

Use Informal, Continuous Checks for Understanding

The goal of informal, continuous checks for understanding is to monitor student learning providing information regarding student misunderstandings and/or challenges to inform future instruction. Checks for understanding are generally low stakes and have a low point value, which encourages students to participate but should not significantly impact their final grade. Examples of informal checks for understanding include the one-minute paper, the muddiest point, and using the chat strategically.

The One-Minute Thread is a teaching practice designed to check for student understanding in a fully online course, and can also be used in hybrid or face-to-face courses that use an online platform for class materials and discussions. The One-Minute Thread differs from the One-Minute Paper used in face-to-face settings in that it offers students more time to formulate their responses, which may be helpful when students are asked to grapple with complex questions, challenging material, or when they simply benefit from extra processing time.

Instructions

1. Use the questions below to check for student understanding.
 - a. What was most clear, helpful, or meaningful in this (module, unit, class)?
 - b. What concepts or ideas from this (module, unit, class) are still unclear?
 - c. What additional comments, insights, or questions do you have about the concepts or ideas in this (module, unit or class)?
2. You may include all three questions on one discussion forum. However, creating a separate forum for each question will make it easier to identify patterns or themes in each category.
3. Provide students with instructions that encourage short, concise responses to each question. Consider offering a point or two for completion as well as an example post from a previous class.

Below are some sample instructions:

In order for me to determine how well you understand the content in this module, please post a brief response to the question in each of the three discussion forums. Your response should be brief, and it should not take more than a few minutes to write. For your contribution to our shared understanding, you will earn 1 point for posting to each discussion board prompt. Below are several examples from last semester:

- **Clear** – *I now understand both the basic structure of the cell and what keeps a cell alive.*
- **Unclear** – *I don't get the four phases of mitosis/cell division and if the phases are different for different kinds of cells.*
- **Comment** – *Please show more animations and pictures . . . they help a lot*

Once all students have posted their responses, identify patterns regarding what is clear and unclear. Share a summative post that addresses problem areas by providing necessary clarifications and useful resources. Describe any modifications you will make to course materials or the next module based on the students' comments.

The Muddiest Point is a check for understanding that provides insight into the concepts or ideas causing confusion. The practice consists of asking students to respond in the chat during a live session, or at the end of a microlecture or discussion thread, with a quick response to one question: "What was the muddiest point in [the lecture, discussion, homework assignment, film, etc.]?"

Use the Chat and Other Online Features: Asking students to respond to a quick question in the chat during a live session both keeps them engaged and gives you feedback on how well they are understanding the content.

You may also ask students to respond to a quick online poll to check for understanding, which is similar to asking for a show of hands in a classroom. This type of feedback provides a general sense of how the group as a whole thinks they are understanding the new material. Asking students to respond to a poll during a live session allows you address students' concerns in a timely manner. Online polls typically include a single multiple-choice question. Below are examples of questions for different situations.

- A poll question following an online lecture: How confident are you that you understand the concepts [you may choose to list separate concepts in separate questions] discussed in the video lecture? (responses on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = least and 5 = most)
- A poll about assigned reading: How well did you understand the significance of the results presented in the article? (responses on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = least and 5 = most)
- A poll about assignment instructions: How confident are you that you understand what is expected of you for this assignment? (responses on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = least and 5 = most)

Although the responses to these questions only indicate how well students *think* they understand, not what they actually understand, it is still a good method to obtain feedback that lets you know if you need to follow up with additional instruction for the entire class or offer additional help to the students who have indicated they are struggling with the material.

Source

From "Evaluating and Improving Your Online Teaching Effectiveness," by K. Kelly, in S. Hirtz, D. G. Harper, & S. Mackenzie (Eds.), *Education for a Digital World: Advice, Guidelines, and Effective Practice From Around the Globe* (pp. 365–377), BCcampus and Commonwealth of Learning, 2008 (<http://oasis.col.org/handle/11599/52>). CC BY-SA 3.0. Reproduced with permission.