



Gathering Formative Feedback with Mid-Course Evaluations

A GUIDE FOR FACULTY



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

CENTRE FOR TEACHING SUPPORT & INNOVATION

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1. INTRODUCTION

1. INTRODUCTION TO MID-COURSE EVALUATIONS

Mid-course evaluations are generally informal, qualitative evaluations (but can include quantitative questions) created and administered by the instructor sometime near or shortly before the mid-point of the course. These evaluations may address actions, expectations, or challenges of the instructor and students, as well as the structure, workload, and activities of the course itself. The evaluations may be used to make adjustments or modifications to the course that will affect the rest of the semester, or future revisions of the course.

Mid-course evaluations are also an important communication device between students and instructors, and allow for a substantive discussion of performance and objectives on the part of both students and instructors. This discussion can be a rich source of information that can supplement end-of-course evaluations, and provide an opportunity to make improvements prior to the end of a course.

This guide will help you design, conduct, and evaluate mid-course evaluations. The information in this guide can also be used to help TAs to conduct mid-course evaluations.

******Special Note ******

For instructors in divisions at the University of Toronto where courses are evaluated at the end of term through the centrally-coordinated online course evaluation system, please note the following key considerations.

- Inform your students of the purposes for collecting both mid-course feedback and end-of-term evaluation data and explain that both processes are equally important; if possible/appropriate, explain how the information collected through both processes might differ.
- Take care to not over-survey your students if they will also be completing an online end-of-course evaluation (i.e., ensure you consider the volume/frequency of mid-course feedback you are seeking in light of the end-of-course evaluation process).
- Consider asking for different kinds of information via the mid-course evaluation than what is gathered at the end of the course, or...
- Consider aligning the questions you ask mid-course with the items/categories that will appear on the online questionnaire at the end of the course – doing so can enable you to receive formative feedback early on related to key course elements that students will later rate upon completion of the course.
- Consider posing an open-ended, formative question that will provide information for action.

1.1 MODELS OF MID-COURSE EVALUATIONS

Mid-course evaluations range from very informal, broad and brief to specific and structured. There are three common models of mid-course evaluations:

1. **One-minute papers:** These evaluations give students one-minute (or slightly longer) to note any responses to the course thus far. Students might provide information including positive and negative experiences; “muddy points”, or unclear concepts; responses to particular class activities or assignments; or comments on the instructor’s teaching (see Angelo & Cross, 1993).
2. **Stop/start/continue:** These evaluations ask students to respond to the course based on three categories: “start” asks students to identify things that they would like to see in the course; “stop” things that are happening but are not contributing to or are detracting from student learning; and “continue” things that students believe are beneficial components of the course (see “Getting Feedback from Students,” Boston University, Centre for Teaching and Learning, Hoon et al., 2015).
3. **Structured evaluations with course-specific questions:** These evaluations include a brief number of questions (2-3 questions). These evaluations questions ask students to respond to specific aspects of the course, their own learning activities, or the instructor’s teaching.



While all types of evaluations can be valuable depending on your evaluation goals, we particularly recommend structured, specific evaluations. These evaluations allow students to provide the most substantive, constructive feedback, and from them you can readily identify possible adaptations to teaching behaviours or course components.

While most sections of this guide (in particular, Sections 3 through 5) apply to all models of mid-course evaluations, Section 2 primarily addresses developing questions for these structured, course-specific evaluations.

STEPS TO CREATING, ADMINISTERING, EVALUATING, & IMPLEMENTING THE RESULTS OF MID-COURSE EVALUATIONS

1. Develop goals for your evaluation.	5. Evaluate and summarize evaluation responses; identify possible courses of action.
2. Create evaluation questions based on your identified goals.	6. Discuss evaluation results with students.
3. Introduce evaluations to students and help them understand how to provide constructive responses.	7. Use evaluations to make small changes to your current course or to plan for more substantial changes in upcoming semesters.
4. Provide students with the right conditions and sufficient time to successfully complete the evaluations.	8. Use evaluation results as part of your ongoing teaching improvement.

1.2 HOW ARE MID-COURSE EVALUATIONS DIFFERENT FROM END-OF-SEMESTER EVALUATIONS?

- Mid-course evaluations are formative. That is, they are used for improvement purposes only. Mid-course evaluations are meant only for the instructor and the students, and are not used as a formal mode of assessing instruction.
- Mid-course evaluations should be *discussed* with students, while end-of-course evaluations often provide only one-way communication.
- Because of these characteristics, mid-course evaluations most usefully ask *open-ended* and *qualitative* questions about the course, instead of the more formal and quantitative questions often employed at the end-of-semester.

1.3 WHY CONDUCT MID-COURSE EVALUATIONS?

- ***Mid-course evaluations can support teaching effectiveness***
Please see Section 5.3 for tips on incorporating mid-course evaluations into your ongoing teaching development.
- ***Mid-course evaluations increase student engagement***
Please see Section 3.4 for information on helping students understand the use and value of evaluations.
- ***Mid-course evaluations offer an opportunity to reinforce the priorities and goals of the course***
Please see Section 5.1 for recommendations about discussing evaluation results with students.
- ***Mid-course evaluations allow the instructor to make minor changes to the course while it is still ongoing***
Please see Section 5.2 for tips on implementing the results of mid-course evaluations.
- ***Mid-course evaluations can help you provide feedback for your teaching assistants***
For details on adapting mid-course evaluations for TAs, please see Appendix F.
- ***Mid-course evaluations can increase the value of end-of-semester evaluations and provide you with formative feedback that can help improve end of course ratings***
The communicative nature of mid-course evaluations helps students understand how their comments on evaluations are used and incorporated into class design. In effect, they offer training for the more common end-of-semester evaluations, and help students see such evaluations as constructive and reciprocal.

