



Alternatives to Hearing Crickets in Class: Quick, Formative Checks for Understanding

Has it ever happened that following your question, no one or one student answers? How do you interpret the silence? Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs) offer methods that faculty can use in-person or online to quickly gauge students' comprehension and preparation for future tasks.



CATs provide immediate, ungraded feedback about the entire class's level of understanding, engage students, give them feedback on their learning. Faculty can use this feedback to inform their teaching, such as explicitly addressing areas of confusion, increasing time for problem-solving. For maximum benefit, please incorporate CATs regularly in a course. **Most common CATs:** 1-minute paper (*what's your main takeaway?*) and muddiest point (*what is most confusing to you?*)

We encourage you to incorporate one CAT this semester that supports your students' learning. ***You might consider one of the following CATs:***

Documented Problem Solutions ask students to write down all the steps they would take in solving specific problems (up to 3 problems) with an explanation of each step. You may use this method to assess students' problem-solving skills at the beginning of a unit or as part of homework.

Directed Paraphrasing invites students to explain a core theory, concept, argument to their peer(s) or a specific audience in their own words (e.g., city council members, marketing team). Provide guidelines about length and purpose of the paraphrased explanation. Consider non-written options, e.g., students record explanations in [VoiceThread](#) (Bb tool) and peers respond via video or audio. This media-based comprehension activity invites personalized engagement.

Applications Cards invite students to find 1-3 applications of a principle or concept that they are studying from everyday experience, current news, campus life, or their professional background. You may use a Google doc, slide, or [Google Jamboard](#) (online, interactive whiteboard) to collect examples, categorize them based on commonalities, most innovative, most relevant. Students can discuss why they selected certain examples and how they relate to the specific principle or concept (e.g., cost of college tuition, democracy, vaccine production)

Adapted from [Faculty Focus Live Podcast](#), January 2021 – accessed 01/27/21

Reference: Angelo, T., & Cross, P. (1993). [Classroom assessment techniques](#): A handbook for college teachers.

[Using CATs and examples](#), Carnegie Mellon University, accessed 1/27/2021