Classroom Assessment Techniques

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Useful books:
Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers, 2nd edition, by Thomas A. Angelo and K. Patricia Cross (Jossey-Bass, 1993)
Learning Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty, by Elizabeth Barkley and Claire Howell Major (Jossey-Bass, 2016)

What are Classroom Assessment Techniques?

Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs) are simple in-class activities designed for the primary purpose of giving the instructor useful, current feedback on teaching and learning. They are tools to help the instructor understand what, how much, and how well students are learning so that adjustments can be made before the end of the term.

CATs are most often ungraded; their purpose is not to evaluate individual students but to assess learning across the class as a whole. They are usually anonymous.

CATs are not meant to take place of more traditional forms of classroom evaluations but to complement formal evaluations of learning, providing feedback before or between exams and assignments.

Benefits of CATs?

Angelo and Cross argue that "CATs reinforce student learning in three ways: by focusing student attention on the most important elements of the course; by providing additional practice in valuable learning and thinking skills; and by training students to become more self-aware, self-assessing, independent learners….CATs [are] both 'assessment techniques' and 'teaching strategies'"(p. 9).

CATs can improve teaching and learning in a variety of ways:

- CATs provide feedback to faculty about student learning and the effectiveness of teaching to inform the rest of the semester.

- Timely feedback to students is important for student learning, but instructors may not be able to offer feedback as often as ideal given their workloads. Information from CATs enable instructors to provide quick and frequent feedback to students as a group in an efficient way.

- CATs provide instructors with information about student learning more frequently and with less work than traditional, high-stakes assignments (tests, papers, etc.). Receiving this information before high-stakes, graded assignments can help instructors provide feedback to students to enable success on those assignments.

- Many CATs provide students with additional opportunities to practice and apply learning on low-stakes tasks, and this reinforces their learning.

- CATs can help students become more aware of their own learning, increasing metacognitive skills. Use of CATs models the importance of self-assessment as a practice.

- Use of CATs show students that instructors take a strong, active interest in their learning process throughout the course.

How to Implement CATs

Here are a few tips to follow:

- Begin by thinking about the learning outcomes for the course/class session and what you want to find out about student learning, or what aspect of teaching you'd like feedback on.

- Choose a CAT that will give you information about what you want to know, and that also fits your teaching style and can be implemented easily in your class.

- Explain the purpose of the CAT and your goal clearly to the students, and then conduct the CAT.

- Review the results, determine what they tell you about your students' learning or your teaching, and decide what changes to make, if any.

- Share your findings with your students. Offer them feedback on their learning, and let them know about any changes you plan to make in response to their feedback.

Examples of CATs:

Name	Description/Process	Benefits/Notes
The Minute Paper	The minute paper provides a quick snapshot as to what students are learning and what confuses them. For this technique, the instructor ends class by asking students to briefly respond to the following questions: "What was the most important thing you learning during this class?" and "What important questions remain unanswered?"	*This requires more than simple recall. Students have to ask themselves how well they understand what they have learned and to articulate this. *Could give students a few extra minutes to compare and discuss responses.
The Muddiest Point	This is a variation on the Minute Paper and is one of the simplest ways to assess where students are having difficulties. In this technique, at the end of class, the instructor asks students to respond to the question "What was the muddiest point in _____?" (class, reading assignment, etc.) The term "muddiest" means "most unclear" or "most confusing."	*Students practice metacognitive skills: they need to determine what they are most confused about. *Can be great for students who are hesitant to ask questions in class
Quick Write	In this technique, the teacher poses an open-ended prompt and students write a response in a brief amount of time. This can provide students with a quick view of students' understanding and their ability to communicate it.	*Incorporates writing practice in a low-stakes environment *Articulating or explaining something in one's own words assists learning
One-sentence Summary (or Tweet)	This enables teachers to find out how concisely, completely, and creatively students can summarize a large amount of information on a given topic. Students are asked to summarize information within the grammatical constraints of a single sentence, addressing the areas relevant to the topic .(Who? What? When? Where? How? Why?) For a modern spin, students could be asked to explain the concept as well as possible in a Tweet.	*Students practice synthesis, critical thinking, and writing *Students summarize and organize the information into their own framework, making it easier for them to recall in the future.

Student-generated Test Questions	This helps instructors understand what students think are the most important concepts and content of the class, as well as see what students expect in terms of the test. A couple weeks before a test, determine the types of questions (e.g. multiple choice, fill-in, essay) desired and the topics on which students should generate questions. Ask students to write a couple questions per topic/type.	*Helps students to step back and think about what is most important in the class *Helps students self-assess their knowledge as they think about whether they can answer the questions *Instructors can give feedback to students on how closely their questions parallel what they will see on the exam *Good questions could be turned into a study guide, or selected to be on the exam.
Background Knowledge Probe	The *Background Knowledge Probe* is a short quiz or questionnaire given to students at the start of a course, or before the introduction of a new unit. It helps the instructor understand the level of foundational knowledge students have as well as any preconceptions or misconceptions. Students are often asked to rate their level of confidence in their responses. This is similar to the "First Day Final," in which a non-graded test similar to the final exam is given in an early class session.	*Allows the instructor to determine what students know and do not know prior to teaching, enabling her to teach more effectively *Enables the instructor to connect new information to what students already know, which is beneficial for learning
Study-time logs/ Diagnostic learning logs	Study logs: Instructors ask students to keep a log of how much they study for a particular course and what seems to work best. Think about what you want students to make note of: Amount of time? Days of the week? Time of day? Location? Task? Etc. This can help faculty understand how much time students are spending and determine whether their study habits are effective for the class. Diagnostic learning logs: After returning a test or assignment, an instructor can ask students what was successful and what was less successful in terms of how they studied for the test/did the assignment, and what they would do differently next time.	*Helps students gain insights into their study habits *Helps students be more reflective and develop metacognitive skills * Can have students compare their logs to those of their classmates * Can have class discussion about which study habits students found successful and less successful

Annotated Portfolios	Instructors ask students to submit a limited sample of their work, asking them to select work that demonstrates certain course goal or relates to a particular question or topic. Students provide annotations about why they selected the work and what each piece demonstrates. For example, students could select two assignments that demonstrate their growth in learning and discuss, or discuss the assignment that was most challenging to them and why.	*This requires students to evaluate their work critically and explain their learning. * Can be useful with frequent low-stakes assignments like journal entries that may not be reviewed by the instructor.
Reading Rating Sheets; Assignment Assessments; Midsemester feedback form	These are various ways to elicit student feedback on teaching. Reading Rating Sheets are brief forms that students fill out in response to their assigned course reading. The instructor asks questions about how interesting, clear, and useful the readings are. Assignment Assessments: To assess an assignment, ask students two or three questions about whether the assignment was useful to their learning. You can use this technique to see assignments from the students' perspective; get feedback on difficulty level, learning value, and interest level of the project/assignment. Brief feedback forms can be used to get student feedback at the midpoint of the semester, or even on a particular class.	*This feedback should be anonymous and collected in a way to protect anonymity. * Demonstrates to students that they have a role in the learning environment by providing feedback. *Let students know how you will use their feedback in the future, or how you have used feedback from past students for that class. *Be careful about asking for feedback on aspects of the course you are unwilling or unable to change. However, don't ask for feedback on assignments/readings that you are unwilling to change.