2. CREATING GOOD QUESTIONS FOR MID-COURSE EVALUATIONS

Before you conduct your evaluations, take some time to reflect on the reasons why you wish to conduct this evaluation and what you hope it will achieve. Primarily, you should decide the degree to which your goal for the evaluation is to evaluate elements of the course, and the degree to which it is to evaluate you as an instructor. Is the course new or has the course been significantly redesigned and if so, do you want to evaluate how students are responding to the new elements? Are you trying a new teaching technique or using a new resource and want to see how it has affected student reactions to the course? Are you new to the institution and are unsure of how students are responding to your expectations? The questions on your evaluations should reflect your goals.



Please see Appendix B for a worksheet to help you develop goals for your mid-course evaluation.

Your goals will help you shape your questions, and will also help you to interpret and react to the feedback you receive. Depending on your goals, the following ideas may be useful in developing your questions. In general, however, the best mid-course evaluation questions are as specific as possible.

Use the individualized nature of mid-course evaluations to your advantage by asking questions that relate directly to your course activities and assignments and to particular pedagogical techniques that you have employed. As such, the following examples are only guidelines that should be adapted to your particular course.

2.1 IDENTIFYING TOPICS FOR QUESTIONS

Mid-course evaluations can be used to address or explore several aspects of the course, as well as to provide feedback on both student and instructor performance and activities. You may choose to address areas of particular concern, or conduct a broad survey of class activities.

- ***Questions about student activities***

You may wish to explore the work that students are actually doing for the course, the degree to which they find those activities manageable, and which activities they find most and least useful.

Examples:

Please describe how you usually prepare for each class session.

- ***Questions about student expectations and outcomes***

Such questions might address whether students are learning or doing what they thought they would learn or do in the course, or how they expect to perform in the course.

Examples:

Was there anything you expected to encounter in this course that we haven't addressed and doesn't appear to be on the syllabus?

- ***Questions about instructor activities***

These questions might evaluate whether the instructor is easy to understand, is available outside of class, creates a respectful learning environment for all students, and presents the material in a way that allows students to learn.

In developing these questions, you may wish to incorporate characteristics of good teaching. Relevant sources for this information include Chickering and Gamson's "Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education" and Murray's "Teaching Behaviours Inventory." These are outlined in Appendix C.

Examples:

Please describe the interactions you have had with the instructor – in class, in office hours, or via phone or email.

Do you leave each session with a sense of the most important points learned that day?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Questions about instructor expectations and objectives
These questions provide an opportunity to reinforce pedagogical priorities and ask if students are meeting outcomes or objectives set for the course. | <p>Examples:</p> <p><i>How has your writing / lab work changed as a result of the feedback you've received?</i></p> |
|---|---|
- Please see the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation's publication [Developing Learning Outcomes: Guide for Faculty](#) for more information on developing goals and outcomes for your course.*

2.2 USING DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS TO CONTEXTUALIZE WRITTEN RESPONSES

While most questions on mid-course evaluations will ask students to provide a written response to a question about a particular aspect of the course, you may also wish to include questions with quantitative responses that ask students to note the frequency with which they perform a particular activity, the degree to which they agree or disagree with a statement about the course or the instruction, or that discern the academic background of students (such as their year and previous courses they have taken). Such questions can provide a way to compare responses across classes or individual students. Make sure that you provide students with a clear scale to use in responding to these questions if appropriate.



Please see **Appendix A** for additional examples of demographic and contextualizing questions.

2.3 HOW MANY QUESTIONS TO ASK

The length of your evaluation will be dictated primarily by how much time you have allotted to conduct, analyze, and discuss the evaluation, and the size of your class. Avoid evaluations that take longer than 15 minutes to complete. Effective evaluations can be very short or very extensive; however, the following course characteristics might benefit from more detailed questionnaires:

- If the course is new or revised, or if you are a new instructor, you may wish to gather substantial information about many elements of the course.
- Large lecture courses may require additional information about student characteristics (for example, previous courses taken or academic year) and student work habits, as they may be less evident to the instructor than in a small seminar.
- If there have been any particular problems or challenges in the course, or if the course previously received low student ratings, you may wish to investigate these issues in more depth.

3. CREATING CONDITIONS FOR RECEIVING GOOD FEEDBACK

Introducing mid-course evaluations to your class and explaining how they will be used is a vital part of the evaluation process. Students may be unfamiliar with mid-course evaluations, and may assume that they operate similarly to end-of-semester evaluations. Furthermore, students may not be aware of how instructors evaluate and incorporate student feedback. Part of the value of conducting mid-course evaluations is helping students understand the purpose, importance, and process of collecting student feedback. You should therefore be sure to emphasize the formative and communicative nature of mid-course evaluations, and work to help students provide substantive, constructive feedback.

3.1 WHEN TO CONDUCT EVALUATIONS



Evaluations should be conducted early enough to provide an opportunity to adapt the course, if necessary, but after students have had a chance to experience representative examples of several of the course elements, such as readings and problem sets, and to understand the standards and expectations of the instructor. If students seem to be having trouble grasping fundamental concepts of the course, you may wish to conduct the evaluation before the midterm so that you can identify and resolve major challenges with the course material. If at all possible, avoid conducting the evaluation the same week as a major test or assignment, and avoid survey fatigue by conducting mid-course evaluations only once (Davis, 2009, p. 462).

3.2 ADMINISTERING COURSE EVALUATIONS:

In administering course evaluations, you will want to consider the method of delivery and the timing of delivery. Regardless of how you decide to administer them, it is important that you ensure students' anonymity.

