relatively realistic target in light of the preponderance to date of both academic and non-academic HITs paying much less so far. There isn't one answer appropriate for all situations, but here are some points to consider when trying to decide what a fair and ethical rate of pay on your HITs would be for US-based workers:

- Honest US-based turkers will generally be paying taxes on their MTurk earnings as self-employment.
 - There is a lot of unpaid overhead time involved in turking, including: looking for the next suitable HITs to do, taking uncompensated qualification tests to hopefully qualify for certain HITs, checking reviews for unfamiliar requesters to decide whether to work on their HITs, writing reviews of requesters, communicating with other workers on forums, dealing with some of Amazon's security measures such as periodic Captchas and forced logouts that can interrupt workflow, dealing with occasional malfunctions of the worker's ISP/browser/computer,
-

communicating with requesters (or in about half the cases, apparently futilely sending messages into a void) about questions/problems/suggestions, keeping track of the work they've done and the payments and bonuses they have or haven't received so far, checking their records of work they've done to see if it's safe to take a survey that threatens rejections if you take it more than once, and more. All break time (even going to the restroom) is also uncompensated.

- The more specialized knowledge/skills/characteristics, and/or the more stringent the qualifications (such as higher number of HITs approved, higher approval rate, scores on requesters' custom quals, and/or Masters) that your HITs will expect or require, the higher the pay rate for it generally should be if you want to continue to be fair (a fair *minimum* pay rate logically would only be considered as fair for HITs with minimum requirements, just like more-qualified/experienced workers in the traditional workforce generally expect to receive higher pay than less-qualified/experienced workers).
- Although self-employment work is not legally obligated to comply with minimum wage laws, they are commonly used as a benchmark in evaluating what pay would be fair and ethical. Points to consider regarding the minimum wage include:
 - As of Aug 2014, the current national minimum wage has been \$7.25/hr (~\$0.12/min) since July 2009, due to the final of three gradual tiers of increases that were passed in May 2007.
 - As of Aug 2014, there is currently a movement trying to raise the national minimum wage to \$10.10/hr (~\$0.17/min), but a bill that would've done that by late 2016 is stalled in Congress due to the political situation. The President was still able to set \$10.10/hr as a minimum wage for employees of companies contracting on federal government projects, which will take effect for contracts that are new or renegotiated after Jan 1, 2015. - Wage and Hour Defense Blog ^[1]
 - An increasing number of states/territories, and even some cities, have stepped in to raise their own minimum wages higher than the national one. The current highest state/territory minimum wages as of Aug 2014 are \$9.00/hr (\$0.15/min) in California (increasing to \$10.00/hr (~\$0.17/min) on Jan 1, 2016), \$9.32/hr (~\$0.16/min) in Washington state, and \$9.50/hr (~\$0.16/min) in DC effective July 1, 2014 (increasing to \$10.50 (~\$0.18/min) on July 1, 2015, to \$11.50 (~\$0.19/min) on July 1, 2016, and annual inflation-indexed increases thereafter). - National Conference of State Legislatures ^[2]
 - If increases in the national minimum wage had kept pace with basic inflation of consumer prices since 1968, it should be \$10.86 (~\$0.18/min) as of 2013. - National Employment Law Project ^[3]
 - If increases in the national minimum wage had kept pace with nationwide productivity growth in all industries since the 1940s, it should be \$16.54 (~\$0.28/min) as of 2012. - Center for Economic and Policy Research ^[4]
 - If only considering 'non-farm' productivity growth (i.e. excluding agricultural workers from the calculation), the minimum wage should be \$21.75 (~\$0.36/min) as of 2012. - Center for Economic and Policy Research ^[4]
 - "If minimum-wage workers received only half of the productivity gains over the period, the federal minimum would be \$15.34 [~\$0.26/min]. Even if the minimum wage only grew at one-fourth the rate of productivity, in 2012 it would be set at \$12.25 [~\$0.20/min]." - Center for Economic and Policy Research ^[5]
- The per-subject costs for other non-MTurk ways researchers can recruit survey participants reportedly tend to be much higher than you would be paying MTurk workers even at much more fair and ethical pay rates than is currently prevalent. Researchers who say they 'don't have the funding' to pay better rates on MTurk should consider that the alternatives are often to pay even more for a participant pool that may be less diverse and in some cases less attentive than MTurk workers. Even in the case of unfunded student projects, please try to consider that the total difference between fair and unfair pay will usually be less than you might think, particularly compared to the other costs you've committed to in pursuing your education; even just the textbooks.
- The availability of non-US workers on MTurk has apparently been gradually decreasing since Amazon stopped accepting registrations of new international worker accounts in late 2012. And with the exception of India (the

