

## How Can I Adapt 5 Popular Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs) to the Online Classroom?

Presented by:

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### Editor's Note:

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Hello, and welcome to today's Magna 20-Minute Mentor on the question, how can I use classroom assessment techniques online? My name is Stephanie Delaney.

Today, I'll be talking to you about these fabulous classroom assessment techniques. I have to let you know that I'm relying heavily on the work of Thomas Angelo and Patricia Cross in their amazing book, *Classroom Assessment Techniques*. Each edition has wonderful information, and if you find the information in this 20-Minute Mentor to be interesting and useful to you, then I would strongly recommend that you go out and buy this book.

It's an actual handbook with specific examples from different disciplines. And it has the pros and cons of each of the different assessment techniques, what specifically you'll learn from doing the assessment technique, how long it takes to do the assessment techniques. So, lots and lots of details that can make it really wonderful and helpful for you in your quest for classroom assessment techniques to use in your instruction.

What it doesn't do is talk about using these classroom assessment techniques online. And so that's what we're going to do here today. The book makes the assumption that you're in the face-to-face classroom and not using online tools. So, I will be talking to you about ways that I've adapted five of these classroom assessment techniques to the online environment, and I'm hoping that by explaining how I've done these five, you'll have the foundations for being able to adapt to any of them to your online instruction. It should be hopefully pretty straightforward.

So, first, let's talk about what a classroom assessment technique is. This is focusing on what the student has learned as opposed to the assessment of the instruction. It's learner-centered, really focusing on the student experience. It's also ongoing. You want to do the CATs on a regular basis so that students know that they have regular opportunities for feedback.

It's also formative as opposed to summative. In other words, it looks at the learning as the learning is happening as opposed to looking at the learning at the end of the learning. And so, it gives you the opportunity to hopefully, if the learning is not going as

well as you had hoped, it gives you the opportunity to make changes to your instruction to make the learning more effective for the students.

So, let's talk about some of the benefits of classroom assessment techniques. It results in improved learning, because you are checking constantly to make sure that the students are learning. And so, you can immediately change course or make adjustments if you find learning is not happening in the way that you had hoped.

It also leads to higher student satisfaction. When you ask students, actually, "how is the learning going?" and you show the students that you are listening, the students genuinely appreciate that. They feel cared about, and they feel like you've got their back. And that is really a wonderful way to also begin to incorporate culturally responsive learning into your teaching repertoire.

Because students are able to feel welcomed and feel like you are hearing their authentic experience and hopefully responding to their authentic experience. And so, it's a really wonderful thing that you can do to help support students engaging in the CATs so that results in the students being happier.

Also, in that same way it builds trust. Students know that you're listening to them, and they begin to rely on you to do so. And that type of trust results in greater retention and gives the students a feeling like somebody cares. It matters whether they've come to class or not. It matters whether they're doing well and whether they're learning, and when that happens, students engage more.

Because of that increased engagement, it results in increased retention. Students are more likely to complete classes in which classroom assessment techniques are being used and responded to. So that's another great thing. And finally, it reduces stress. And in these days when we're really being attentive to mental health, we really want to resist—or reduce stress in as many ways as we can.

It reduces stress on the instructor because you're not surprised at the midterm that suddenly things that you thought everybody knew, they don't know. You'll know as you're going along whether the students are getting it or not. And it reduces stress on the students because they are not operating blind. They know that you are paying attention all along the way and working to make sure that their learning is how

happening in the most effective way possible. So, it gets everybody on the same page and reduces stress all around.

There are some challenges of using CATs as well. In the traditional setting it would take up class time. Now in the online setting, you don't tend to be as worried about the minutes passing during a class session. However, students do have limited time to dedicate to your class. There's only so many hours in a day, and so you really do need to be attentive to any additional expectations you have on the student, particularly if it's not graded.

And generally, classroom assessment techniques are not graded. But one way that you can thread the needle here is to give students credit for doing it even though the responses are anonymous, and I'll be talking about that as we're going forward on the different classroom assessment techniques on the ways that you can give the students a few points for clicking and doing your classroom assessment technique while not requiring—giving them full credit just for simply doing it. And that way, there's no stress related to the grading portion of it.

Now classes may—another downside is that your class may not be flexible enough to actually respond. You may discover that you thought all the students came into class knowing x and only half the class knows x and the other class doesn't—or the other half doesn't. And then you're stuck trying to figure out how to catch the other half of the class up.

And sometimes you just may not have the flexibility in your curriculum to be able to do so. Or maybe you're in a setting where somebody else has designed your online class and you don't really have the flexibility to change it very much, so that may make it challenging to use a classroom assessment technique.