METHODS

Paper: You can opt to print out your evaluation form and hand this out to students to be collected. The advantage of this method is that it requires no devices (e.g., laptop or smartphones) and so more students may be able to complete it. The disadvantage is that the collection and subsequent examination/analysis of the data, particularly for large classes, can be challenging.

Online: You can use an online tool to collect your evaluation data. In this case, students will need a device of some kind to complete the questionnaire. The advantage of this method is that data are easily collected and typically easier to examine/analyze. See following *** Note *** .

PROCESS & TIMING

In Class: You may wish to dedicate in-class time to filling out the evaluations. It is recommended you leave the class if you do this. The advantage of this method is that you will likely have more students respond. The disadvantage is that students will likely have a relatively limited amount of

time to complete the evaluations and may not provide as rich and/or detailed feedback. Delivering the evaluation online will require preparation (e.g., providing and/or telling students in a prior class to bring a device). See following *** Note ***.

Out of Class: You may ask students to complete the evaluation out of class. The advantage of this is that you will likely get more informative and deeper responses. The disadvantage is that you will get potentially fewer responses as students may not remember to fill them out and/or fail to bring them to a future class. In this case, reminders are critically important.

*** Note ***

One critical consideration when selecting an online survey tool is where the information collected through the tool is stored. As per privacy legislation, student data collected online must be stored in Canada. Many survey tools store data in other countries (e.g., the United States). This is to be avoided. For information or guidance around selecting an online survey tool, or for information on what is possible through the University's own Portal, please contact the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation at ctsi.teaching@utoronto.ca.

3.3 HELPING STUDENTS PROVIDE GOOD RESPONSES

Because of their unfamiliarity with these types of evaluations, students may benefit from some guidance about what good answers look like. By helping students feel confident that their answers will be constructive, you may also help alleviate some of the anxiety that they may feel in completing an evaluation while the course is still in progress. Svinicki (2001) provides several suggestions of ways to encourage useful responses:

- Provide students with models of helpful responses.
- Offer students opportunities to provide positive as well as negative feedback.
- Encourage students to provide examples to illustrate their comments.
- Ask students to focus on teaching behaviours or other tangible elements of the course rather than inferred motivations.
- Encourage students to explain how the elements they are discussing have affected their performance in the course.
- Ask students to propose alternatives to what they identify as problematic elements of the course.

As will be discussed later in this document, you should also provide students with some feedback on *their* feedback as part of the process of discussing the evaluations. This input may help them to complete both future mid-course and end-of-term course evaluations.

3.4 CONDITIONS FOR RECEIVING GOOD FEEDBACK

Because of the format of end-of-course evaluations, students are more accustomed to evaluations as a one-way process from which they never see results – either in the form of a response from the instructor, or in the form of changes to the course. In order to establish conditions that will provide the most effective feedback, therefore, you should:

- Highlight for students how evaluations will be used. You may wish to walk them through the process of creating the evaluation, and explain why you chose the questions that you did. Outline how you will review and interpret the evaluations, and prepare the students for the discussion that will ensue. The point of this exercise is to convince students that their feedback will be heard, to encourage them to take the evaluation seriously, and to provide substantial and thoughtful comments. Studies demonstrate that the more students know about the evaluation process, the better the comments they provide.
- Explain to students what outcomes they can anticipate. Note that you may make some changes to the course as a result of the evaluations, and what students should expect of that process. If you have made changes to courses from evaluations in the past, you may wish to provide some examples. Also indicate what you may *not* do as a result of feedback (for example, reduce the number of readings or change assignment due dates).
- Clarify with students how their anonymity will be protected. Students are apt to be anxious since, unlike end-of-course evaluations, their comments will be read by the instructor before final grades are submitted. Do not connect evaluations and the grading process (for example, do not administer evaluations as part of a midterm or provide marks for completion of mid-course feedback). Providing opportunities for students to offer positive feedback (for example, suggestions for new activities or new readings rather than suggestions of which readings to eliminate) can also help students feel more comfortable providing comments in a context of limited anonymity.
- Provide students with enough time to both plan their responses and complete their evaluations. You may wish to alert them the class before you plan to conduct the evaluation, or provide them with the evaluation questions at this time, so that they will have an opportunity to prepare their comments. Encourage them to bring in notes and look at their syllabus as they complete the evaluation.

4. INTERPRETING THE RESULTS OF EVALUATIONS



At the outset we should distinguish between two kinds of feedback: (a) determining that a problem exists, and (b) diagnosing just what the problem might be. Like medical patients, students are better at identifying (a) than (b). They are generally correct when they claim that something is amiss, but often less reliable when attempting to identify the precise cause of the problem. This should come as no surprise. For one thing, few have been trained to assess teaching techniques, and thus most focus on effects, rather than on causes. For another, most students lack a precise vocabulary for talking about teaching, and tend to invoke familiar groups for complaint, even when they do not apply.

Interpreting evaluations. (2007). Bok Centre, Harvard University



4.1 HOW USEFUL IS STUDENT FEEDBACK?

Many studies have been performed on student evaluation of teaching, and most find that the feedback students provide is consistent and reliable (Gravestock & Gregor-Greenleaf, 2008). Students are reliable and valid assessors, and are uniquely positioned to provide feedback on “those aspects of courses and teaching about which they are the best and most reliable and often the only informants” (Hativa, 2014, p. 29). As an instructor, there are several steps you can take to make sure that the information you are receiving is reliable and valid. Cashin (1990) suggests that in order to receive a clear picture of the range of student experiences in the course, evaluations should be received from at least 10 students, and at least 2/3 of the students in the class.

However, evaluations developed by one instructor will never produce results as valid as those developed by psychometric experts. As such, instead of approaching mid-course evaluations as a means to provide evidence of teaching ability, focus on questions that address particular areas of concern or interest.