only country besides the US that has ever been able to receive direct monetary payment), there were never a large percentage of workers from any other particular country. So even if you don't specifically require workers to be in the US to accept your HITs, a large and re-growing proportion of them will be in the US, unless you specifically exclude US workers from your HITs.

Learning more about the demographics and other statistics of the turker workforce can help requesters make more informed decisions about how to structure and compensate their HITs. Many turkers are indeed casual participants performing a small number of HITs, but studies indicate the vast majority, perhaps 80%, of the HITs completed on MTurk are performed by turkers who are in the top 10% or so of productivity among active turkers, each completing hundreds or thousands of HITs per week; and many of those put forth that much effort because the money is very important to them to make ends meet, whether they have other significant sources of income or not.

Several dozen academic papers and blog posts, covering much of the above information and other related topics (many demographics, as well as work consistency, work distribution, etc), are listed with links and quotes of the relevant portions, at 'Demographics of Mechanical Turk' by turker 'clickhapper' at mTurk Grind ^[6].

Why not pay a small, token amount?

Many Turkers won't work for less than \$0.10 / minute. That means if you pay \$.02 / minute, you are getting workers who are too desperate to boycott. This constitutes coercion. If you really cannot pay the minimum, then it is better to pay nothing because at least then you get true volunteers.

What about my research sample?

No matter what guideline is used, it has always been up to the individual worker to decide how much their time is worth, but when large groups of workers are excluded from research because of poor payment, the results of the research cannot be considered a valid sampling of a population.

What if I want Turkers from different countries?

Since MTurk is a worldwide website, what may be an acceptable wage in Asia is not acceptable in many North American and European countries. If a requester would like to use the entire range of worldwide users, they should pay the same wage in India as they do in Indiana. If a requester would like to use only workers from emerging economies, it would be acceptable to break from the Western payment norms and price work according to fair wages within those countries.

What if my task takes longer than I thought, so the wages sink below what is fair?

If an amount of pay you expected to be a fair rate turns out not to be because you accidentally underestimated how long your survey would take for reasonably-efficient workers to complete, consider adjusting for this situation by sending bonuses to the workers to make up the difference (could base the bonus amount on the mean or median time to complete, in case a few workers are unusually inefficient). In July 2014, a requester did this unexpectedly for workers who took one of their surveys, basing their target pay rate on Washington state's \$9.32/hr minimum wage.

References

- [1] <http://www.wagehourblog.com/2014/06/articles/dol-enforcement/minimum-wage-for-employees-of-federal-contractors-and-subcontractors-to-rise-to-10-10-per-hour/>
- [2] <http://www.ncsl.org/research/labor-and-employment/state-minimum-wage-chart.aspx>
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- [5] <http://www.cepr.net/index.php/blogs/cepr-blog/new-cepr-issue-brief-shows-minimum-wage-has-room-to-grow>
- [6] <http://www.mturkgrind.com/threads/26341-Demographics-of-Mechanical-Turk>

Communication with requesters

Resources for Turkers to communicate with requesters

These are resources available to help with the steps described in For Turkers: what can you do when these guidelines are violated?, and other situations in which you may need to contact requesters.