And you really only want to use it in a setting in a situation where you can do something with the information that you're getting back from the students. If you ask the students for information and they give it to you, and then from their perspective, you do nothing, maybe you're going to make a change next term but you can't do anything this term, you need to let them know that up front, otherwise it'll cause you to lose faith with the students and the trust that we were hoping would be built through the use of a classroom assessment technique will actually start to diminish.

Also, you may not know how to address the student concerns. Maybe the students are saying, I read this and it just didn't make sense to me, and you feel like you've explained it in the clearest way possible. You're not quite sure what else to do to make it clearer. Or maybe your students are struggling in some other way and you're just flummoxed as to how to fix it.

Hopefully you've got resources at your institution that you can turn to and get some assistance. And I would encourage you, even if you feel like you have some good ideas about how to address it, to seek others' information, because getting another pair of eyes on your content can be super helpful when you've gotten feedback from your students that it's not working out like you thought.

I'm going to now give you some examples of some classroom assessment techniques that you might try. And I'm going to give you five of them, talk about the ways that you can use them, and specifically, the ways that you might incorporate them into your online classroom. I'm going to talk about a background knowledge probe, the muddiest point, the minute paper, the reading rating sheet, and the one-sentence summary.

So, let's start off with the background knowledge probe. You know that problem I just talked about were some of the people in your class know it and some of the people don't? Well, the background knowledge probe can give you that information upfront so that you don't have to be surprised when you do the summative assessment and discover that it was information that people didn't have.

You just can do ask the students the question, what do you know about x? Or give them a problem that would require the knowledge that you expect them to have to respond to. And it can be very straightforward, very short. It would be an anonymous thing. You just want to know who—whether people know it, not necessarily who knows it.

It's great for assessing, prior knowledge, recall of information that they learned earlier in the term if you want to make sure that they still got it later in the term, and for understanding whether the students understood what they learned.

There's a lot of different ways you can incorporate this into the online classroom. You can use your learning management system survey tool. You could use a learning

journal. You could use a private discussion board or a post-first discussion board depending on whether your learning management system supports these tools.

I'm a big fan of using either the private or the post-first discussion because it will allow you to see all the answers in a single page, which makes it easier to skim through them. There may be another—some LMSs will show you all of your answers posted in the Assignment section on a single page, and so that can be easy to look through as well. Or some tools allow you to click through your assignments very quickly, so it's not actually all that time-consuming to go from one assignment to the next one.

So, looking at how long—classroom assessment techniques are supposed to, as I mentioned, be low stress. You don't want something that's going to take you ages to read through. And that's really contrary to the point. It's supposed to be quick, it's supposed to be easy, it's supposed to give you quick data. And so, you want to organize it in a way that you can consume the information that you're getting as quickly as possible and as easily as possible.

If you are going outside of your learning management system, you might use something like Google Forms or another form software that will dump the answers into an Excel spreadsheet or some other spreadsheet so that you can look through the answers again very quickly.

The background knowledge probe can really be a helpful tool at the beginning and even at the end is a pre and post-test that a student could take—or pre or post-query, you don't want to call it a test, maybe that could worry the students, and again, we're trying to have low stress. So those are some ways that you can use the background knowledge probe and how you can incorporate it into your online classroom.

Let's go now to the muddiest point. This is one of my favorite CATs that I like to use on an ongoing basis. And you basically ask the students the question, what was the muddiest point? What was the most confusing thing that you encountered in this chapter or this unit or this week? And if you ask it consistently, it can really yield some helpful data.

I, in a lot of my classes, will ask this question every single week in an anonymous survey in which the students just get a couple of bonus points. The nice thing is since

the students know it's coming, they start to look for an answer. So, as they're going through the materials, if something is confusing, they make a mental note, so that when they answer the survey, they can say, yes, this is what was confusing.

But more interestingly, perhaps, is that if they're looking through and nothing is confusing and then they respond, nothing, I didn't have a muddy point this week, it's because they were thinking about it all week and didn't run into any problems as opposed to they got to the end of the week and couldn't think of anything, so they just said nothing.

So, I think that the muddiest point can be really wonderful if used consistently, but also if you have perhaps a chapter where people always get stuck. This is the place where if you're going to lose students, this is where you lose them. That's a great place to insert the muddiest point if you just want to use it on a one-time or just a couple of times in the term basis.

You can—there's lots of ways that you can do it. Similar to the background knowledge probe, you could use your post-first discussion board, you could use something like Google Forms or SurveyMonkey or another surveying tool. And it gives you the opportunity—anything that gives you the opportunity again to read through the responses quickly and easily ideally in a single document so that you can skim through and look for answers that seem to be gathering in the same area, some similarity we've seen responses, that can give you some insights on how to clear things up.

Or if there's a muddy point that lots and lots of people are having, you may want to post some supplemental materials that can help hopefully clear that up. It doesn't necessarily need to be something that you create. And indeed, if you can find some supplemental materials that somebody else created, that could be especially helpful.

