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ASSESSING YOUR TEACHING

EFFECTIVENESS

This job aid describes methods you can use to analyze and improve your instruction by using

your own observations and reflections as well as feedback from your students.

This job aid will help you to:

# decide which qualities of your teaching to evaluate

# choose an appropriate assessment method

# improve your teaching through reflection and revisions

# incorporate techniques for assessing your teaching in online courses

# What qualities of instruction do you wish to assess?

Use this checklist to decide the qualities of instruction you wish to review. This is not an exhaustive list. It’s best to focus on areas that you are actually able (or willing) to change.

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| Qualities of my teaching I wish to assess are:   * identification of student's wants and needs with strategies and techniques required to meet these needs * alignment of learning outcomes or competencies with course materials, activities, and assessments * organization and flow of course and subject matter * opportunities for learners to engage in the class * provision of supporting resources needed for student success * communication between myself and students * interactions with students * use of flexible and inclusive practices to support accessibility and learning for all * e.g., IDEAS components: Indigenous Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Access, Sustainability, Student Wellbeing * variety of types of learning activities and resource materials * my knowledge of the subject matter * enthusiasm for the subject and for teaching along with my ability to communicate effectively * fairness of testing and grading |

# How can you assess the quality of instruction?

You may already collect data about instruction in many ways. Options include:

* structured interviews with students
* instructional rating surveys
* tests and exams
* content analysis of instructional materials
* review of classroom records
* peer feedback

You may also want to try something new.

When choosing methods to assess the effectiveness of your teaching, use the following guidelines:

* Use techniques that give you the type of feedback you need to reflect on your area of interest.
* Use techniques that appeal to your intuition and judgment as a teacher.
* Choose techniques that will benefit yourself and your students.
* Plan how to introduce the technique to students.
* Estimate and plan for how much class time and effort techniques will take.

## Tips

* Use variety—if students find techniques overused, predictable or monotonous, the information will not be as useful.
* Encourage shy students to express their thoughts by using brief written exercises.
* Encourage students to be honest (with anonymity) as there is no possibility of a penalty.

Remember that assessing teaching, tests, activities, or tools must be followed by analysis of how things went and any results or responses from learners. Allow enough time to plan for changes. Change may take longer than you think! Remember the value of self-assessment and do not let it become a burden or a chore.

# What do students look for in an instructor?

Take time to reflect on your behaviour and attitudes and how students might perceive these.

Based on an informal survey conducted with BCIT Trades and Technology students, these are the top five qualities students want in an instructor:

1. willingness to take extra time to answer questions and solve problems
2. well-organized presentations and lessons
3. real-world experience
4. respect for students
5. sense of humour
6. enthusiasm

See references 1, 2, 3

# Assessment Techniques

# There are many ways to assess your teaching effectiveness. Here are three we suggest:

1. Self-assessment using observation and analysis.
2. Classroom Assessment Techniques
3. Peer Feedback
4. Small Group Instructional Feedback (SGIF)

# Self-Assessment Using Observation and Analysis

The following simple techniques can help you to analyze and improve your instruction using your own observations and records.

## Analyze Your Lesson Plans

If you need to create or update your lesson plans, see also the job aid *Preparing Lesson Plans*.

To identify areas for improvement in your lesson plans, use the following checklist.

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| In my lesson plans, I:   * Include a bridge-in or ‘hook’ at the start to gain students’ attention and interest. * Check learners’ background knowledge and adjust the lesson to the right level. * Communicate why this learning is important. * Present information logically. * Include necessary information only and limit this to a digestible amount. * Use appropriate instructional techniques and resources. * Include opportunities for active learning (e.g., activities, discussion, thinking tasks). * Check student learning at the end. * Close the lesson with a summary, review, or lesson highlights. |

These points may give you the insight you need to make changes. For example, at the start of a lesson about the components of a machine, you might decide to add a video to show how the parts relate to each other as a hook to catch students’ attention and interest.

## Keep a Log or Journal

Keep a personal log or journal that includes what happens in class or jot down your ideas, examples, and anecdotes in your lesson plan. Note how you decided to teach various topics and what happened as a result. Note what was happening around the time you taught subjects that gave you problems. This can help you to analyze what is happening by revealing patterns of behaviour. It also helps you to track your progress and plan for the future.

## Observe Your Classroom

Many clues in your everyday teaching environment can help you identify areas for improvement in instruction. Four obvious things to check are student attendance records, participation in classroom activities, classroom clues, and your own feelings.