Inform requesters of the guidelines and ask them to sign it

This is a template workers and researchers may want to use to inform other academic requesters of the guidelines and ask them to sign it, through email or the MTurk Contact Requester feature.

[Academic Requester],

There is currently a lot of variability in how academic requesters structure their interactions with workers on Amazon Mechanical Turk. We encounter some academic HITs with issues such as very low pay, arbitrary rejections, or excessive requests for personal information. Academic researchers and their IRBs, used to face-to-face studies, are often ill-prepared to protect Turkers' time, rights, and privacy. Tensions came to a head recently when a social scientist experimented unannounced on Turkopticon, a site where Turkers review requesters; the intervention resulted in much confusion, frustration, and wasted time on all sides. After that incident, and in response to other ongoing concerns, a group of Turkers and researchers drafted guidelines for ethical research on Amazon Mechanical Turk.

University IRBs review and approve proposals for academic research, an increasing amount of which gets done on AMT. The goal is to have a publicly accessible document to help guide researchers and IRBs. This document augments the Amazon Mechanical Turk Terms of Service, setting standards on issues workers face that the ToS doesn't address. The contributors have put in a lot of time and energy over several weeks to get this right.

After the draft was discussed on multiple Turker community forums and modified to address suggestions, we are gathering signatures from requesters such as yourself. We hope you will submit your signature to voluntarily show your support and commitment to follow these guidelines. They cover issues such as the basics of how to be a good requester, how to pay fairly, and what Turkers can do if HITs are questionable.

The guidelines are available here: <http://guidelines.wearedynamo.org/>^[1]

As a requester, you are part of a very powerful group on AMT. Your signature in support of this document will help give Turkers a sense of cooperation and goodwill, and make Mechanical Turk a better place to work.

What to do in case of violations

Please feel free to use the templates below as a starting point. The Dynamo community welcomes you to get thoughts or share drafts of your emails for feedback before you send it, by optionally posting in a private thread in the Dynamo forum ^[1].

First step: email the requester

Most academic requesters are very responsive. This template should help solve most problems.

TO: [the requester]

CC: ethics@wearedynamo.org (emails sent to this address will be posted to a private Dynamo thread ^[1], so Dynamo users and Dynamo creators can help monitor and step in, if you ask them to; you can also post emails manually in the thread if preferred)

SUBJECT LINE: Research ethics and your Mechanical Turk task

[Academic Requester],

I am a Mechanical Turk worker who noticed your HIT, [HIT title]. I am worried that this HIT is in violation of ethical guidelines for academic requesters on Amazon Mechanical Turk: <http://guidelines.wearedynamo.org/> ^[1]. These guidelines were collectively authored by Turkers and researchers, who have signed onto the document to help set it as a standard for how to practice research ethically on AMT.

I'm optimistic that you can fix your approach pretty easily. The particular problem is that [describe problem here]. The guidelines suggest that you need to [describe fix here]. The relevant part of the guidelines is: [link to specific subsection of guidelines document].

Often these kinds of violations are totally accidental and a result of an understandable misunderstanding. I hope we can fix this quickly so we can get back to working on your HITs! We also hope that you incorporate these guidelines into your research protocols and practices in the future.

Thank you,

[Your name, or pseudonym]

Second step: let the requester know about next steps

If the requester isn't responding or is uncooperative, this second template might prove useful.

TO: [the requester]

CC: ethics@wearedynamo.org

SUBJECT LINE: Contacting IRB about your Mechanical Turk task

[Academic Requester],

I am still concerned that your HIT, [HIT title], is in violation of the ethical standards that the community laid out for research on Amazon Mechanical Turk. It has been [??? days] since the problem was first flagged, and we don't seem to be making any progress. Please get your HIT in accordance with the guidelines: <http://guidelines.wearedynamo.org/> ^[1]

On [a date roughly three days from now], if your HIT is still in violation, other Turkers and I will be contacting your Institutional Review Board (IRB) and issuing a formal complaint. Please, we don't want to do this.

