

Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs)

Category: Assessment, Feedback and Learning

Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs) are brief, focused activities through which educators and learners obtain timely evidence about learning. Usually low-stakes or ungraded, they answer specific questions about prior knowledge, understanding, skill or learning processes so that teaching and study can be adjusted while a course is still in progress.

A CAT is useful only when it is aligned with a learning aim and followed by interpretation and response. Familiar examples include the minute paper, muddiest point, background knowledge probe and concept map ([Angelo & Cross, 1993](#)).

Classroom Inquiry Cycle

1. **Focus:** Identify one answerable question about learners' knowledge, thinking or experience.
2. **Select:** Choose a technique that elicits the relevant evidence with proportionate effort.
3. **Explain and collect:** Clarify purpose, participation and anonymity, then gather concise responses.
4. **Interpret:** Look for meaningful patterns, misconceptions, variation and uncertainty rather than merely counting.
5. **Respond:** Adapt teaching and tell learners what the evidence showed and what will change.

Examples in Practice

At the end of a statistics seminar, students state the most important idea and their remaining question. The tutor groups responses, opens the next session with two contrasting explanations and recommends targeted practice for different difficulties.

Why It Matters

CATs make learner thinking visible without waiting for formal assessment and can increase metacognitive awareness. Their value lies in the resulting conversation and instructional change, not in collecting frequent data or using a fashionable classroom activity. Anonymous collection can lower participation risk, but educators should explain data use and avoid making individual or high-stakes conclusions from thin evidence alone ([Steadman, 1998](#)).

Further Reading

6. Angelo, T. A., & Cross, K. P. (1993). [Classroom assessment techniques: A handbook for college teachers](#) (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.
7. Steadman, M. (1998). [Using classroom assessment to change both teaching and learning](#). New Directions for Teaching and Learning, 1998(75), 23–35.
8. Barkley, E. F., & Major, C. H. (2016). [Learning assessment techniques: A handbook for college faculty](#). Jossey-Bass.

Related Terms: Formative Assessment | Diagnostic Assessment | Minute Paper | Retrieval Practice