

Unmoderated Studies

What Unmoderated Studies Are

An unmoderated study is a research task that you complete on your own — no moderator. You're given a set of tasks or questions, and you complete them independently, within a set deadline. Your interactions are recorded using specialized tools that capture on-screen activities, clicks, and sometimes even voice commentary.

How They Work for a Participant

Once you're accepted, you receive a link to the study platform. From there it's usually straightforward — you'll see instructions, a task or series of tasks, and you work through them on your own. You complete tasks at your own pace, on your own time, at a time and location of your choosing. Some studies ask you to think out loud while you do things and record your screen and voice. Others are purely written — you answer questions, react to concepts, or rate things. Some ask you to record a short video of yourself completing a task, like using a website or trying a product. When you're done, you submit and get paid. They're typically shorter in length — 30 minutes or less — which is what makes them the “in-between money” format. Quick, self-contained, and low commitment.

What Companies Use Them and Why

The platforms your students already know are the main ones hosting these: User Interviews, Respondent, and dscout. User Interviews supports surveys, usability tests, and mini assignments such as asking participants to record a video of themselves completing a specified task. Dscout is particularly well-known for mobile-first unmoderated work — diary-style missions where you complete tasks and submit video, photo, and text responses through their app. From the research company's side, the appeal is significant — the method is scalable, fast, cost-effective, and because people participate in their own environment, researchers see natural behavior rather than performed behavior.

What You Might Actually Be Asked to Do

It varies widely. Common tasks include navigating a website and sharing your experience, reacting to a new product concept or ad, completing a short survey about your habits or opinions, recording yourself using an app, or doing a diary-style check-in over several days. Surveys allow participants to answer structured questions about their opinions, behaviors, or preferences and are best for collecting feedback at scale. Task-based studies tend to involve more doing and less just answering.

How Hard Are They to Get Into

Generally easier to qualify for than a live focus group. The screeners are usually shorter, and since there's no scheduling coordination required, researchers can approve more people.

How Much Do They Pay

This is the most variable part. On the low end, a quick 10 to 15-minute survey or simple task might pay as little as \$5, though the average incentive for an active participant runs higher than that. Online surveys and short interviews on Respondent typically pay \$50 to \$150. Multi-day diary studies on dscout — where you're checking in over several days and submitting video or photos — can pay significantly more, often \$75 to \$150 or higher depending on the workload. On Respondent, incentives can go up to \$1,000 per project on the high end, though that's rare and usually reserved for hard-to-reach professional or specialized audiences. For most everyday consumer unmoderated studies, expect somewhere in the \$20 to \$75 range for tasks that take under 30 minutes.