Thanks,

[Your name, or pseudonym]

Third step: contact the IRB

If previous attempts have failed, then you may want to first check in with the Dynamo forum ^[1] for feedback. Contacting an IRB unnecessarily could make it more difficult for all academics at that institution to do future research on Mechanical Turk. So we only want to do this when fully justified. The university's IRB can take action by asking the researcher to pause their research and address and resolve issues they have caused.

TO: [the requester's university IRB board] (To find this information, if you haven't saved it from a survey consent/intro page, you can search the internet for "[university name] institutional review board" and look for contact information.)

CC: ethics@wearedynamo.org

SUBJECT LINE: Research on Amazon Mechanical Turk is in violation of community ethical guidelines

Dear [university name] IRB,

I am a worker on the Amazon Mechanical Turk marketplace (www.mturk.com), and your researcher [researcher name] in the [department] Department is violating our community guidelines for ethical research practices. A number of us are concerned about the negative impact this research is having on Amazon Mechanical Turk. It poisons the water for current and future research on the site.

Researchers and Turkers have collectively authored a set of guidelines for ethical research on Mechanical Turk: <http://guidelines.wearedynamo.org/> ^[1]. [Researcher name] is in violation of these guidelines, and has not responded to previous requests to fix the problem.

[Describe the HIT]

[Explain the violation. Refer to specifics in the guidelines.]

Please help us get [researcher]'s task in line with the guidelines, or pull it down.

Thank you. This is important to address: many of us depend on Amazon Mechanical Turk for critical income.

Sincerely,

[Your name, or pseudonym]

References

[1] <http://www.wearedynamo.org/forum/actions/topics/help-communicating-with-academic-requesters>

Links to other resources on AMT and online research ethics

Other guidelines as resources

AMT Requester best practices: academic

- 'A Step-By-Step Guide to MTurk for the Academic Researcher' by requester EE Buckels at 'Mechanical Turk Wiki for Behavioral Research' ^[1]
- 'Amazon Mechanical Turk Guide for Social Scientists' by requester Michael Buhrmester ^[2]
- 'Experimenting on Mechanical Turk: 5 How Tos' blog post by Markus Jakobsson at PARC ^[3]

Internet Research and Social Computing Ethics

- Code of Ethics for Community Informatics Researchers ^[4]
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy - Internet Ethics ^[5]
- University of Connecticut Internet Research Ethics ^[6]
- Association for Internet Research Ethics Guidelines ^[7]
- Reardon, "On the Emergence of Science and Justice" in *Science, Technology & Human Values* ^[8]

AMT Requester best practices: general

- 'Requester Best Practices Guide' (pdf) from Amazon Web Services ^[9]
- 'Being a Respected Requester' by turker 'Mills' at mTurk Boards ^[10]
- 'Tips for Academic Requesters on Mturk' blog post by turker 'T' at 'Tips For Requesters On Mechanical Turk' blog ^[11]
- 'ProPublica's Guide to Mechanical Turk' by requesters Srinivas Rao and Amanda Michel at ProPublica ^[12]
- '15 Tips to Get the Most out of Mechanical Turk' blog post by requester AJ Kohn ^[13]
- 'Making the Most of Mechanical Turk: Tips and Best Practices' blog post by requester Edwin Chen ^[14]
- 'Effective Use of Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk)' by requester Neeraj Kumar ^[15]