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| **Student Attendance Records** Are there attendance patterns? Do students tend to miss a particular class or activity? Maybe students don’t understand the importance of the topic or activity, or you’re less interested and this shows. Or maybe your delivery needs to be more lively or interactive. But remember, the solution may not rest entirely with you. Personal issues, medical problems, and religious or cultural activities can all affect attendance. | **Student Participation in Activities** Are students more involved at certain times? Do they ask questions? Respond to yours? Request extra resource material? What is their mood? Is participation equal? Be observant; note their reactions to what you do or say. If you’re not sure your perception is right, try something similar again and see if the reaction is the same. For example, suppose you notice the students paying more attention after you tell a story about a serious job-related injury. What could this indicate? |
| **Classroom Clues**Watch students’ faces for confusion or boredom. Listen in on discussions and pay attention to what learners are making or doing during activities. Do you check on learning during and at the end of an activity, as well as at the end of the class? Review the products students create. Ask questions to get insight into what kind of help is needed or where gaps or challenges exist. | **Your Own Feelings** Are you aware of your own feelings as you teach? You may be sad, angry, joyous, excited, depressed, worried. When you recognize your feelings, you can examine the actions (your own and the students’) that led to these feelings. Your mood and feelings will affect those of your students, and theirs will affect yours. Remember, there will also be natural ebbs and flows of energy levels throughout the semester. |

## Use Recordings

Recording yourself as you teach is a simple technique to enhance your instruction. This gives you an accurate picture of what happens in your classroom. By paying attention to what you and your students said and did, you can get valuable information to improve your instruction.

All you need is a camera with a stand (e.g., video camera, mobile phone). You may already have your own equipment; if not, it should be available from your department or audio-visual services. If you need advice or help with recording or with deciding what changes are needed after you view the session, the Learning and Teaching Centre has plenty of experience in this type of self-assessment.

Use the following procedure to record your class:

1. Tell your students what you are doing. Explain that you are trying to improve your instruction to make learning more effective. Emphasize that they are not being judged or graded in any way. Only you will see the recording. Ask for their support—you will probably get it.
2. If the classroom arrangement allows, place the camera so that both you and the students can be observed.
3. Try to place the camera where it is not disruptive.
4. Open the lens to its widest opening to capture as much information as possible.
5. Turn the camera on and let it run without adjustments. It takes only a few moments for you and the students to forget that it’s there.
6. Before you view the recording, think about your goals and write down some questions about your teaching.
7. To view the recording, choose a time when you will not be distracted. As you view the video, be open to unexpected observations. Remember to look at what students do as well as what you do.
8. After you view the recording, consider the teaching behaviours you wish to keep and those you wish to change.

## Analyze Test Results

When you mark a test, use the results to help you analyze your teaching effectiveness. For example, if many students give the same incorrect answer to a particular question, your teaching of that topic could need changes. (Of course, this assumes that the test question is clearly worded, valid, and at the appropriate level of difficulty. See also the job aid *Developing Written Tests*.)

Look at the test results for the class and check for response patterns. Pay particular attention to areas where several students had problems. Then check your lesson plans, materials, and activities to see what might be improved. Where could you make changes to support specific concepts or skills which students struggle with?

# Classroom Assessment Techniques

Classroom Assessment Techniques are short, quick, low stakes activities students do at the end of a topic or before a break. They provide a high-level view of the level of understanding. They are an informal way to get a quick snapshot of how learners are doing.

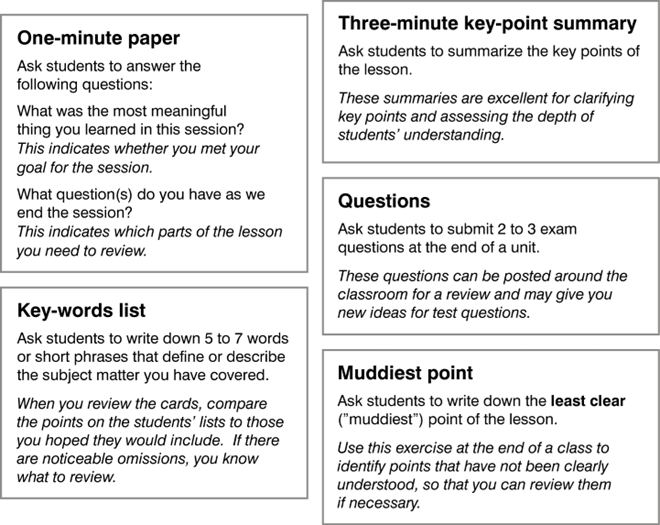
You can use the results of CATs to adjust your teaching. If learners get the concept, you can move on. If learners are struggling, you need to slow down, reinforce, use a different approach, or offer additional support.

Several very useful short writing exercises are described below. You can use them to identify points of difficulty in your teaching. Use one of the exercises at the end of a particular topic or class or before a break. For each exercise:

1. Give each student a card or sheet of paper.
2. Ask the students to take a few minutes to write their responses as directed.
3. Collect the responses and analyze them as soon as possible.
4. At the next session with these students, clarify any misconceptions or unclear areas, and answer any questions.
5. Note any commonalities in the responses and change your lesson plans to improve these areas for future classes. These exercises not only provide you with information, but they have also been shown to help students learn as well.

*Based on the work of Patricia Cross and Tom Angelo*

For other classroom assessment ideas, see the job aid *Classroom Assessment Techniques*.



