

Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs)

Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs) are quick, low-stakes methods used to gauge student learning. CATs are highly effective and efficient student-centered strategies

CATs improve student engagement

When instructors use CATs in the classroom, students are more likely to participate in the activities of the class. Students may feel that they have a voice and that their instructor cares about their learning. You may also bring out friendly (no losers) competition, peer support, and make it okay to be wrong.

★ CTL Favorite: Student-Generated Test Questions

Ask students to prepare two or three potential test questions and the correct (or A+) responses for each. It is best to do this 2-3 weeks before the exam so there is time for feedback and correcting misinformation. Use the questions for a review sheet, and include at least some of the questions in the real exam.

CATs help students create connections between prior knowledge and new information

At the beginning of the semester or a new content unit, it is important to learn what students know so that you can target instruction and focus on what they need most as well as the pace that is most appropriate. CATs can ask students to apply knowledge and skills learned in class to their own lives, which can help them make sense of new information.

★ CTL Favorite: Background Knowledge Probe

Prepare a short, simple questionnaire with 2-3 open-ended questions to collect information about what students know about a class subject. Use simple language and encourage students to provide thoughtful answers. This activity is particularly useful for students who have had some previous coursework (in high school, for example) or experiences. Gather and compile the responses, and share the results with students in a subsequent class.

★ CTL Favorite: Misconception Check

Provide a common misconception about a topic and have students explain why they agree or disagree with it. This is best used when reviewing a lesson to check for understanding and to help students walk through their thinking process.

CATs check for understanding

CATs are a form of formative assessment. Formative assessment provides information to the instructor about how well students are learning. Formative assessments help students identify their strengths and areas where they are struggling.

★ CTL Favorite: One Sentence Summary

The One Sentence Summary requires students to synthesize information into a single sentence. Ask students to identify the who-what-when-where-why of something they read or did in preparation for class. This technique can also be used to help students connect ideas over time or in an instructional unit. Instructors can quickly scan and compare responses.

★ CTL Favorite: Color Cards


Provide each student with a set of three color-coded cards. Red means *Stop, I need help*; Green means

for wrong answers, since we want to encourage students to take risks and make mistakes.

CATs should be a regular and ongoing part of classroom instruction.

Remember, learning is an ongoing process of experimentation, inquiry, and reflection. People learn at different rates and have different stumbling blocks. By paying attention to how well students are understanding and processing information in your class, you can adapt your instruction to meet their needs. Using CATs effectively can create a positive, student-centered environment where students feel valued and respected as learners.

So Many More CATs

 Angelo, T. A., & Cross, K. P. (1993). *Classroom assessment techniques: A handbook for college teachers* (second ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

^ [Selected Classroom Assessment Techniques \(CATs\) for Getting Feedback on Student Learning \(adapted from Angelo & Cross\)](#)

^ Cornell University Center for Teaching Innovation -- [Assessing Prior Knowledge](#)

^ Edutopia -- [53 ways to check for understanding](#)

^ Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching and Learning -- [Classroom Assessment Techniques](#)

^ Yale University Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning -- [Classroom Assessment Techniques](#)