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Online Assessment Techniques (OATs)

Minute paper

Description: During the last few days of an open module, ask students to answer: “What is the most important point you learned in this module?”; and, “What point remains least clear to you?” The purpose is to elicit data about students’ comprehension of a particular module/topic.

What to do with it: Review responses and note any useful comments. In a follow up discussion emphasize the issues illuminated by the students’ comments.

Quick Check-in

Description: Instructor creates a discussion with one question about the course/module/topic, and gives a very short time frame for responses, etc. Each student he/she responds to the question in the allotted time. This can be done publicly in a discussion, or posted in each of the student’s private folders, or as a written assignment with the instructions to submit to class or professor.

What to do with it: Go through the student responses and determine the best criteria for categorizing the data with the goal of detecting response patterns. Discussing the patterns of responses with students can lead to better teaching and learning.

Memory matrix

Description: Instructor creates an assignment: Attaches a Word table representing a two-dimensional diagram for which instructor has provided labels. Students fill in cells and return their Word documents as attachments to assignments. For example, in a music course, labels might consist of periods (Baroque, Classical) by countries (Germany, France, Britain); students enter composers in cells to demonstrate their ability to remember and classify key concepts.

What to do with it: Tally the numbers of correct and incorrect responses in each cell. Analyze differences both between and among the cells. Look for patterns among the incorrect responses and decide what might be the cause(s).

Directed paraphrasing

Description: Ask students to submit a layman's “translation” of something they have just learned—geared to a specified individual or audience—to assess their ability to comprehend and transfer concepts.

What to do with it: Categorize student responses according to characteristics you feel are important. Analyze the responses both within and across categories, noting ways you could address student needs.

One-sentence summary

Description: Students summarize knowledge of a topic by constructing and submitting online a single sentence that answers the questions “Who does what to whom, when, where, how, and why?” The purpose is to require students to select only the defining features of an idea.

What to do with it: Evaluate the quality of each summary quickly and holistically. Note whether students have identified the essential concepts of the class topic and their interrelationships. Share your observations with your students in a follow up discussion to the activity.

Exam Evaluations

Description: Select a type of test that you are likely to give more than once or that has a significant impact on student performance. Create a few questions that evaluate the quality of the test. Add these questions to the exam or administer a separate, follow-up evaluation.

What to do with it: Try to distinguish student comments that address the fairness of your grading from those that address the fairness of the test as an assessment instrument. Respond to the general ideas represented by student comments.

Real-World Application

Description: After teaching about an important theory, principle, or procedure, ask students to submit at least one real-world application for what they have just learned to determine how well they can transfer their learning.

What to do with it: Quickly read once through the applications and categorize them according to their quality. Pick out a broad range of examples and present them to the class in a follow up discussion.

Student-generated test questions

Description: Allow students to write test questions and model answers for specified topics, in a format consistent with course exams. This will give students the opportunity to evaluate the course topics, reflect on what they understand, and what are good test items.

What to do with it: Make a rough tally of the questions your students propose and the topics that they cover. Evaluate the questions and use the goods ones as prompts for discussion. You may also want to revise the questions and use them on the upcoming exam.

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