4.2 COLLECTING AND ORGANIZING THE RESULTS OF MID-COURSE EVALUATIONS

Depending on the questions asked and whether the evaluation seeks to address particular problem areas, there are several useful ways to organize evaluation results. A challenge with open-ended responses is collecting the results into useable, comparable results. Do not dismiss the value of student written comments simply because they contain widely varied, and perhaps even contradictory, reactions; an important part of the process of interpreting evaluations is understanding the roots of these variations and contradictions.

Analyzing your results

Consider employing some or all of the following techniques in analyzing the results of your evaluations.

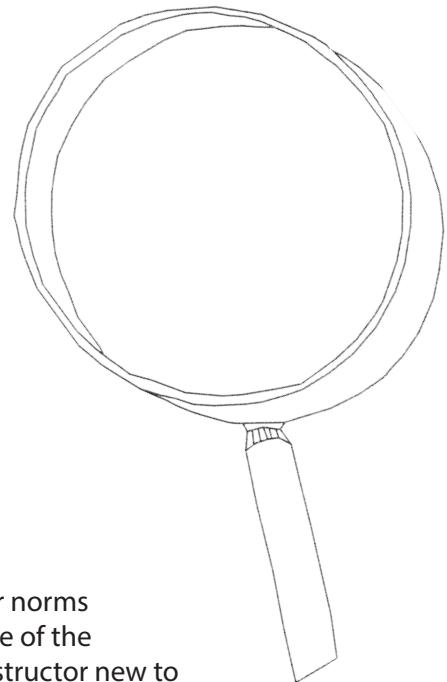
- Note any common themes or student comments that emerge from the evaluations as a whole.
- Group the responses into positive and negative piles. Identify trends and themes in each category. Select representative student comments for each theme. See **Appendix D** for a worksheet to record a summary of responses.

- To provide a visual summary of the strongest and weakest elements of your evaluation, keep numerical track of the number of positive and negative responses to each question or emerging themes (e.g., communication with students). You can then arrange these on a chart that will provide a striking depiction of the relative status of each criterion. See **Appendix D** for a worksheet to assist you to conduct such an analysis (an example is also provided).

Contextualizing your results

Evaluate the responses you've received in the context of information you've gathered about student demographics and behaviours.

- Look to the information you've gathered about students' academic histories for sources of contradiction. If some students report that requirements for written essays are difficult to understand, check whether they are coming from another discipline or faculty; perhaps they are used to different conventions. Students concerned about the length of assignments may be earlier in their academic careers than those who are comfortable with the workload. It will then be up to you to determine whether your expectations are appropriate to the level of preparation of the students the course is likely to attract.
- Student identification of any course problems can also be analyzed in the context of their responses about their own learning habits. If students complain about the difficulty of the material, do patterns in their learning habits, such as not completing all the readings, or starting assignments very close to the due date, indicate the origin of this challenge? If so, it may be more useful to focus on the source of the problem than its manifestation.
- One of the valuable aspects of mid-course evaluations is gaining a deeper understanding of community norms and expectations. You may wish to identify any comments in the evaluations that suggest that your norms and expectations (for example, for communication or availability outside of the classroom) are different from your students', particularly if you are an instructor new to the institution.



Please see **Appendix D** for examples of worksheets that can help you sort the feedback you receive.

For more information on collecting and organizing the results of your evaluation, please see:

Lewis, K. G. (2001). Making sense of student written comments. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 87, 25-32.

5. IMPLEMENTING CHANGE

After analyzing your evaluation results, consider the following next steps to help you implement any changes that you feel will improve the course and the learning experience of your students.

5.1 DISCUSSING EVALUATION RESULTS WITH STUDENTS

Discussing evaluation results with students has three primary goals: 1) to clarify student responses, and help identify means to improve the course; 2) to help students understand how their feedback is used; and, 3) to reinforce the priorities of the course and the importance of student learning habits. In this way, feedback becomes a tool not just for change, but for discussion of the learning experience and of students' role therein.

A note on discussing evaluation results with students

While the opportunity to communicate evaluation results with students is one of the benefits of conducting mid-course evaluations, instructors should take care, in discussing evaluation results with students, to avoid a situation where students discuss an instructor's teaching ability or competence. Such a conversation could damage classroom dynamics and the instructor's ability to manage the class in the future. Do not feel that you have to discuss *all* evaluation results with students. Instead, conversations about evaluation results should focus on course components or activities, or connections between student behaviour and evaluation results, but not instructor characteristics.

Clarify appropriate actions

Present students with your summary of the evaluations and any plans to adapt the course based on the evaluations. If there were any confusing elements in the evaluations, a discussion offers students a chance to further consider and articulate their responses in a way they can't do on paper or online. Discuss changes that can be made for the rest of the semester and changes that cannot be made.

Help students understand the evaluation process

Provide students with some feedback on their feedback. Note examples of useful comments. Demonstrate to them how you organized their feedback, and explain how you interpreted particular items of feedback in the context of the goals of the course.

Reinforce course outcomes and expectations

An important aim of this discussion is to help students better understand the structure of the course. It is also an opportunity for you to explain why you have made certain choices in designing the course. Not only does this kind of information lead to more engaged students, but it will also help students provide more informed responses to their end-of-semester evaluations, leading to a more accurate portrayal of the success of the class on those evaluation measures.

- Help students draw connections between their learning habits and their comments. You may wish to show them some of the data you've compiled. For example, you may be able to demonstrate that students who attend class regularly find the readings easier to manage.
- Reinforce the course's outcomes or your pedagogical priorities for the class. If students are not responding well to something that you feel is important to the course, explain why you developed that policy or activity, and why you feel that it is important to maintain.

