

Teaching and Learning Matters

Monitoring Student Progress

Part of the job of being a teacher is to monitor student progress. This involves a range of formal and informal activities. The setting and marking of tests/examinations and coursework are the most common methods used for formal assessment at IVE. Teachers also monitor student progress in less formal ways and at more frequent intervals. Teachers will judge student participation in class (especially tutorials) and will evaluate the quality of what students do and say. This can help a teacher to adapt their teaching methods to best suit the needs of the learners. It can also allow the teacher to correct any misunderstandings that students have of the subject being studied.

Good teachers recognise that if students can be encouraged to reflect on their understanding of topics and their progress in studying a subject, then they are likely to learn more and understand more. It is important to encourage them to monitor their progress. Like any form of skill, self-reflection can be taught, practised and developed. There are a range of informal classroom assessment activities that can be both useful and fun. Many IVE teachers already use quizzes to review major topics, but there are plenty of other

informal assessment activities to consider using. These can really benefit students, especially if used regularly throughout the academic year.

What is informal classroom assessment?

Informal classroom assessment involves activities that you can do with your students that help them to see how well they understand what has been taught. The students themselves can get a feel for how well they are doing. Informal classroom assessment is student-centred and requires students to be actively engaged. Teachers do not have to give the students a formal grade or mark.

Almost anything that engages students and makes them think about what they have been studying can be classed as an informal assessment activity. The range of possible activities is limited only by the creativity of the teacher and the students. Informal classroom assessment activities include asking two or three questions (often called the “One-Minute Paper”) or asking students to identify what they understood *least* (the “Muddiest Point”). You could also use a simple questionnaire/quiz or a discussion activity. Alternatively, consider asking students to send you e-mail messages about a topic/issue, or develop a role-play activity.

About this Edition

In this edition we think about using activities that are fun for students, but which have a serious purpose - getting students to check their understanding of what has been taught. Unlike assignments, tests and examinations, these informal methods are not marked or graded by the teacher. However as students reflect on what they have done and learned during the informal assessment activities, they can gain valuable insights into their progress and be able to identify areas for further improvement.

Adapt the ideas to suit your own subject and level of teaching.

This edition is researched and written by Michele, based on a draft written by Ernie. Doris and Angie helped with getting it ready and published.

Teaching Tips: Using Informal Assessment Activities



1. Plan carefully

It is best to plan a number of short activities throughout the academic year. Choose activities that you are comfortable with and work them into your lesson plans. Allow sufficient time for briefing students, for them to work on the activity and to debrief at the end. If the activity is complex, produce clearly-written handouts/briefing sheets to enable them to understand what is required. If you use a quick activity, such as asking them “What is helping you learn in this class?” and “What makes it difficult for you to learn in this class?” (the ‘One-Minute Paper’), then you just need to prepare a slide for an overhead projector, or write the questions on the board.

2. Justify the activity - getting student co-operation

You need to be convinced that the activity is worthwhile - give ‘positive body signals’. It is also useful to explain to your students what you are doing and how the activity might benefit their learning.

3. Keep it short

Informal assessment activities should reinforce what you have been teaching rather than introduce a lot of new material. Try to keep it short and simple but allow time for picking up areas of student concern. If it is clear that many students have misunderstood a key point, ensure you either spend time in class reviewing the topic, or give guidance about reading/revision materials that students can refer to. Remember to review your teaching materials carefully when you next teach the topic.

4. Keep it relevant

Link informal assessment activities closely to your course materials. Check student understanding of

‘essential’ points regularly and they should do better when it comes to formal assignments, tests and examinations.

5. Debrief well

Remember that the debriefing element of informal assessment is important. Students must be encouraged to reflect on what the activity shows they know/understand and where they need to do more work. There is a range of methods you can use. Some teachers like to have an open discussion at the end of an activity, others like students to report back in groups. At the end of an informal assessment activity your students should know what they know, what they don’t know, and where they need to work harder.

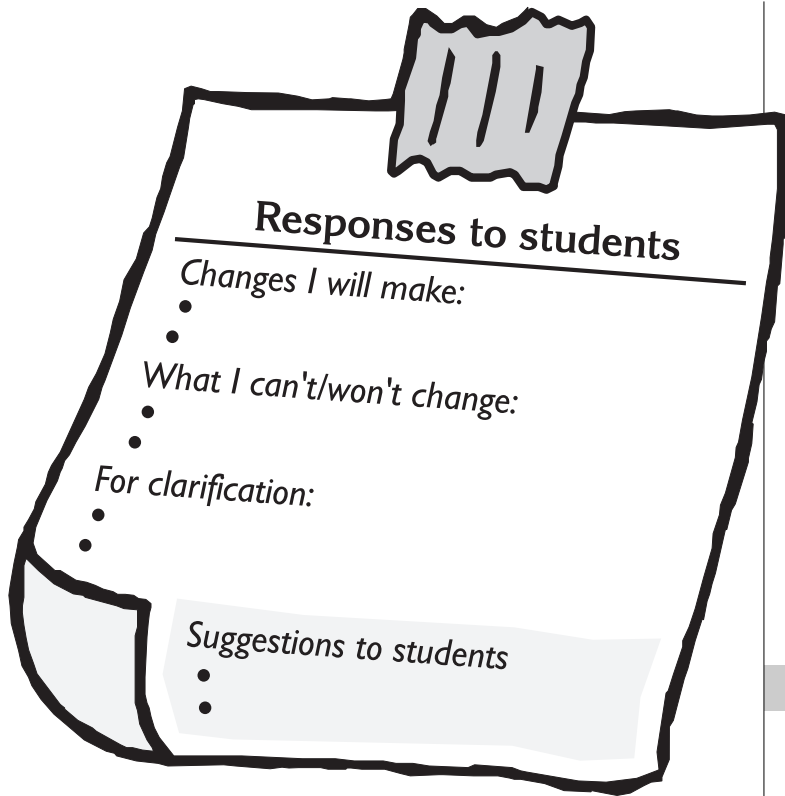
6. Respond to what the informal classroom assessment reveals

You will need to allow some time to think about what is revealed about your teaching/learning approach. For example, if you ask students to e-mail you to identify what they feel most concerned about or feel they understand least well (a ‘Muddiest Point’ activity), and if you find significant numbers of students have similar worries, then you will have to think hard about how best to help them.

