

ASSESSING YOUR TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS

This job aid describes some methods you can use to analyze and improve your instruction, using your own observation and records and by gathering feedback from your students.

This job aid will help you to:

- decide which qualities of your teaching to evaluate
- choose an appropriate assessment method
- make changes to improve your teaching

 Includes techniques for online courses.



Think about what you wish to assess

Use this checklist in deciding what you wish to evaluate.

Qualities of my teaching I wish to assess are:

- Organization of subject matter and course
- Communication
- My knowledge of the subject matter
- My enthusiasm for the subject and for teaching
- My attitude toward students
- Fairness in testing and grading
- Flexibility in approaches to teaching
- Appropriateness of student learning outcomes

Choose how you wish to assess it

You may collect data in many ways other than those in this job aid. These include structured interviews with students, instructional rating surveys, tests and exams, content analysis of instructional materials, and review of classroom records. You probably already use many of these. But you may want to try something new.

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

- Avoid techniques that don't appeal to your intuition and judgement as a teacher.
- Do not allow any self-assessment to become a burden and a chore.
- 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 it will take.
- Do not use these techniques too often—if the students find them predictable and monotonous, the information will not be as useful.
- Brief written exercises are good for encouraging shy students to express their thoughts.
- Anonymity encourages students to be frank without the possibility of penalty.
- Remember that assessment and analysis probably take twice as long as you think! Allow enough time to plan for changes.

What do students look for?

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

- willingness to take extra time to answer questions and solve problems
- well organized presentations and lessons
- real world experience
- respect for students
- sense of humour

Self-assessment using observation and analysis

The following simple techniques can help you to analyze and improve your instruction using your own observation 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 some problem areas in your lesson plans, use the following checklist.

In my lesson plans I have:

- Included all necessary information for the students
- Planned to communicate why learning this is important
- Not included too much information
- Removed irrelevant information that might confuse the students
- Presented the information logically
- Planned to use appropriate instructional techniques
- Planned to use appropriate resources

These questions may give you the insight you need to make changes. For example, you might decide to add an overhead transparency to your lecture about the components of a machine to show how the parts relate to each other rather than drawing on the chalkboard or whiteboard each time.

Keep a log or journal

Keep a personal log or journal that includes what happens in class or jot down your ideas, examples, anecdotes, etc. on a sticky note and fasten it right to the 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 are giving you problems. Were you worried or sick? Were there disruptions such as fire drills? 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.

Pay attention to classroom clues

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

Student attendance records

Are there patterns? Do students miss a particular class or activity? Perhaps you have less interest in this topic or activity and this attitude is being communicated to the students. Or perhaps students don't understand why certain content is important. Or maybe the way you deliver your lectures needs to be more lively or interactive. Sometimes a colleague can help with tips on good delivery. See also the job aid *Making Large Lectures Interactive*. (Remember, the solution may not rest entirely with you. Personal issues, medical problems, and religious and cultural activities can all affect student attendance and performance.)

Student participation in classroom activities

Are students more involved at certain times than at others? Do they ask questions? Respond to yours? Request extra resource material? What is their mood? Be more observant; note their reactions to something you do or say. If you're not sure your perception is right, try something similar again and see if the student reaction repeats. For example, suppose you notice the students paying more attention after you have told a little story about a serious job-related injury. Perhaps they could see the relevance of that skill to their own lives. Or perhaps they were able to relate better to you as a person.

Your own feelings

Are you aware of your own feelings as you teach? You may be sad, angry, joyous, excited, depressed, worried, and so on. 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 your students, and theirs will affect you. Remember, there will be natural ebbs and flows of energy levels throughout the semester.

Use videotape

Videotaping yourself as you teach is a simple technique to enhance your instruction. Recording your instruction 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 on how to improve your instruction.

All you need is a camera with a stand and a VCR for viewing the tape. Check whether your department has the equipment and facilities you need. If not, the audio-visual department can lend you the equipment. If you need advice or help with the taping or with deciding what changes are needed after you view the tape, the Learning and Teaching Centre has plenty of experience in this type of assessment.