References

- [1] <http://buckels.psycstudies.com/mechanical-turk-wiki/>
 - [2] <http://homepage.psy.utexas.edu/HomePage/Students/Buhrmester/MTurk%20Guide.htm>
 - [3] <http://blogs.parc.com/blog/2009/07/experimenting-on-mechanical-turk-5-how-tos/>
 - [4] <http://ci-journal.net/index.php/ciej/article/view/441/307>
 - [5] <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-internet-research/>
 - [6] http://irb.uconn.edu/internet_research.html
 - [7] http://ethics.aoir.org/index.php?title=Main_Page
 - [8] <http://scijust.ucsc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/On-the-Emergence-of-Science-and-Justice-PDF-copy.pdf>
 - [9] http://mturkpublic.s3.amazonaws.com/docs/MTURK_BP.pdf
 - [10] <http://mturk.boards.net/thread/111/respected-requester>
 - [11] <http://turkrequesters.blogspot.com/2012/09/tips-for-academic-requesters-on-mturk.html>
 - [12] <http://www.propublica.org/article/propublicas-guide-to-mechanical-turk>
 - [13] <http://www.blindfiveyearold.com/mechanical-turk-tips>
 - [14] <http://blog.echen.me/2012/04/25/making-the-most-of-mechanical-turk-tips-and-best-practices/>
 - [15] <http://homes.cs.washington.edu/~neeraj/writings/mturk/>
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Meta: Maintaining the guidelines

These guidelines have been authored collaboratively by a group of Amazon Mechanical Turk workers and researchers interested in the ethics of crowdsourcing. Version 1.0 was frozen on Wednesday, August 20th 2014, at 11:59 pm (PDT).

Any further changes happen by:

- If the change is a minor edit (e.g. fixing a broken link or adding a signature), the admins will temporarily open the document and make the change.
- If the change is a major edit, a proposal has to be submitted to the Dynamo thread ^[1]. After discussing the change the Wiki will be opened and edited, after which the version number will change and all those who have signed the guidelines will be informed by email of this change.

Any comments, disagreements, or questions are welcome.

- If you are a Turker, post to the Dynamo forum ^[1].
- Otherwise, email info@wearedynamo.org and we will post your message to the thread.

Who created this guideline?

Dynamo ^[2] is the platform that has hosted the drafting process so far. Dynamo is a place where Turkers can join together to reach a mutual agreement on matters that affect them all, and act collectively to make a change. Turkers from all forums and lone wolves are all welcome here.

The legitimacy of actions on Dynamo relies on the fact that each Dynamo user is actually a Turker with a minimum of 100 HITs under their belt. To log in to Dynamo, workers complete a HIT ^[7] on AMT; upon completing it, a registration code is received. That registration code is the key to obtaining an anonymized username on the Dynamo signup page. So, there are no spammers or lurkers, and each Turker receives one voice to make change. Register on Dynamo ^[3].

References

[1] <http://www.wearedynamo.org/forum/actions/topics/call-for-comments-turker-authored-guidelines-for-research-on-amt>

[2] <http://wearedynamo.org>

[3] http://www.wearedynamo.org/users/sign_up

Article Sources and Contributors

Guidelines for Academic Requesters *Source:* <http://wiki.wearedynamo.org/index.php?oldid=537> *Contributors:* Cheerful panda, Dark bird of paradise, Enchanting sea anemone, Eva, Excited iguana, Faithful fly, Gorgeous monarch butterfly, Lazy rhino, Lazy urchin, Light dragonfly, Lilly, Lonely wombat, MediaWiki default, Niloufar, Tense ringworm, Tired cricket, Vast anaconda

Basics of how to be a good requester *Source:* <http://wiki.wearedynamo.org/index.php?oldid=402> *Contributors:* Cheerful panda, Gorgeous monarch butterfly, Light dragonfly, Niloufar, Tense ringworm

Fair payment *Source:* <http://wiki.wearedynamo.org/index.php?oldid=386> *Contributors:* Gorgeous monarch butterfly, Light dragonfly, Niloufar

Communication with requesters *Source:* <http://wiki.wearedynamo.org/index.php?oldid=404> *Contributors:* Excited iguana, Gorgeous monarch butterfly, Light dragonfly, Niloufar, Tense ringworm

Links to other resources on AMT and online research ethics *Source:* <http://wiki.wearedynamo.org/index.php?oldid=234> *Contributors:* Tense ringworm

Meta: Maintaining the guidelines *Source:* <http://wiki.wearedynamo.org/index.php?oldid=407> *Contributors:* Gorgeous monarch butterfly, Light dragonfly, Niloufar