Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATS): Frequently Asked Questions

What is Classroom Assessment?
Classroom assessment is both a teaching approach and a set of techniques. The approach states that the more you know about what and how your students are learning, the better you can plan learning activities to structure your course. This approach has the following characteristics: It is learner-centered, teacher-directed, mutually beneficial, formative (as opposed to summative), context-specific, ongoing, and rooted in good teaching practice.

The techniques (called CATs, or Classroom Assessment Techniques) are simple, non-graded, anonymous, in-class activities that give both you and your students useful feedback about the teaching/learning experience.

How is Classroom Assessment different from other forms of assessment?
Classroom Assessment differs from tests and other forms of student assessment in that it is aimed at improving the course and students’ learning, rather than at assigning grades. The primary goal of Classroom Assessment is to help you better understand your students’ learning, and thereby to improve your teaching.

How do I use Classroom Assessment Techniques?
- Decide what you want to learn from a classroom assessment.
- Choose a Classroom Assessment Technique (CAT) that provides the kind of feedback you want, that is consistent with your teaching style, and that can be easily implemented in your course.
- Explain the purpose of the activity to your students, then conduct the assessment.
- After class, review the results of the CAT and decide what changes, if any, to make in your course.
- Let your students know what you learned from the CAT and how you will use this information.

What are some advantages of using CATs?
CATs have a number of advantages that make them particularly useful assessment techniques. For example, they can be adapted in numerous ways to your course and classroom context. They increase students’ active involvement in their learning, and promote metacognitive development and cooperation among students. Finally, they can foster a sense of the class as a learning community, with the instructor and the students all working toward the same goal, which can ultimately enhance students’ satisfaction with the course.


*This handout was created by Lisa Kurz, Assistant Director, Campus Instructional Consulting, Eric Metzler, Instructional Support and Assessment Specialist, Kelley School of Business and George Rehrey, Director, Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, Indiana University.
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>What to do with the data</th>
<th>Time/effort required</th>
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| Minute paper or Muddiest point | During the last few minutes of a class period, ask students to answer on a half-sheet of paper: What were the most important concepts in today’s class? OR “What part of today’s class is least clear to you?” | Review responses and note any useful comments. During the next class period, emphasize the issues illuminated by the comments. | Prep: Low  
In class: Low  
Analysis: Low |
| Show Me Your Notes          | Periodically, ask a few randomly-chosen students to photocopy their class notes and anonymously send them to you so that you can see if students are grasping the overall structure of the class and your main points. | Using your class objectives as a benchmark, study the notes from one day and note consistencies or differences between your objectives and those recorded and highlighted by your students. Adjust accordingly. | Prep: Low  
In class: Low  
Analysis: Low |
| Memory Matrix or Categorizing Grid | Students fill in cells of a two-dimensional matrix in which the instructor has provided row and column labels. For a Memory Matrix, students generate content of each cell in the matrix; for a Categorizing Grid, instructor provides a list of terms to be placed in the matrix. | Tally the number of correct and incorrect responses in each cell. Look for patterns of incorrect responses that indicate a widespread problem. | Prep: Medium  
In class: Medium  
Analysis: Medium |
| Directed Paraphrasing       | Ask students to write a layman’s “translation,” geared to a particular individual or audience, of something they have just learned. | Categorize students’ responses according to criteria you feel are important. Analyze the responses both within and across criteria, noting ways you could address students’ needs. | Prep: Low  
In class: Medium  
Analysis: Medium |
| One-Sentence Summary        | Students summarize knowledge of a topic by constructing a single sentence that answers the questions, “Who does what to whom, when, where, how, and why?” The purpose is to require students to select only the defining features of a concept. | Evaluate the quality of each summary quickly and holistically. Note whether students have identified the essential concepts of the topic, and their interrelationships. Share your observations with your students. | Prep: Low  
In class: Medium  
Analysis: Medium |
| Word Journal                | Students summarize their response to a text or presentation with a single word, then write a paragraph explaining why they chose that word. This activity helps students to analyze and evaluate their own thinking on the topic. | Tally the words that are used by more than one student. Note the justifications students give for their selections. Categorize word journals by both selected words and explanations. Share the pattern of results with your students. | Prep: Low  
In class: Medium  
Analysis: High |
| Application Card            | After teaching an important theory, principle, or procedure, ask students to write down a real-world application for what they have just learned, to determine how well they can transfer their learning. | Quickly read through the applications and categorize them according to their quality. Pick out a broad range of examples and present them to the class. | Prep: Low  
In class: Low  
Analysis: Medium |
| Student-Generated Test Questions | Allow students to write test questions and model answers for specific topics, in a format consistent with course exams. this will give students the opportunity to evaluate course topics, reflect on what they understand, and select the most important concepts to test. | Make a rough tally of the topics covered. Evaluate the questions and use the good ones as prompts for discussion. You may also want to revise the questions and use them on an upcoming exam. | Prep: Medium  
In class: High  
Analysis: High |