Because you want to—if you think about universal design for learning and multiple means of representation where you're representing the information in different ways, having somebody else besides you explain it can be helpful to students who just didn't—the way you explained it to them didn't make sense.

So, if you have people explaining it in other ways, it might make sense to the students who struggled with the way that you were explaining it. So, I do encourage you, if you

find some many points, to bring in materials from other sources that might help clear those points up.

The next idea is the minute paper. Now the minute paper just asks your students to take one minute and answer two questions, and it's similar to the muddiest point. What was the most important thing you learned in class today and what questions remain unanswered? So that unanswered part is the muddiest point, but what was the most important thing you learned in class today? It can be really interesting feedback for the instructor.

You may have thought this was the main point, but for all the students, maybe it was this other thing. And so that can be interesting feedback for you, especially if you see that the thing that you thought was the important point, the students later struggle with. So this can be great learning and a great way to observe your own teaching to see if where you're emphasizing if the students are getting that emphasis.

The minute paper can be done, again, in a post-first discussion forum where the student can't see the other students' responses until they post. That's what it means to have a post-first. So, they post, then they can see the responses the other students made if they want to. In something like a classroom assessment technique, I don't generally require them to look at the other students' posts. But sometimes people are curious about what did other people learn?

And for students who are struggling with imposter syndrome, they may wonder, did they think what I thought was important was important? Do they think what I thought was confusing was confusing? And in an online setting, which can sometimes feel isolating, being able to see the thinking of your fellow students can actually create greater sense of belonging and a greater sense of engagement with the class. So that's some ideas for using the minute paper.

The next classroom assessment technique I'm going to talk about is the reading response sheet. The reading response sheet gives you information back about what did the students think about the reading that you assigned? Now this is especially helpful in classes where you have multiple different readings and where you as the instructor have some control over what the students are reading.

For example, in a literature class where you have students read four or five books and you get to choose which books they're reading. It's probably not as helpful in a class with a single textbook where the textbook was selected by your department and you don't have any choice over it. So, this is one that you'll want to make sure that you've got the right situation, because if the students found the class readings were not very effective, but you don't have any choice in changing them, or if it's just going to continue to be readings that are just like it throughout the course, then that could be frustrating both for you and for the students.

If the situation is that you could change the readings but not until the end of the class and not until the next term, you might save—you might be clear about this with the students or save the question for the end and ask them to talk about it at the end of the course where they don't have an expectation that you would make any changes as a result of what they wrote.

You could also do this, as I've already mentioned, there's a lot of consistency in the way that you can incorporate these into your online class. I love the idea of using this in a post-first discussion as well. And again, using your—using it as a bonus points type of thing where students get credit for doing it, but they're not penalized if they don't.

And the responses are anonymous, they can just post and the information is there for them to look and see what other students thought about it, and you can look and see what all the students thought about it. So, it can create learning for the instructor, engagement for the students. Like many of these CATs, it's really a wonderful thing all around.

Finally, we've got the one-sentence summary. The one-sentence summary answers the questions, who does what to whom, when, why, how? It really digs into everything you need to know about the question. And it's good for looking at critical thinking and your students' ability to pull all the information together very concisely.

And you know, it's much harder to write a single sentence to summarize something than a whole page to summarize something. You really have to distill your thinking to write a one-sentence summary.

And so, I'd urge you to make sure that a one-sentence summary can be written. Make sure that you give it a shot. Try this at home before taking it into the classroom. Because if you can't do it, then the students probably can't either. But if you can do it and you have an idea of what a summary—a one-sentence summary might look like, then go for it and have your students put in their one-sentence summaries.

This could also be if you have students engaged in informal learning communities online, they might do this as a group. And this could be done asynchronously in a shared document where students posted their one-minute summaries—or their one-sentence summaries, and then they can sort of combine them all together to make like the ultimate one-sentence summary and then submit that as a group. That could be a fun activity for students. If you have groupwork as an outcome for your class, that could be a way for students to engage.

And you could, again, use a response for summary discussion board with students being able to see what other students thought, how other students felt—what the other students thought the key points were compared to what they thought the key points were. But again, have it count as bonus points, something anonymous so that students feel like if they'd like to do it, they can. If they don't want to do it, they don't have to and that won't hurt.

There you have it, five classroom assessment techniques and some simple ways to adapt those techniques to the online classroom. I hope that that gave you some ideas for how you might use classroom assessment techniques in the wonderful book by Angelo and Cross about how to incorporate assessment techniques into your instruction. It really is a wonderful way to make your teaching better, and more importantly, make sure that the students learn all the wonderful things that you're trying to teach them. I hope that you found this presentation useful to you for you today.

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