For more information on discussing the results of your evaluation with students, please see:



- Centre for Teaching. Vanderbilt University. *Student evaluations of teaching*. Retrieved from <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/student-evaluations/>
- Lewis, K. G. (2001). Using mid-semester feedback and responding to it. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 87, 33-44.
- Sargent, C. (2007). Using mid-course evaluations to encourage active learning. In *Teaching concerns: Newsletter of the teaching resource center for faculty and teaching assistants*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia.
- Tiberius, R. (2001). Making sense and making use of feedback from focus groups. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 87, 63-75.

5.2 ADJUSTING THE COURSE BASED ON EVALUATIONS

After the evaluations and following discussions are completed, return to your evaluation goals and compare these with the feedback you've received. The results will hopefully have pointed you towards some actions you can take to ameliorate any problems, and will have provided you with some information about particular components of the course or about your strengths as an instructor.

In the immediate term, do not make any major changes to your ongoing course based on evaluations, particularly to the marking scheme, deadline, or list of assignments.

For small changes that can be implemented immediately, such as lecture formats and in-class activities, use your goals or learning outcomes for the course as your guide. Students may have many suggestions or wishes, but not all of them will promote learning, or adhere to the goals you have set for the class.

5.3 USING EVALUATIONS TO IMPROVE YOUR TEACHING

Student evaluations can be a very useful element of your long-term development as an instructor. Though many instructors feel hesitant about placing too much weight on student evaluations, if used thoughtfully and deliberately they can provide you with a great deal of information about the priorities you have identified in your own teaching.

There are many ways that you can employ your mid-course evaluations in the process of becoming a better instructor. These include:

- Using these evaluation results to [make changes to your course design](#) and teaching behaviours in future semesters.
- [Discussing evaluation results with a trusted mentor](#) or colleague who may be able to help you interpret the feedback and point you to resources addressing any issues that arise.
- Asking a mentor or colleague to conduct an [in-class observation of your teaching](#) to provide collegial feedback on any issues arising from the evaluations.
- [Visiting the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation, or other University teaching centres for a consultation](#) on your evaluations, for resources on teaching activities and techniques, or for seminars and roundtables on teaching.
- Using evaluations to direct you towards appropriate [professional development](#) workshops, resources and activities.

Remember that mid-course evaluations in particular are formative, and ultimately are a tool – both to assist you in improving the course in which they are conducted in the immediate term, and as a valuable component of the improvement of your teaching in the long term.

6. FURTHER RESOURCES ON MID-COURSE EVALUATIONS

WEBSITES:

Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning, Harvard University. Early evaluations for sections and courses. (2007). Retrieved July 9, 2007, from <http://bokcenter.harvard.edu/early-feedback>

Eberly Centre for Teaching Excellence and Innovation, Carnegie Mellon University. How to assess your teaching. Retrieved January 6, 2017 from <https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/assessment/assessteaching/index.html>

Eberly Centre for Teaching Excellence and Innovation, Carnegie Mellon University. Early course evaluations. Retrieved January 6, 2017 from <https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/assessment/assessteaching/earlyCourseEvaluations.html>

Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning, Harvard University. Interpreting evaluations. (2007). Retrieved July 9, 2007, from <http://bokcenter.harvard.edu/interpreting-feedback-and-evaluations>



ARTICLES:

Cashin, W. (1990). *Student ratings of teaching: Recommendations for use (Idea paper no. 22)*. Manhattan, KS: Center for Faculty Evaluation and Development.

Lewis, K. G. (2001). Making sense of student written comments. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 87, 25-32.

Felder, R. (1993). What do they know anyway? 2: Making evaluations effective. *Chemical Engineering Education*, 27(1), 28-29.

Rando, W. L. (2001). Writing teaching assessment questions for precision and reflections. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 87, 77-83.

Sargent, C. (2007). Using mid-course evaluations to encourage active learning. In *Teaching concerns: Newsletter of the teaching resource center for faculty and teaching assistants*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia.

Svinicki, M. (2001). Encouraging your students to give feedback. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 87, 17-24.



APPENDIX A: EXAMPLES OF MID-COURSE EVALUATION QUESTIONS

As is noted throughout this document, mid-course evaluation questions function best when they are specifically targeted towards the goals of the evaluation and of the course. As such, the following examples will best serve only as prompts or variations on questions you might ultimately select or develop, and should be revised and refined in the context of your particular needs. It is strongly recommended that you take the time to tailor these questions to your specific course and goals.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND CONTEXTUALIZING QUESTIONS

You may wish to ask questions like these to collect information that you can use to group and analyze the responses you receive to the open-ended questions that will comprise the rest of your evaluation. For example, if you suspect that non-majors are struggling with your course, you may ask students to provide their major or area of specialization, or to list previous courses they have taken in the subject area.

(Be sure to select and describe your response scale, if appropriate.)

- Please list your Program of Study.
- What is your (approximate) GPA?
- Please describe your career plans.
- I come to class having completed the readings and ready to discuss the day's topic*.

(*or other preparation that you expect students to complete before class.)

QUESTIONS ABOUT STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Questions like these can help you understand how students are preparing for class and interacting with the course material. This information can help you understand which activities lead to student satisfaction and success, and can help you point students to actions they can do that might improve their satisfaction with and performance in the course.

- Please describe how you usually prepare for each class session.
- Was there any point in the course where you were uncomfortable in a discussion or in completing a written assignment?
- If you had a question about the readings, did you ask the instructor or TA for more information?
- If there is an element of the readings you don't understand, please describe how you respond to that element (e.g., do you email the instructor, look up information online, wait to see if it will be covered in lecture, etc.).
- Please describe your work habits for this course. When and where do you do the readings/assignments? How many hours do they take you to complete? Do you take notes or prepare questions on the material?

