



“The central purpose of Classroom Assessment is to empower both teachers and their students to improve the quality of learning in the classroom” through an approach that is “learner-centered, teacher-directed, mutually beneficial, formative, context-specific, and firmly rooted in good practice.”

(Angelo & Cross, 1993, p. 4)

Many of the active learning strategies used in the face-to-face courses can also be used to test students’ understanding of course content in the online settings. One of the most systematic approaches used to determine how well students are learning is the Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs), by Angelo and Cross (1993). There are 50 CATs that could be used to collect information on students’ engagement in the classroom.

These 50 CATs are divided into three main categories:

1. Techniques for assessing course-related knowledge and skills.
2. Techniques for assessing learner attitudes, values and self-awareness.
3. Techniques for assessing learner reactions to instruction.

Examples of Easy-to-use CATs

Faculty can still adapt several popular CATs for use in the online environment for both synchronous and asynchronous methods.

FOR INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS

Background knowledge probe:

To determine the most effective starting point for a lesson or lecture. Ask students to write anonymous answers to 2 or 3 open-ended questions about their background knowledge related to course material. Use:

- Blackboard Quizzes, Assignments or Survey tool, OR
- Blackboard Collaborate Ultra (voice or text)

Minute papers and Muddiest Point:

To challenge students to write a one-sentence summary to answer questions such as “What was the muddiest point in this week’s readings?”; “Who does what to whom, when, where, how, and why?” about a particular topic. The information gathered enables you to see what students are most unclear about and can form the basis for further discussion or activities.

- Use Blackboard Quizzes, Assignments, Discussions or Survey tool.

Summarize a text:

To ask students to summarize an assigned text. It helps you to check their understanding and ensure that they have done the reading.

- Use Blackboard Assignments or Discussions tool.

Reflection:

To require students to reflect on what they learned from a class discussion, assigned case, a video they were required to watch or any other assignments they were asked to do. Such reflections could indicate their study habits, their effort or their perception about the assignment or the class in general. Use:

- Blackboard Quizzes, Assignments, or Discussions tool, OR
- Blackboard Collaborate Ultra (voice or text)

FOR PAIRS OR GROUPS

Buzz groups:

Buzz groups are groups of students formed to respond to questions or brainstorm solutions to a problem. Can be used to prepare students for in-class discussion or to enable students to work more deeply with assigned material. Use:

- Blackboard Discussions or Collaborations tool, OR
- Blackboard Collaborate Ultra Breakout group.

Note-taking pairs:

Assign students to work in pairs and have them take notes individually on an assigned reading. They then share their notes in their pairs and check them for completeness and accuracy. This technique enables students to confirm their understanding of an assigned text, and also helps them become better note-takers. Pairs can be asked to consolidate their notes into a single document, which is then handed in. Use:

- Blackboard Discussions or Collaborations tool, OR
- Blackboard Collaborate Ultra Breakout group.

Learning cell:

Have students individually develop thoughtful questions about an assigned reading. Then divide them into pairs and have the students in each pair take turns asking and answering each other’s questions. Students can check their understanding of a text using this technique, which encourages students to think more deeply about a text than they might by only taking notes on it. It can also help students prepare for an exam, and student-generated questions can be posted on a forum for others to see. Use:

- Blackboard Discussions or Collaborations tool, OR
- Blackboard Collaborate Ultra Breakout group.

Fishbowl:

Divide students into two groups. One group will actively participate in an online discussion (the inner circle); the rest will spectate (lurk). Create a discussion or forum and assign a prompt to the inner circle. The inner-circle students can respond to the prompt and then comment on each other’s responses. Instruct the lurkers to monitor the conversation among the inner circle students. After the inner circle students have finished, invite the lurkers to comment on the postings. Assignment as a lurker or an inner circle member can be rotated so that all students have a chance to participate in an online discussion actively. Use:

- Blackboard Discussions or Collaborations tool, OR
- Blackboard Collaborate Ultra Breakout group.

Send a problem:

Divide students into groups and assign each group one problem to analyze or solve. Provide a collaboration space or forum for each group where they can post their ideas and arrive at a solution. Then each problem is assigned (or “sent”) to another group, which solves it without reading the first group’s solution. The last group to see a problem reads all the previous groups’ solutions, evaluates and synthesizes them, and reports out to the entire class. Use:

- Blackboard Discussions or Collaborations tool,
OR
- Blackboard Collaborate Ultra Breakout group.

Case study:

Divide students into groups. Assign a reading or create a real-world scenario that includes the description of a situation and a dilemma to be resolved. You could also ask students to watch a relevant video or clip. When each group has written up their analysis and proposed resolution, allow the entire class to read and comment on the analyses of the other groups. Use:

- Blackboard Discussions or Collaborations tool,
OR
- Blackboard Collaborate Ultra Breakout group.

Peer editing:

When assigning a return assignment or a paper, divide students into pairs or trios and have students exchange rough drafts of their papers. Give students specific questions to address or things to look for when editing; often, it works well to provide a form that editors fill out. Editors can also use the “track changes” feature in Microsoft Word to make comments on the paper itself. Then the edited paper and the form can be returned to the writer, and the form can be handed in to be also evaluated. Use:

- Blackboard Discussions or Collaborations tool,
OR
- Blackboard Collaborate Ultra Breakout group,
OR
- Google Docs.

Source:
Angelo, T. A., & Cross, K. P. (1993). Classroom assessment techniques. A handbook for college teachers. San Francisco: Jossey Bass Wiley.
(A copy of this book is available at the AUS library)