



## **Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs)\***

### Ice Breakers

Purpose: To get people talking quickly and personally about their goals, fears, expectations for the session before them.

Procedure:

- 1) Example: Ask participants to consider what one thing each hopes to gain from the workshop and what one thing each hopes to offer during the workshop, then have the group get up to rove the room for five minutes gathering a sense of what others have come to gain and to offer. At the end of the workshop, this might become a way for individuals to measure what they've accomplished and gained overall.
- 2) Example: Have participants fill out a 3x5 card with their names and phrases/words in response to questions you've given all of them; the participants then don these cards as name badges and walk around the room meeting as many people as possible, interviewing others about the ideas/information on the card or large-size name tags; after five minutes you can ask participants to return to their seats and jot down names of folks who might be contacts after the session or jot down an individual goal for the session.

### Background Knowledge Probe

Purpose: To help teachers determine effective starting points/appropriate levels of instruction for a given subject and/or class. Used to both open and close course activities, a BKP helps students focus attention on what will be important material.

Procedure: Ask for basic, simple responses (short answers, circling/showing of hands in response to multiple choice questions) from students who are about to begin a course, a unit, or study of a new concept.

### Think/Pair/Share

Purpose: To engage participants with the material on an individual level, in pairs, and finally as a large group. The activity can help to organize prior knowledge; brainstorm questions; or summarize, apply, or integrate new information. Works well with pre-planned questions and with ideas that emerge during a workshop from a larger group discussion.

Procedure:



- 1) Have attendees turn to someone near them to summarize what they're learning, to answer a question posed during the discussion, or to consider how and why and when they might apply a concept to their own situations.
- 2) Individuals reflect on (and perhaps jot notes) for one minute in response to a question
- 3) Participants pair up with someone sitting near them and share responses/thoughts verbally for two minutes, or they may choose to work together to create a synthesis of ideas or come to a consensus
- 4) The discussion leader randomly chooses a few pairs to give thirty-second summaries of ideas.

### Write/Pair/Share

Purpose: Identical to the think-pair-share, except that students process the question asked of them by writing about it rather than reflecting.

Procedure:

- 1) After a brief time to note their thoughts, each student turns to a partner to discuss.
- 2) The activity closes with the instructor calling on random students to summarize their responses.

As with the think-pair-share, the instructor may choose to skip the summary portion of the exercise depending on circumstances.

### Question and Answer Pairs

Purpose: To engage individuals with readings and then to pair them to answer particular questions. This helps to deepen the level of analysis of presentations/readings, and helps engage participants in explaining new concepts, as well as considering how/where to apply the concepts to their own thinking/work setting.

Procedure:

- 1) Participants respond to a presentation (video, panel, readings) and compose one or two questions about it; they may do this in class or you may ask students to bring questions with them
- 2) The participants pair up; A asks a prepared question and B responds; then B asks a prepared question and A responds
- 3) The leader may ask for a sampling of questions and answers in order to bridge to a full group discussion.



### Minute Paper/Free Write

Purpose: To help participants move from one level of understanding to another, from presentation of new ideas to application of ideas, from considerations about self to situations involving others. The moments of writing provide a transition for participants by bringing together prior learning, relevant experience and new insights as a means of moving to a new (aspect of the) topic. The writing offers participants a moment to explore ideas before discussion, or to bring closure to a session by recording ideas in their minds at that moment. A minute of writing is also a useful thing when discussion takes a turn you didn't expect – when a particularly good question comes from the group, when discussion keeps circulating around a basic idea rather than inching its way into potential applications or deepening of ideas.

Procedure:

- 1) Ask participants to write for 2-3 minutes on a topic or in response to a question that you've developed for the session.
  - a. What is the most important thing you learned in this session?
  - b. What is one thing you don't quite understand?
  - c. What is a big question that was raised by today's session?
- 2) Ask participants to share responses with each other or collect them for your own assessment of learning during the session.

### Two Column Method

Purpose: This technique can be quite effective in moving a group discussion from basic ideas toward considerations of how to apply those ideas; the listing can provide a base of ideas from which potential problems as well as benefits/successes/possibilities can be identified so that participants can begin a next stage of discussion.