- Which topic have you found the most difficult so far? What do you think made it difficult?
- Have you discussed the class topics or readings outside of class? If so please describe what you discussed and with whom.
- Please describe your reading habits for this course (for example, when do you do the readings, do you take notes, etc.).
- Have you used any academic resources on campus regarding the work of this course (e.g., the writing centre, learning skills centre, librarian)?
- Do you revise or proofread your assignments?



QUESTIONS ABOUT STUDENT EXPECTATIONS AND OUTCOMES

If you are an instructor who is new to the institution, teaching the material for the first time, or experimenting with new teaching activities, these questions can help you uncover any areas where your expectations for student learning and preparation diverge from the expectations or experiences of the students in the class.

- Was there anything you expected to encounter in this course that we haven't addressed and doesn't appear to be on the syllabus?
- Please describe any relationships you have identified between the material you are learning in this course and the other courses you are taking this semester or have recently completed.
- Are the class activities what you expected when you registered for the course?
- Does the content of this course reflect the calendar description? If not, why?
- Will your experience in this course prepare you for future courses? Why or why not?
- Is there any particular content or skills that a student should know before beginning this course in order to be able to succeed?
- Have you felt unprepared for any of the topics covered so far?
- Have you felt over-prepared for any of the topics covered so far? Has the class covered topics you've learned elsewhere?
- Did this class use the texts, or types of texts, you expected to use? If not, what texts did you expect?
- Do the assignment requirements correspond with what you expected?
- Do you feel that the workload of this course is comparable to other courses? Please provide examples in your response.
- Did you expect more or less class participation/more or less reading/more or less writing?
- Will the work on writing you've done in this course affect your writing for other courses? How or why not?

QUESTIONS ABOUT INSTRUCTOR ACTIVITIES

Questions such as these help you to identify your strengths and weaknesses in instruction and in communicating with students, and in promoting particular kinds of classroom or online interactions and activities.

- Do the lectures and/or class or online activities help you learn? Why or why not?
- How does the instructor respond to student questions?
- Do you feel comfortable asking questions in class or online? Why or why not?
- Does the instructor seem interested in the topics of the course?
- Does the instructor make evident the connections between different elements of the course (e.g., lectures, readings, labs, assignments)?
- Does the instructor provide further explanation when needed?
- Do people seem comfortable sharing opinions or asking questions in class or online? Do you? Why or why not?
- Are you comfortable speaking to the instructor outside of class (e.g., in office hours or over email)?
- Do you feel the instructor is more receptive to certain viewpoints? Certain students?



QUESTIONS ABOUT INSTRUCTOR EXPECTATIONS AND OBJECTIVES

Questions in this section should derive directly from your goals for the course, and will consequently vary by instructor and by course. For example, if you hope that students will learn independent research skills as part of your course, include questions about this element of the course.

- Please describe what you believe to be the most important idea or skill you have learned from this course so far.
- How has your writing/lab work changed as a result of the feedback you've received?

QUESTIONS ABOUT COURSE COMPONENTS AND ACTIVITIES

You may wish to ask questions like these to help you evaluate particular assignments, or to receive feedback on specific class sessions or activities. This can be particularly useful for new activities or assignments, or for activities or assignments that were not successful.

- Which class session did you enjoy the most so far this semester? Least? Why?
- Please describe the positive and challenging aspects of completing _____ assignment.
- Please describe any ways in which you feel your peers are contributing to your learning.
- Do you feel that you receive sufficient information to complete assignments/class activities? If not, what additional information would be useful?
- Reflect on the class session covering _____. Is there anything the instructor could have added that would improve your learning (e.g., graphs, pictures, examples, demonstration)?
- Would you change anything about the presentations?
- How have you used the online components of the class? Have the online components of the class contributed to your learning?
- Would you prefer more or less discussion? Lecture? Small group work? Presentations? Please explain your preferences.

- Which regular class activity (e.g., lecture, discussion, lab demonstration) helps you learn best? What about it helps you learn?
- Are the assignments for this course different from those you have encountered in other courses? How so?
- Please describe the class or online discussion that you found most interesting (most disappointing). What about it made you feel that way?
- Please describe your response to the organization and presentation of course materials.
- Please describe your sense of the purpose of _____ assignment. How does it fit with the broader goals of the course?
- Is there anything you feel you need to understand better in order to succeed in the class?

APPENDIX B: MID-COURSE EVALUATION GOALS WORKSHEET

TEACHING BEHAVIOUR OR CLASS ACTIVITY TO BE EVALUATED			
	INFORMATION SOUGHT REGARDING THIS ACTIVITY OR BEHAVIOUR	INFORMATION FROM STUDENTS THAT WOULD HELP ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS	POSSIBLE MID-COURSE EVALUATION QUESTIONS
Organization of lectures (previous evaluations have indicated that this is a problem for the instructor)	Do students find lectures hard to follow because of the way I am organizing and presenting the lectures, or because the material is too advanced?	<p>Are there any aspects of the way I deliver lectures that impede student learning?</p> <p>Are my expectations for students' background in the subject too high?</p> <p>I am developing my lectures assuming that students have read the related section in their textbook. Is this happening?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Please describe how you take notes during lectures. What about the lectures makes this process easier or harder for you? Do you feel that your previous classes in the subject have prepared you for this material? Please list the classes you have previously taken in this department. Please describe your reading habits for this class. Do you complete the readings before or after the related lectures? Do you take notes and jot down questions about the readings?
The Portal (this is the first time the instructor has used the Portal in the course)	<p>Do students feel that the Portal is enhancing their learning?</p> <p>Are students using all the features of the Portal? Is there anything missing?</p>	<p>Student descriptions of how the site is contributing to their learning.</p> <p>Student descriptions of how they use the Portal.</p>	<p>Please describe how you use the Portal. Which features do you find most useful?</p> <p>Please provide an example of how these features have helped your learning in the course. Is there anything you wish was available on the site that currently isn't?</p>

