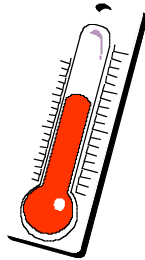


Techniques for Informally Assessing Learning

These are ways students can give you and themselves feedback either on (1) *what* they've learned or (2) how well they feel they *understood* a concept or skill that was presented.



1. **Be a thermometer.** Students extend one arm above their head. Visualizing it as a thermometer, they indicate with their other hand the “degree” to which they understand a concept or the day’s lesson. Placing their other hand at shoulder level means they are not yet confident that they understand it—it didn’t register. A hand at elbow level means they feel they understood it partially. A hand up by wrist or fingertip level means they feel confident that they understood the technique or concept that was presented. Alternative version: draw a thermometer on a piece of paper and distribute copies (or have students draw their own). Have them shade in their degree (level) of understanding. Beneath it they write, “The reason I rated myself this way is....”
2. **Fill out an index card.** Instruct students, “Write three things you learned today. If anything still puzzles you, write your questions as well.” You can also be more specific: “List at least two characteristics of stated main ideas that we discussed in class today.”
3. **Write a letter.** Instruct students, “Write a letter to [classmate who is absent that day]. Tell him/her what we studied today and what you learned today.”
4. **Give a show of hands.** Ask students to indicate their general level of understanding by giving a thumbs down, thumb to the side (or closed fist), or a thumbs up. As with the extended arm thermometer, this activity enables you to scan the class and quickly get an idea of where the class is as a whole in its understanding.
5. **Draw in the dendrites.** Have students draw lines (representing dendrites or learning) radiating out from small circles (representing brain cells) to indicate the amount of knowledge they have about the topic at that point. For example, by drawing in lots of dendrites, they would be indicating they know/understand a great deal about the topic or skill. They should explain beneath their drawing the *reason* they drew in the number of dendrites they did (e.g., “I studied this last semester so I already know quite a bit about it”). This idea comes from Rita Smilkstein and is described in her book, *We’re Born to Learn*.
6. **Mark a 1-5 rating scale.** Using a rating system, students write or circle a number from 1 to 5, with 1 being “This is all new to me; I’m still a beginner”; 2—“I need much more practice with this”; 3—“I need a little bit of help; I have a few questions”; 4—“I can do this on my own”; 5—“I understand this so well that I can explain it to someone else.” This can also be done in the form of a Likert scale. You can display the scale on Smartboard or slide and have students write a number on their papers or hold up fingers (which you tally and record). Alternatively, you can print out the scale, distribute copies on slips of paper, and have students circle a number.
7. **Give a quick impression.** Ask students to fill in the blank and finish statements such as, “I would color today’s class session [color] because _____.” “The one word I would choose to sum up today’s class session is _____ because _____.” “After today’s session I felt _____ because _____.” “A song title I would use to describe class today is _____ because _____.”