Procedure:

Before solving a problem or applying concepts, a discussion leader can help participants more fully consider a problem or issue or concept by employing a two-column method of generating and recording responses to a prompt – eg, "A Positive Classroom Looks and Sounds Like/ Doesn't Look Like This."

- 1) Head two columns on the board/flip chart with "Looks/Sounds Like" and "Doesn't Look/Sound Like"



- 2) Ask the participants for ideas, observations, recalling of presentation information that will support one side of the board or another. [You might ask half the room to be initially responsible for the two minutes of listing "Favorable to A" and the other half to provide "Favorable to B" listing]
- 3) Then you could take a minute to have participants generally add to this base of information and/or generate a "Creating C from A & B" column.

### Scenarios/Case Studies

Purpose: To allow participants to apply (conceptual) information presented to a particular (concrete) situation

Procedure:

- 1) Provide participants with a "local" example of a concept/theory/issue/topic being covered in the discussion
- 2) Participants discuss and analyze the scenario/case (provided by facilitator), applying the information covered in a presentation to some situation they may encounter outside of the workshop
- 3) Participants can briefly present their findings to other small groups or to the whole group or simply record ideas on an overhead/white board so that workshop leader can draw questions and synthesis from the material
- 4) Participants can also develop (individually, in pairs, groups) their own work-based case studies and exchange them with others for discussion and analysis.

### Corners

Purpose: To encourage direct student engagement and develop shared problem solving skills.

Procedure:

- 1) The leader of the day places content (or flipchart with question) in each corner of the room.
- 2) Groups of 3-6 people move from corner to corner and discuss answer(s) to each posed question. The groups develop a consensus and write their answer directly on each flipchart.
- 3) When the flipchart has an answer already written by a previous group, the next group revises/expands/ illustrates that response with additional information, if possible.



Different colored markers can be used for each group to see what each group wrote for each question. At the end of the exercise, the leader can ask the group as a whole to summarize what they learned from the exercise, or even use a minute paper to assess individual student learning.

### Jigsaw Teamwork

Purpose: For participants to gain expertise in a certain set of knowledge and to share that knowledge with other participants. This activity ensures that by teaching others, each participant will have a better understanding of the material.

Procedure:

- 1) A general topic is divided into smaller, interrelated pieces (e.g., the puzzle is divided into pieces)
- 2) Each member of a team is assigned to read and become an expert on a different piece of the puzzle (e.g., one person is given a Team Building Issues puzzle piece/article, another the Team Composition & Roles piece/article, and so on)
- 3) After each person has become an expert on their piece of the puzzle, they teach the other team members about that puzzle piece
- 4) After each person has finished teaching, the puzzle has been reassembled and everyone in the team knows something important about every piece of the puzzle

Functioning as a successful team requires the integration of many different activities. If any piece of the puzzle is missing, the team is generally a group and not a team.

### Rotating Chair Discussions

Purpose: To allow participants to act not only as speakers, but also as attentive listeners by jotting down notes about ideas so that ideas develop in those spaces between speaking, learning from others' ideas rather than listening for a "right idea" or "right answer" to emerge, and trusting that the opinions and experiences that you offer in speaking will increase the knowledge base and problem-solving capacity in the classroom.

Procedure:

The ground rules for Rotating Chair are:

- 1) When you would like to participate, raise your hand
- 2) The person speaking will call on the next speaker (aiming to call on a person who has not/has less frequently contributed)



- 3) The person called on will first briefly restate/summarize what has been said then develop the idea further
- 4) As a speaker, if you wish to raise a new question or redirect the discussion, you will briefly summarize the points made in the prior discussion, and where possible create a transition from that thread to the one you're introducing

Assigning Tasks for Small Group Work

Purpose: To involve students in their own learning, to deepen students' knowledge about a topic, and to develop particular skills

Procedure:

- 1) Divide the class into groups of 3-4
- 2) Assign each member of the group a particular task (examples: facilitator, recorder, summarizer, presenter)
- 3) Give specific instructions for the group's task and the amount of time allotted
- 4) Debrief with each group by having the presenter share the group's discussion/answer/question

You can make small cards with each task and a list of responsibilities associated with it to keep students on task.

\*Adapted from "Some Basic Active Learning Strategies," University of Minnesota, Center for Teaching and Learning, <http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/teachlearn/tutorials/active/strategies/>