Ideally, the information can help you

- ▶ target specific areas of learning difficulty, and
- ▶ make improvements to your course and/or your teaching approach.

The classroom assessment may also identify things that you are not able to change or are not willing to change. Students may appear to misunderstand some aspects of your course (the course content or the way the course runs). Whatever technique you use to obtain feedback, you might wish to do an analysis of it, and write up a response. This analysis can simply contain a tally of the number of times a response is given, along with a note of any responses that you consider particularly relevant/interesting.



Once you have identified changes that you are willing to make, it is important that you do so promptly. This tells students that you are addressing areas of learning difficulty and will encourage them to participate in other informal classroom assessment activities that you use.

Why not plan to use some informal assessment activities with your own students?

Surf the Web



Here you will find some information about practical informal assessment activities to try with your own students.

Classroom Assessment Technique Examples

Much of the information available online comes from a book written by Thomas A. Angelo and K. Patricia Cross, "Classroom Assessment Techniques, A Handbook for College Teachers." Follow this link to read a summary of why they feel informal classroom

assessment is worthwhile.

<http://www.hcc.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/assess-1.htm>

Then follow the link below for information about specific techniques, such as:

- ▶ Background Knowledge Probe
- ▶ Minute Paper
- ▶ Muddiest Point
- ▶ One-Sentence Summary
- ▶ What's the Principle?

<http://www.hcc.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/assess-2.htm>

Examples of Classroom Assessment

Four examples are drawn from the experiences of instructors at Lingnan University. They introduce the 'One Minute Paper', E-mail messages, Questionnaires, and 'Student Quality Circles'. These teachers recognise the value of getting feedback early and often on the effects of their teaching on student learning.

<http://www.ln.edu.hk/tlc/level2/td.htm>

(click on "Examples of Classroom Assessment")

Feedback for Teachers: Gathering Your Own Student Feedback

You can gather student feedback to help you improve your teaching as well as to check student's levels of understanding. This need not be time-consuming for you or them. On this site are described a range of practical and well-established techniques. These include:

- ▶ Quick and Easy Feedback Strategies
- ▶ Student Group Interviews
- ▶ Focus Group Interviews
- ▶ Getting Feedback Online

Have a look at the "Three Open Questions" technique for a quick (but insightful) informal assessment activity.

<http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/feedback/gatherstufeed.htm>

Role Plays

Role-playing is like a drama in which each student is assigned a character to portray, but where no lines are learned - the individuals improvise their responses to the situation. Role-plays may be used to:

- ▶ Give students practice in using what they have learned
- ▶ Illustrate principles from the course content
- ▶ Develop insight into human relationship problems
- ▶ Provide a concrete basis for discussion
- ▶ Maintain or arouse interest

This site provides a brief overview of using role-play and suggests nine steps for conducting role-play effectively.

http://www.cityu.edu.hk/pdqs/rft/rft_teachingtips_roleplay.html

Evaluating Learning: Alternatives for Testing and Reviewing

From the University of Kansas, Centre for Teaching Excellence come some practical suggestions for informal assessment activities. These include:

- ▶ Anonymous questioning
- ▶ Blind multiple choice
- ▶ Reverse questioning
- ▶ Oral test/review

Have a look at their suggestion for a “Bluebook” which students use to do and record quiz results. They also use this booklet to maintain a composite record of their progress and the outcomes of teacher conference meetings.

<http://www.ku.edu/~cte/resources/teachingtips/alternatives.html>

Look out for TLC new resources



Do you already have a teaching portfolio? Do you want to write a teaching profile but are not sure what is

involved? These new resources from your Teaching and Learning Centre will be of great benefit to you! Look out for these new resources in **August**.

Developing Your Teaching Profile: A Workbook for IVE Teachers

This workbook has been written for IVE teachers who need to produce a teaching profile. It covers three types of teaching profile: a general purpose profile; a teaching profile to support an application (for a new contract/new job or promotion or transfer onto unified terms); and to support a nomination for a teaching excellence award.

This workbook was written with the aim of giving VTC and IVE teaching/instructing staff a practical source of guidance so that they can write a teaching profile to suit their own needs and circumstances.

The objectives are to:

- ① Briefly describe a range of reasons why teaching profiles might be useful to IVE teachers.
- ② Outline a range of headings/sections that may be useful in writing a teaching profile.
- ③ Provide four sample (fictional) teaching profiles for teachers to think about.
- ④ Provide a number of self-reflection questions, activities, and checklists that teachers might find beneficial to think about, and use, as they start to write their own teaching profiles.

So, if you are thinking about writing a teaching profile, why not use this workbook to help you?

Developing Your Teaching Profile: An Online Resource for IVE Teachers

The key points from the workbook described above have been made available online. Log on to the TLC Website and follow the link to the Resources page.