

Formative Evaluation of Teaching (FET)

Teacher-designed Feedback Forms

Purpose

The purpose of using teacher-designed feedback forms in Formative Evaluation of Teaching is to collect timely feedback from students to identify the strengths and weaknesses of teaching during the course.

Can I use SFQ?

There are two main reasons why standardized student feedback questionnaires (SFQ) used at the end-of-course do not serve the above purpose.

- SFQs are designed mainly to provide a **summative evaluation** of a course. In order to allow comparison of ratings across instructors and courses, standardized questionnaires are used. Hence, it only contains questions that are of general nature and relevant to most courses.
- SFQ are administered **at the end** of the semester. This prevents instructors to take actions to address any issues of concern should they arise during the course nor would the instructors know what students like about their teaching.

Usage of Teacher-designed feedback forms

- **Formative evaluation** questions allow instructors to obtain **specific feedback** on a particular aspect that interests or concerns them during the course. Questions can also focus on an **innovation** the teacher has introduced for the first time.
 - ❖ Example 1, a teacher is concerned about students' understanding on a specific topic, reaction to a specific assignment, or satisfaction on the pace of instruction delivery.
 - ❖ Example 2, after trying a method to encourage active learning in a large class, the instructor want to ask the students if the method has encouraged them to do more thinking or not.

When is a good time to conduct formative evaluation of teaching?

- The feedback should be collected earlier in the course, such as **week 4 to 7**. This allows the instructor time to take remedial actions as soon as possible should any issues occurred during the semester.
- After you have collected and analyzed the FET data, it is important to share the results with your students as soon as possible, preferably in the **next class**. By telling them what you discovered and what changes you will make to address possible issues, it will encourage students to take any future feedback process seriously.

Suggestions for Question Design

Length of Questionnaire

- ❖ Avoid using long questionnaire. For FET, a questionnaire of **10 or fewer questions** which can be completed in 3-5 minutes is desirable.

Closed-ended Questions

- ❖ Students should be asked **one issue per question** only. Avoid using “double-barreled” questions which address two things in one question with an “and” in the middle. For example, “The instructor is knowledgeable and communicated effectively. This double-barreled question poses problems in interpretation of students’ feedbacks later on.
- ❖ The questions should also ask students **specific questions** to obtain meaningful feedbacks. For example, instead of asking students -“Is the instructor presenting information at an appropriate pace?” it is more useful to ask the students – “The pace of the teaching was:
Answer category: Too Fast Fast Just Right Slow Too Slow”
- ❖ Consider using “**low inference**” questions to collect feedback. These are questions that do not require students to use too much subjective judgment when answering, and hence problems identified can be readily rectified. For example instead of asking the students to rate the instructor’s presentation skills, we can ask if the instructor had provided sufficient examples, or repeated explanations on difficult ideas, etc.
- ❖ Avoid **ambiguous questions** which could at least have two possible interpretations. For example, “Please rate the competence of the instructor”. Here “competence” could mean things such as “competence in the knowledge of the field” or “competence in teaching” etc. To avoid confusion and misinterpretation by students, the questions should be unambiguous without multiple meanings.
- ❖ Avoid “**Loaded**” questions which are ones that convey bias and presupposition in the question e.g. blaming the student. For example, “How often do you skip the lecture?” Neutral questions without suggestive presumptions are essential for collecting accurate information.

Open-ended Questions

- ❖ Open-ended questions allow richer input from students than a typical close-ended question. For example, just knowing “material presented was not clear” may not be sufficient. Further feedback could be collected to help instructors find out *in what way* it was not clear. Hence open-ended questions with free-response items such as “Please explain” or “Suggestions for possible Improvements” etc can be useful.
- ❖ Good open-ended questions would not solicit “yes” and “no” answers. For example, “Do you think case study is useful in this course?” is a close-ended question. An alternative question would be “What is your opinion on the use of case study in this course?”

As the above suggestions show, the main purpose of collecting feedback from students is to **enhance both teaching and student learning** rather than assessing the instructor’s performance in teaching. Hence it is important that the feedback collected can effectively help the instructors to identify both areas of merits and areas for improvement.