FOR
TAs

Assessing Learning in the Classroom
Are your students "getting it"?

You have learning objectives for your students—things that you want your students to know, understand, and be able to do. Now, how do you know if your students are "getting it"?

What It Is

A way of obtaining clear feedback about the extent to which the daily learning objectives are being met.

Formative assessments are no- or low-stakes check-ins that happen along the way to graded tests/papers (i.e., summative assessments).

Why It's Important

- Formative assessment creates a feedback loop. By assessing what, how much, and how well students are learning, you can better gauge how to adapt your teaching to meet the needs of your students.
- Assessment activities give students more opportunities to practice and demonstrate proficiency.
- Receiving incremental feedback encourages students to assess their own learning and mastery of material.

Getting Started with Assessment in the Classroom

Good news ... you're already assessing!

- Graded quizzes, tests, papers and projects are different forms of summative assessment.
- Posing questions, listening to student questions/comments, monitoring body language, etc. are ways you already gauge student understanding. In this handout you'll find more structured ways to assess learning in the classroom.

When is the best time to assess?

Assess early and often for an ongoing gauge of student learning and gaps in understanding.

- Start of class: informs where you'll begin.
- During class: reveals student progress.
- End of class: reinforces learning and reveals remaining gaps.

**>>> All these can inform how you plan for and lead your discussion section.**

Next steps ...

Here are some ways to get meaningful information about your students' learning. It's easiest to build assessment opportunities into your plan for a session, but with a little practice, you can also use some of these on the fly ...

"Are there any questions?"
is not a useful assessment

Responding to that question is a complex cognitive act, requiring rapid synthesis of gaps in knowledge with analysis of what just happened. Most students can't do that in 0.9 seconds, which is the average length of time instructors of all types wait after asking that question (Rowe, 1986).

Consider giving the students a few minutes to summarize the material to get a glimpse of their thoughts instead. Reading or hearing their responses will inform you of what students do, and do not, see as important, and will inform you on areas to address.
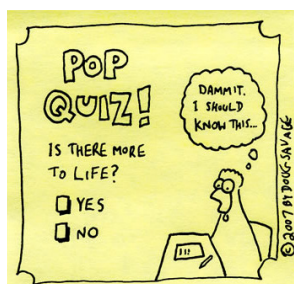
No-Stakes Quiz

What to do: Develop a set of questions that will reveal whether or not your students are where they are supposed to be. Can be administered at any point in a class period. Have them turn it into you to grade, or trade with another student to grade.

Why it works: Poor performance may inspire students to redouble their study efforts, no-stakes will not cause anxiety in students.

Participation: 🖐 🖐 🖐
Prep TIme: 🕐 🕐
Class Time: 🕐

Adapted from **Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers** (Angelo and Cross, 1993).

SANGER LEARNING CENTER

Muddiest Point

What to do: At the end of class, ask students to pull out a piece of paper and answer: "What was the muddiest [least clear] point in _____?", referring to lecture, readings, discussion, etc. Use this information to structure the next class period.

Why it works: Identifies major areas of confusion, quick, easy to administer, little prep needed, easy for shy students to share, promotes more careful listening by students.

Participation:
Prep TIme:
Class Time:

Blind Poll

What to do: Ask students to close their eyes before taking a poll. Students raise their hands to answer yes or no, a or b, or something similar. Insist that everyone answer - and ask each group to put their hands down before students open their eyes.

Why it works: Reduces pressure for students to respond a certain way and encourges honest participation, especially if one of the categories is "I have no clue".

Participation:
Prep TIme:
Class Time:

Minute Paper

What to do: Refer to the last class/topic. Ask students to pull out a piece of paper and give them 1-2 minutes to quickly answer one or two of the following:

- What was the most important thing you learned during this class period?
- What important question remains unanswered?
- What do you understand now that you didn't before?
- How has your thinking about _____ changed?