Use the following procedure to videotape your class:

1. Tell your students what you are doing. Explain that you are trying to improve your instruction so that they can learn more effectively. Emphasize that they are not being judged or graded in any way with the videotape. Only you will see the tape. Ask for their support—you will probably get it.
2. If the classroom arrangement allows, it is a good idea to place the camera so that both you and the students may 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 is there.
6. Before you view the tape, think about your goals and write down some questions about your teaching.
7. To view the tape, choose a time when you will not be distracted. As you view the tape, be open to unexpected observations.
8. After you view the tape, 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, it could be that your teaching of that particular topic needs some 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 as a whole and check for patterns in the responses. Pay particular attention to areas where several students had problems. Then check your lesson plans.

Classroom assessment techniques

Traditional methods of evaluating learning usually occur at the end of term, when it is too late to make changes. By contrast, classroom assessment techniques are non-threatening to students and help the students and instructor to cooperatively improve learning.

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 a 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, they have been shown to help student learning as well.

One-minute paper

Ask students to answer the following questions:

What was the most meaningful thing you learned in this session?
This indicates whether you met your goal for the session.

What question(s) do you have as we end the session?
This indicates which parts of the lesson you need to review.

Key-words list

Ask students to write down 5 to 7 words or short phrases that define or describe the subject matter you have covered.

When you review the cards, compare the points on the students' lists to those you hoped they would include. If there are noticeable omissions, you know what to review.

Three-minute key-point summary

Ask students to summarize the key points of the lesson.

These summaries are excellent for clarifying key points and assessing the depth of students' understanding.

Questions

Ask students to submit 2 to 3 exam questions at the end of a unit.

These questions can be posted around the classroom for a review and may give you new ideas for test questions.

Muddiest point

Ask students to write down the **least clear** ("muddiest") point of the lesson.

Use this exercise at the end of a class to identify points that have not been clearly understood, so that you can review them if necessary.

Based on the work of Patricia Cross and Tom Angelo

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

Small Group Instructional Feedback (SGIF)

Small Group Instructional Feedback (SGIF) is a simple, powerful technique for determining the effectiveness of your teaching. It is equally valuable for new and for experienced teachers. It uses a specially trained colleague to provide you with a consensus of student opinion 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 mid-term 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?
5. 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.
6. 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.

Students enjoy the interactive nature of this method and appreciate that the instructor cares about their learning. The timing allows them to benefit from changes that result and they are made to understand how their opinions compare to others' and that they have some responsibility for the success of a class.

Instructors appreciate the help of a knowledgeable and objective colleague. They also appreciate the diverse opinions being 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 Small Group Instructional Feedback to evaluate your instruction or if you wish to have more detail about the method used.

Making changes

After you have used some of these techniques for analysis, you will probably try to make changes to improve your teaching. Remember that change can be a difficult and slow process and that it 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.

When planning changes to improve my teaching:

- I remember and note what I do well
- I do not try to change more than two things at once
- I try not to get discouraged—change needs time and practice
- I plan to repeat the process of analysis a few times through the year (this helps me to note patterns and to track movements)

net Assessing your online teaching effectiveness

In an online teaching environment, use the built-in forums common to all online environments—email and discussion threads—for the feedback you want to receive. Your effectiveness as an online instructor will revolve around traditional concerns, such as the quality of the instructional materials and fairness of the quizzes and exams, etc., but will have one very important addition. This is what is called “social presence” and means the feeling the student has that you are present in the course.

To maintain a social presence online, you must respond in a reasonable time to email questions from students, and also participate in discussion forums at natural points in the discussion. You should set the tone by leading off discussions and setting the terms of reference, and gently steering when required. Students will also feel your presence if you acknowledge receipt of tests and assignments and mark them within a reasonable period of time.

Other techniques, such as some of those in the “Classroom assessment techniques” section on page 6, can be adapted successfully and provide important clues to your teaching effectiveness. See the *Classroom Assessment Techniques* job aid for a description of adapting these to the online environment.

Learning Management System (LMS) tools

To assess how students are responding to your instructional material, you can use the methods built into many learning management systems for monitoring student activity online. For example, you can tell whether or not a student has actually viewed pages and attempted quizzes. Self-tests are worthwhile additions to an online course, because they can provide you with ideas on where students are having difficulties before they attempt major assessment pieces, such as a midterm or final exam.

The LMS may also provide a survey tool, which the students can fill out at the end of the course, and which can provide the same information that has been traditionally gathered in the paper-based surveys distributed at the end of classroom courses.

Feedback from colleagues or staff can be valuable. Most online course environments allow for auditors of the course, and with your permission, one of your colleagues or an Instructional Development Consultant from the Learning and Teaching Centre could review your course by viewing the course materials and monitoring the discussion forums.