

Are Students Learning in Your Online Course?



How do you know that students are learning in your asynchronous online or synchronous remote course? **Just look to your students, ask them and they'll let you know!** In this issue of Online Teaching Coaching newsletter, we explore how you can use **Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs)** to get just-in-time feedback from students about their learning. CATs are brief, non-graded or low-stakes activities that may be used for formative assessment & feedback from students about their learning of course concepts, skills & knowledge, and also their reactions to instructional methods & course design. You then can use results and feedback (from CATs) to guide changes or adjustments that may be needed now in your online or remote course.

Steps for Planning and Using CATs in Your Online or Remote Course

Here are steps to plan and use CATs for just-in-time feedback about learning during your course. (Adapted from “**Classroom Assessment Techniques Teaching Guide**” by Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching, Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License).

1. **Decide** what you want to know about your students’ learning and their course experience. What feedback are you seeking?
2. **Choose and plan appropriate CAT** that will provide this feedback. What CAT is consistent with your teaching style? How can CAT be implemented easily in your online or remote course?
3. **Communicate.** Make sure that your students understand the purpose of the CAT activity. Let them know that you care about their learning. How will CAT information be used to improve their learning in the course?
4. **Conduct CAT activity.** Post the activity (with specific deadline) for students to complete in the asynchronous online course. If you teach remote synchronous course, plan time for students to complete CAT during real-time class session.
5. **Review CAT results.** What do the results and feedback from CAT tell you about your students’ learning?
6. **Make changes in course.** What small changes can you make right now to “fine-tune” the course to better support learning in your course? Small changes may include making instructions and assignments clearer; providing additional resources for learning support (e.g., links to tutorials); clarifying or revisiting important course concepts in the course.
7. **Follow-up with your students.** Tell your students what you learned from CAT and how you will use this information to improve the course. Let them know how their participation in CAT made a difference!

Examples of CAT Activities for Feedback about Online Learning

(Click on the name of each activity to learn more)

Exit Tickets

Exit Tickets can help you quickly assess student understanding of specific concepts. What concepts do students feel they've mastered and what they may still find challenging or unclear?

For **asynchronous online course**, you can create this CAT activity at the end of a module using [Blackboard survey tool](#). For **remote synchronous courses**, you can [create a poll](#) in Zoom to ask students to provide feedback about their understanding of important concepts during the class session.

KWL

KWL is acronym for "what you know, what you want to know, what you have learned".

For **asynchronous online course**, KWL can be done easily through an [online discussion](#), with students sharing their KWL during course week or module. At the end of week or module, you can review the student postings, note the KWL, and wrap-up by revisiting important concepts. For **remote synchronous course**, you may use [Zoom breakout groups](#) for students to discuss KWL, with each group then sharing their KWL with you and/or the entire class.

Muddiest Point

"**Muddiest Points**" are concepts that are unclear or confusing to students. At appropriate intervals during your course, you might consider having students each identify their "Muddiest Point". Use the list of "Muddiest Points" to guide possible changes in your course and teaching.

For **asynchronous online course**, you can create a "Muddiest Point" [discussion forum](#) in Blackboard. Set up the forum so that students don't see others' postings until they post. For **remote synchronous course**, you can prompt students to post their "Muddiest Point" in the [chat area](#) during Zoom class session.

You can encourage students to help clarify "Muddiest Points" for each other in the discussion forum or real-time session.

One-Sentence Summary

Want a quick snapshot of what students are learning and understanding in your course? Have students prepared a one-sentence summary! You can ask for one-sentence summary of what they've learning to check for their understanding of important concepts after they've viewed a video or completed reading, activity or assignment.

For **asynchronous online course**, students may post their one-sentence summaries in a [Blackboard journal](#) or [survey](#). In **remote synchronous course**, students may post their one-sentence summaries to [Zoom chat area](#).

Check & review their summaries for evidence of understanding and learning. Remember to follow-up with the class about this CAT and all CAT activities you use in your course.

Contact Us!

Office of Digital Learning | Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning
Phone: 703-993-6200 | Email: stearns@gmu.edu
Suite 412 Innovation Hall, Fairfax Campus
George Mason University