Why it works: Helps students clarify important points, identifies what went well and what needs clarification, quick, easy, flexible, immediate feedback.

Participation:
Prep TIme:
**Class Time:**

Directed Paraphrasing

What to do: Ask your students to paraphrase a part of a lesson for a specific audience. You can ask your students to do this in writing, or orally. Be sure to set a time limit for completion.

Why it works: Reveals whether students truly understand certain concepts, promotes higher-order thinking, builds students' communication skills.

Participation: (individual) or (group)
Prep Time:
Class Time: (individual) or (group)

SANGER LEARNING CENTER

Assessing Learning
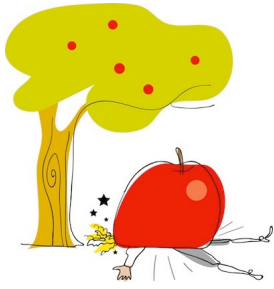
Application Cards

What to do: After presenting principle, theory, or procedure, give your students an index card and ask them to develop at least one real-world application of what they learned. This can be done either as individuals or in small groups.

Why it works: Promotes higher-order thinking, demonstrates relevance of material. Gives you a sense of whether or not they really "get it".

Participation:

Prep TIme:

Class Time:

Electronic Discussion Boards

What to do: This is a great way to get the pulse of the class without taking up valuable class time (you can use class time to explore the responses you receive). You can ask your students to respond to a wide variety of questions about content, opinions, etc.

Why it works: You get immediate feedback, students can respond at their own pace, students can respond to each other's contributions.

Participation:

**Prep TIme:**

Class Time:

Create a Wiki

What to do: Have students contribute to some product that represents the knowledge of the group. For example, draw an incomplete *timeline*, *pro/con list*, *matrix*, *flowchart*, or *diagram* on the board and ask you students to take turns filling in the missing informtation.

Why it works: Students are forced to organize course information and expose gaps in their knowledge. This can also be used to illustrate the complexity of an issue, help students develop analytical skills, or promote higher-order thinking.

Participation:

Prep TIme:

Class Time:
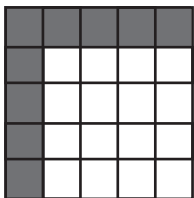
Problem Categorization

What to do: Give your students a list of random problems. Ask them <u>not</u> to solve them, but instead just categorize them according to the principle or procedure that applies to each.

Why it works: This highlights a problem students often have in problem-based courses. They often remember details of procedures, but are unable to recognize when to use them.

Participation:

Prep TIme:

Class Time:

Now What?

Okay, so you figured out how your students are doing. Now what are you going to do with that information?

What you discover	What you can do
About half the class gets it , and half the class doesn't	Develop an activity with multiple entry points so that regardless of skill/knowledge level, all students will be able to contribute. For example, • "Everyone contribute one fact about ..." • If you are working with problem-solving content, provide a selection of problems on the topic and at levels of increasing difficulty. Have each student find a problem at an appropriate challenge level and start working from there.
Everybody's clueless	Revise/develop activities to address challenging content.
Everybody's on track	Congratulations! Keep going ...
You have a couple outliers: • Most are getting it	Consider asking one or two students to describe-in their own words-the process or idea you are trying to communicate. Sometimes it just takes hearing it from a peer for the information to be digestible. This can also reinforce content for others in the class. Just be sure not to spend too much class time on content that only one or two individuals are having difficulty with. You could also invite students to office hours, recommend tutoring, etc. to continue the learning outside of class.
• Most are <u>not</u> getting it	Address gap in understanding with the whole class, and provide a new role for those few individuals who are understanding the content in question (e.g., plan a group activity with those students in some leadership role). If there is a stepwise process to the idea you are communicating, be sure to use the board to list each step, and if possible, carry a problem through all steps, highlighting how the sequence is needed for the end goal. Refer back to these steps in an ongoing manner.

SANGER LEARNING CENTER