

Classroom Assessment Techniques

Classroom assessments are short, ungraded ways to check student comprehension and gain feedback on the effectiveness of your classroom teaching techniques. For instance, when you ask students in a large lecture to give a show of hands in response to a multiple-choice question, you are conducting a simple classroom assessment on their current understanding of the concept you are about to address. Similarly, designing a short survey and sending it to students halfway through the semester to gauge their attitudes toward the textbook or other materials is another form of classroom assessment.

Thomas Angelo and Patricia Cross made popular the term "Classroom Assessment Techniques" (CATs) with their *Handbook for College Teachers* in 1993, available for check-out from the CNDLS library in 314 Car Barn. CNDLS offers assistance with a few of the more time-intensive techniques, such as videotaped think-alouds and mid-semester group feedback sessions. However, there are many simple techniques that faculty members can implement in a single class session.

- **Prior Knowledge Survey**—A short, simple questionnaire that determines what students already know about a subject or concept. This information helps the faculty member select the appropriate starting place or level of instruction. Useful at the beginning of a course, a unit, or an important new topic.
- **Concept Maps**—These are drawings or diagrams showing the mental connections students make between certain concepts. If students are asked to draw concept maps at the beginning and end of the course, the maps may illustrate whether students gained a more sophisticated understanding of the issues surrounding a particular concept.
- **Minute Paper**—Short, written responses from students at the end of class in response to one or two questions, such as: "What was the most important thing you learned during this class?" or "What important question remains unanswered for you?"
- **Muddiest Point**—Well suited to large, lower-division classes, the Muddiest Point involves asking students to write down the most confusing or least clear part of what they just heard (lecture) or saw (video). These responses are collected by the professor and provide immediate feedback on student understanding of presented material.
- **Pro and Con Grid**—This exercise forces students to go beyond their initial reactions and to search for at least two sides to the issue in question. This assessment works well in humanities, social sciences, or public policy courses where questions of value are being examined.
- **Mid Semester Group Feedback**—This assessment technique is conducted at the midpoint of the semester so that the feedback from students can be utilized to make course adjustments before the end of the semester. CNDLS staff facilitate this process, which begins with a conversation about course aspects the faculty member is curious about, includes a 40 minute class session where CNDLS staff talk with students and gather written responses, and a follow-up conversation with the faculty member to interpret the results and discuss possible adjustments.