

# Distance Learning Systems

## Teaching Tips #22 — Classroom Assessment

Classroom assessment (CA)—the study of what your students are learning and how effectively you are teaching them—is no less pertinent to the distance educator than the face-to-face instructor. No one should wait until a final exam to discover the result of problems when techniques exist to help you discover potential problems and correct them mid-course as well as reveal those things that are working exceedingly well.

### The Assumptions of Assessment

Classroom assessment is based on seven assumptions<sup>1</sup>:

1. The quality of student learning is directly, although not exclusively, related to the quality of teaching. Therefore, one of the most promising ways to improve learning is to improve teaching.
2. To improve effectiveness, teachers need first to make their goals and objectives explicit and then to get specific, comprehensible feedback on the extent to which they are achieving those goals and objectives.
3. To improve their learning, students need to receive appropriate and focused feedback early and often; they also need to learn how to assess their own learning.
4. The assessment most likely to improve teaching and learning is that conducted by faculty to answer questions they themselves have formulated.
5. Systematic inquiry and intellectual challenge are powerful sources of motivation, growth, and renewal for teachers, and CA can provide that challenge.
6. CA does not require specialized training and can be carried out by teachers from all disciplines.
7. Collaborating with colleagues and students in CA enhances learning and personal satisfaction for all.

### Methods of Assessment

There are many techniques of classroom assessment, both ongoing and summative. Here are just a few that are particularly suitable for distance education activities:

- The *Background Probe* adapts the informal gathering of background information about a student's preparation for the course, background, and expectations that happens in a traditional classroom to the distance setting. This can be done as a written survey, email, or using an assessment tool.
- *Unit Reflection* asks the student to provide concise documentation relating to an assignment or other activity. A short paragraph or two that elaborates on their approach, what they learned, and unanswered questions helps students clarify their thinking while helping an instructor refine her approach.
- *One Minute Email* asks a student to take one minute to send an email to the instructor in which they either answer the basic questions "what is the most important thing you learned?" and "what important question remains unanswered" or responds to basic prompts such as: "I'm most satisfied with, I'm having problems with, I wonder about, etc."
- The *One Sentence Summary* asks students to summarize a learning unit in one long, grammatical sentence, generally using the "Who does what to whom, when, where, how, and why?" structure.

### More Resources

For more CA techniques and information, resources, and web links on the topic of classroom assessment, see this tip's resource page at: <http://distance.uaf.edu/dls/resources/tt/ca/> and feel free to contact Chris Lott ([chris.lott@uaf.edu](mailto:chris.lott@uaf.edu)) at Distance Learning Systems for personalized assistance.

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<sup>1</sup> Angelo, T.. and Cross, P.K. (1993). *Classroom Assessment Techniques* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993