# Peer Feedback

# Consider inviting a colleague to your class to observe your teaching and provide feedback. You could invite a colleague in your discipline or perhaps a colleague you met through the Instructional Skills workshop or the Polytechnic Teaching Program. The primary goal of peer observation for teaching development is to provide a fresh perspective on your teaching from a neutral observer’s perspective and encourage reflection rather than to evaluate your teaching or to provide solutions. The following strategies may contribute to an effective observation process:

# **(i) Set up a meeting with your colleague before the observation to discuss your goals** for the observation and what you would like to receive feedback on. Share your approach to teaching.

# **(ii) Share the course outline and provide context** for the session, including lesson goals.

# **(iii) For in person teaching: Ask your colleague to focus on observable teacher and student behaviours** (e.g., How often do I ask questions? Do I leave enough silence for my students to respond before I answer my own questions? Are my students engaged during the class? What are the students doing while helping others? Am I providing enough examples? Are directions for active learning or group work clear? How effectively do I provide students with feedback on their work in the lab, on the shop floor or during hands-on activities?)

# **(iv)** **On the day of the observation, introduce your visitor to your students,** and let students know that they are attending to observe your teaching as part of your development as an instructor. Reassure students that the observer is not visiting to evaluate them.

# **(v) For online teaching:** Invite your colleague to review your materials in the Learning Hub for instructor presence, opportunities for interaction and student engagement, clarity of course flow and instructions, relevance and quality of video materials and images, and assessments.

# **(vi) Schedule a meeting to debrief the session and discuss the observation.** Effective feedback is constructive, supportive and focuses on the student experience in the class.Effective observers describe what they saw in class, identify the strengths of the teaching approach, and describe opportunities for improvement (focusing on the student experience).

# **(vii) Reflect on the observation and identify 3-4 steps you can take** to incorporate the feedback in your teaching, collect further data from students or respond to the observations you heard. (e.g., How can I make my lectures more engaging? How can I incorporate more interaction in my online course? How can I add more real-world examples or clarify assignment instructions?)

# **(viii) If possible/applicable, let your students know** how you are changing your teaching approach as a result of the observation.

# **Additional strategies and templates for observation:**

# Chism, N. V. N. (2007). *Peer Review of Teaching. A Sourcebook*. 2nd edition. Anker Publishing.

# Small Group Instructional Feedback

Small Group Instructional Feedback (SGIF) is a simple, powerful technique for determining the effectiveness of your teaching and is based on feedback from your students. It is equally valuable for new and for experienced teachers. It uses a specially trained colleague to provide you with student consensus about your teaching in a particular class.

The process is as follows:

1. It starts after at least three weeks of instruction but before the midterm point.
2. A trained facilitator meets with the instructor to set objectives for the SGIF.
3. A trained facilitator visits the class without the instructor for 30 to 45 minutes.
4. The facilitator asks groups of 4 or 5 students to consider these questions:

* What do you like about this course?
* What areas do you think need improvement?
* What suggestions do you have for making improvements?

1. The facilitator helps the class to synthesize the group reports into a class consensus of recommendations and comments. The exact method used for this depends on the size of the class.
2. The **facilitator** meets privately with the instructor to discuss the results. All information is confidential. It is not used in faculty evaluation or performance appraisals.
3. The instructor uses the results to plan course improvements and tells learners what changes to expect.

Students enjoy the interactive nature of this method and appreciate that the instructor cares about their learning. The timing allows students to benefit from changes that result, and they can see how their opinions compare to others.’ Students can also see they have input and responsibility for their learning and the success of a class.

Instructors appreciate the help of a knowledgeable and objective colleague. They also appreciate the diverse opinions presented in an objective way early enough in the course that they can use the results to improve their instruction.

Contact the Learning and Teaching Centre if you are interested in trying SGIF to evaluate your instruction or if you would like more details about the method.

# Making Changes to Improve Teaching

After you have used some of these techniques for analysis, you will probably want to make changes to improve your teaching. Remember that change can take a few attempts and be a slow process. Change is not about perfection. However, even small changes can make a significant difference to your teaching and your students’ learning. Build on your successes. Use the following checklist as you plan your changes.

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| When planning changes to improve my teaching:   * I remember and note what I do well. * I limit changes to one or two things at one time. * I recognize change takes time and practice. * I plan to repeat the process of review and analysis to track progress. |

[1] Delaney, Jerome G., et al. “Students’ Perceptions of Effective Teaching in Higher Education.” *Research.library.mun.ca*, 2010, research.library.mun.ca/8370/.

[2] Murray, H. G. (1997). Effective Teaching Behaviors in the college classroom. In Perry, R. P. and Smart, J. C. *Effective teaching in higher education: Research and practice*, 171-204. Agathon Press

[3] Murray, H. G., Perry, R. P., & Smart, J. C. (2007). Research on low-inference teaching behaviors: An update. *The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: An Evidence-Based Perspective, Springer, Dordrecht*, 184-200.

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