



Classroom Assessment Techniques: Getting Started

When we think of assessment at the university level, we typically envision the formal tasks required of students: quizzes, tests, exams, term papers, lab reports, and large projects. These are the types of assessments that tend to occur at the end of lessons, units, or courses, and we use these evaluations to make judgments about individual student achievement and to assign grades.

Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs) provide a mechanism of *informal* assessments that allow instructors to adjust their instruction—to slow down or review a key concept, to clarify someone’s misconception, or to move on because students have a firm grasp of the material. These techniques do not replace formal assessments, but rather are meant to complement them, and they provide information to both instructors and students that inform the processes of teaching and learning. A *Classroom Assessment Technique* is a specific procedure or activity designed to help you gather useful data regarding student learning, and there are a wealth of classroom assessments from which you could choose to utilize in your course.

Several common classroom assessments are described in ITLE videos, but you can also perform an internet search to find other examples. Regardless, if you are just beginning to implement these techniques, we offer the following suggestions (Angelo & Cross, 1993):

Start small. Try one or two of the simplest techniques in a class that is going well. This way you can develop expertise with minimal risk. The Minute Paper, Muddiest Point, One-Sentence Summary, Directed Paraphrasing, and Applications Card each offer a nice starting point.

Be explicit. Once you decide to implement a classroom assessment, tell students why you are asking for the information. Assure them that you are assessing learning in order to determine your next steps as an instructor, not in order to determine a grade. Many instructors even choose to make this feedback anonymous, especially in the beginning. Also, make the procedure abundantly clear for students so they understand what it is that you want.



Collect and categorize right away. Analyze your data as soon as possible. Even a cursory glance can provide helpful information. Look for particularly revealing or thoughtful responses and pay attention to what is being said by those who are on-target as well as those who are still a bit off-track.

Respond. Close the feedback loop by telling students what you learned from the classroom assessment. Let them know that their participation in the assessment is making a difference in your instruction. For example, you can begin the next class period by saying, “It appears that many of you are still struggling with the concept of _____, let’s talk a bit more about that today.” Or, if a deeper bit of instruction is needed, you might want to post a quick video or supplementary handout in the online classroom.

Using classroom assessment techniques can make your life easier as an instructor. If you feel unsure about which one to try or how best to implement it, remember that the Department of Teaching and Learning Support at ITLE is always more than happy to help! You may also want to check out the Angelo and Cross resource listed at the bottom of the page.