APPENDIX C: ADDITIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD TEACHING

SEVEN PRINCIPLES FOR GOOD PRACTICE IN UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION

Chickering and Gamson (1987) identified seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education which have guided much research and practice in teaching in higher education for the past three decades. You may find these principles a useful starting point in developing mid-course evaluation questions that will provide feedback on the issues most important to the success of the course. These principles are as follows:

1. Encourages contact between students and faculty
2. Develops reciprocity and cooperation among students
3. Use active learning techniques
4. Gives prompt feedback
5. Emphasizes time on task
6. Communicates high expectations
7. Respects diverse talents and ways of learning



Adapted from Chickering, A., & Gamson, Z. (1987). Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. *American Association of Higher Education Bulletin*, 3-7.

SEEQ

In 1987, H.W. Marsh developed the Students' Evaluations of Educational Quality (SEEQ) instrument, based on the aspects of teaching that student evaluations should address to be the most valuable and reliable. SEEQ identifies nine multidimensional factors to address in student evaluations. Instructors may score highly in one area and not in others. Consequently, no one area on its own is a valid indicator of instructional quality, but taken together, the different factors may establish a thorough portrait of teaching strengths and weaknesses.

SEEQ is primarily used to ensure the reliability and validity of formal teaching evaluations, but it may also be usefully employed in more informal mid-course evaluations as a way to ensure that representative teaching and learning activities are being evaluated.

9 SEEQ FACTORS:

1. **Learning/value:** describes the amount of learning students perceive has been taking place
2. **Instructor enthusiasm:** measures whether students perceive the instructor to be enthusiastic about teaching and the course material
3. **Organization:** evaluates the structure of lectures, presentations, assignments, and other course materials and activities
4. **Individual rapport:** evaluates the degree to which students feel comfortable and welcomed by the instructor
5. **Group interaction:** assesses whether the instructor encourages constructive discussions and group work
6. **Breadth of coverage:** asks whether the instructor contextualized the course material and offered connections with other areas of study
7. **Examinations/grading:** assesses whether students found feedback on tests and assignments to be useful
8. **Assignments/readings:** evaluates whether students enjoyed the assignments and readings and found them essential to their understanding of the course material
9. **Workload/difficulty:** measures the relative difficulty and demand of the course



Adapted from Marsh, H. W. (1987). *Students' evaluations of university teaching: Research findings, methodological issues, and directions for future research*. Sydney: University of Sydney.

TEACHING BEHAVIOURS INVENTORY

Developed in 1997 by Harry Murray at the University of Western Ontario, the Teaching Behaviours Inventory classifies 60 teaching behaviours in 9 categories. These behaviours are typical across most disciplines, and are drawn from the actions of instructors with high student ratings and from cognitive research connecting specific teaching activities to improved student learning.

CLARITY: methods used to explain or clarify concepts and principles

1. Gives several examples of each concept.
2. Defines new or unfamiliar terms
3. Repeats difficult ideas several times
4. Stresses most important points
5. Uses graphs or diagrams to facilitate explanation
6. Points out practical applications of concepts
7. Answers students' questions thoroughly
8. Highlights key terms
9. Explains subject matter in familiar conversational language

EXPRESSION: use of non-verbal behaviour to solicit student attention and interest

10. Speaks in a dramatic or expressive way
11. Moves about while lecturing
12. Gestures with hands or arms
13. Makes eye contact with students
14. Gestures with head or body
15. Tells jokes or humorous anecdotes
16. Reads lecture verbatim from prepared notes or text
17. Smiles or laughs while teaching
18. Shows distracting mannerisms

INTERACTION: techniques used to foster students' participation in class

19. Encourages students to ask questions or make comments during lectures
20. Offers constructive criticism
21. Praises students for good ideas
22. Asks questions of individual students
23. Asks questions of class as a whole
24. Incorporates students' ideas into lecture
25. Presents challenging, thought-provoking ideas
26. Uses a variety of activities in class (e.g., group work, guest lectures, etc.)
27. Asks rhetorical questions



ORGANIZATION: ways of organizing or structuring the course's subject matter

28. Uses headings and subheadings to organize lectures
29. Puts outline of lecture on blackboard or overhead screen
30. Clearly indicates transition from one topic to the next
31. Gives preliminary overview of lecture at beginning of class
32. Explains how each topic fits into the course as a whole
33. Reviews topics covered in previous lecture at beginning of each class
34. Periodically summarizes points previously made

PACING: rate of presentation of information; efficient use of class time

35. Clarifies fundamental points
36. Digresses from major theme of lecture
37. Covers very little material in class sessions
38. Asks if students understand before proceeding to next topic
39. Sticks to the point in answering students' questions

DISCLOSURE: explicitness concerning course requirements and grading criteria.

40. Advises students as to how to prepare for tests or exams
41. Provides sample exam questions
42. Provides clear expectations for all assessed work
43. States objectives of each lecture
44. Reminds students of test dates of assignment deadlines
45. States objectives of course as a whole

SPEECH: characteristics of voice relevant to classroom teaching

46. Speaks at an appropriate volume
47. Speaks clearly
48. Speaks at an appropriate pace
49. Says "um" or "ah"
50. Speaks with voice modulation (fluctuates).

RAPPORT: quality of interpersonal relations between teacher and students

51. Addresses individual students by name
52. Announces availability for consultation outside of class
53. Offers to help students with course-related problems
54. Shows tolerance of other points of view
55. Talks with students before or after class, when possible

TEACHING AIDS: use of media and materials to enhance learning

- 35. Uses visual teaching aids
- 36. Makes effort to ensure readability of visual aids
- 37. Uses audio, video, and computer equipment
- 38. Uses presentation software
- 39. Uses video programs



Adapted from: Education Development Office, Wilfred Laurier University, Teaching behaviours. Retrieved August 23, 2007, from https://legacy.wlu.ca/page.php?grp_id=12499&p=18132.

APPENDIX D: WORKSHEETS FOR SORTING AND ANALYZING EVALUATION RESPONSES

Sorting responses by emergent themes:

Theme 1

Description:

Summary:

Comments:

Theme 2

Description:

Summary:

Comments:

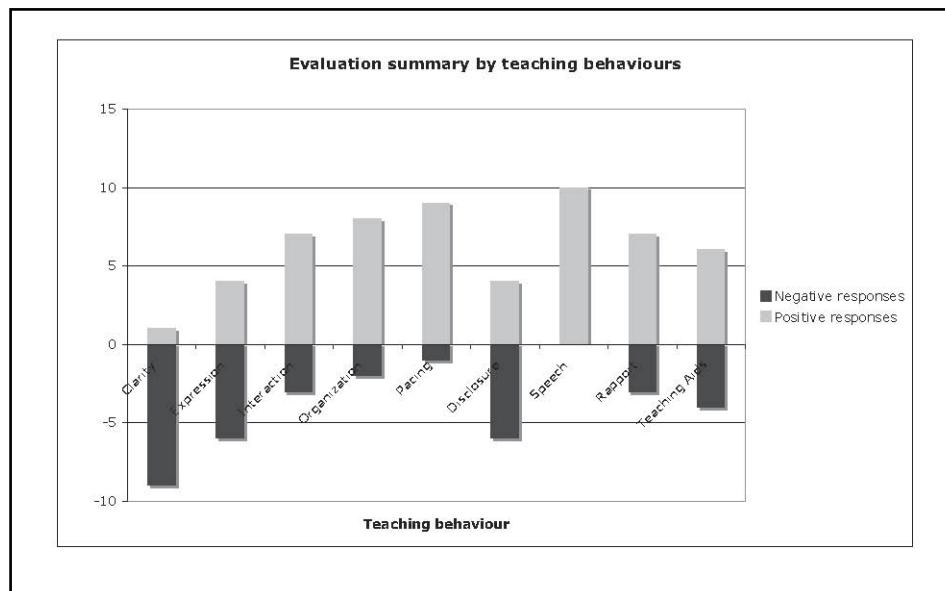
SORTING RESPONSES BY EVALUATION QUESTION:

	QUESTION #1	QUESTION #2	QUESTION #3
STRENGTHS			
WEAKNESSES			
			OTHER COMMENTS

DEVELOPING A VISUAL SUMMARY OF EVALUATION RESPONSES:

The following chart is an example of the visual summary of your evaluations that can be produced by recording the number of positive and negative responses for each criterion. In this case, the results of 10 evaluations were sorted according to the 9 categories of the Teaching Behaviours Inventory (you may also choose to sort by question or theme). These results were then transformed into a graph, which represents the number of positive and negative responses per category. This visual representation provides an immediate depiction of an instructor's strengths - in this case, speech while teaching, pacing, and organization - as well as the instructor's weaknesses - clarity, expression, and disclosure. This exercise allows instructors to prioritize areas for future teaching development and investigation on future evaluations.

	Clarity	Expression	Interaction	Organization	Pacing	Disclosure	Speech	Rapport	Teaching Aids
Positive Responses	1	4	7	8	9	4	10	7	7
Negative Responses	-9	-6	-3	-2	-1	-6	0	-3	-3



APPENDIX E: MID-COURSE EVALUATION FOR TEACHING ASSISTANTS (TAS)

Mid-course evaluations for TAs feature many of the same characteristics as mid-course evaluations of faculty, with a few important differences. Mid-course evaluations of TAs should:

- Focus only on aspects of the course over which the TA has control.
 - » Your TAs might mark papers, lead discussions, or meet with students in office hours. Ensure that their mid-course evaluations focus on these tasks, and not on issues, such as assignment design, over which they have little to no control.
- Focus on teaching or instructional behaviours.
 - » Because of the previously described considerations, much of what can be fruitfully evaluated in mid-course student evaluations of TAs will include teaching or instructional behaviours that take place in class and through individual interactions with students. Please see **Appendix C** for examples of teaching behaviours that most influence student learning.

If you would like to help your TAs conduct evaluations of their teaching, you may wish to:

- Assist them in selecting issues for evaluation. You might help them to identify areas in need of evaluation by sitting in on a class they are leading or by evaluating their grading of student work.
- Meet with them after the evaluations have been conducted to help them identify areas of strength and weakness, and to provide some assistance in ways to improve problem areas.
- Opt to allow them to keep their evaluations private.

Depending on the number of TAs in your course and their roles, it may make more sense to develop separate and individual TA mid-course evaluations, or to incorporate questions about TAs in your main mid-course evaluation.

- If you have multiple TAs leading several tutorials or labs, it may be easiest for each TA to administer an evaluation in their own section. This can be an evaluation only about the TA, or the general evaluation you are using for the course with the addition of several questions about the TA.
- If your course has multiple graders, you may ask general questions about students' perceptions about how assignments are evaluated, but will not be able to match these comments to individual graders because evaluations are anonymous. You may, however, be able to identify areas in which your TAs require additional training or instruction on grading.

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