Resources and Guidance for Collecting and Using Student Feedback

The aim of this guide is to help you effectively and efficiently collect student feedback to use in assessing and improving your course.

Recommendations for Obtaining Useful Student Feedback from Surveys

- *Collect something*: Don't get overwhelmed with possibility. Even a single piece of feedback can help you improve your course. Think about what you most want to know about your students' experience in your course.

- *No need to reinvent the wheel*: Use one of our ready-made templates to get started. You can always customize the questions to meet your specific needs, but there's no need to start from scratch.

- *Wait a bit*: Refrain from collecting feedback during the first two weeks of class; this will help you avoid investing effort into fixing issues that will naturally improve as students settle into the course.

- *Explain*: Tell students what types of feedback you plan to collect and why.

- *Keep it brief*: Try to use surveys that students can complete in a minute or two.

- *Make it convenient*: Embed surveys into Canvas modules or send via email to streamline the process for students.

- *Be strategic*: Don't overwhelm your students or yourself by collecting feedback on every activity. Focus your efforts on activities you suspect are not working well or those you've had to alter significantly.

- *Provide clear response options*: Aim for response options with clear practical meanings (e.g., Needs Improvement/Meets Expectations vs. a 1-5 scale). This approach may help you view, interpret, and respond to feedback more quickly.

- *Give credit*: Consider tying surveys to a small amount of points (i.e., completion credit) to encourage participation. For example, this can be easily done on Canvas with an graded survey.

- *Acknowledge*: Thank students for their feedback and emphasize its importance for improving the course.

- *Follow-Up*: If necessary, make changes and assess their effect with a follow-up survey. For changes made to specific activities, the follow-up can be conducted the next time students complete the activity. For more general course-level changes, allow at least 3-4 weeks for the changes to take hold before reassessing. It's also good idea to tell students explicitly that you're making changes based on their feedback. If many students ask for a change that you decide not to implement, you might want to explain why you made that choice, if appropriate. This lets the students know that they were heard.

Pre-Built Templates Available in Canvas, Google Forms, and Qualtrics

Available Templates (links below are to previews of the templates' questions)

- Quick Course Pulse: Snapshot of how the course is going overall

- Quick Activity Feedback – General: Feedback on a specific course activity

- Quick Activity Feedback – Group Work: Feedback on a small group activity or assignment

- Quick Lecture Feedback: Feedback specific to the lecture portions of a course & the content students find most difficult

Interpreting and Using the Feedback

- <u>Start small:</u> If your data indicate to you that improvement is needed, start by identifying one concrete change you can make rather than making a major overhaul.

- <u>Take care of "easy" fixes:</u> Be sure to make "easy" fixes (broken links, pdfs that are hard to read, not be audible during lecture, etc.); even if only one student has mentioned them others have likely had the same problem.

- <u>Expect some negative feedback:</u> A small percentage of students will always indicate that something "Needs Improvement." It's also normal to receive some contradictory results, especially with open ended questions (e.g. discussions are too long / discussions are too short). Keep negative ratings and comments in perspective.

- <u>Use open-ended feedback:</u> Identify potential changes by consulting open-ended feedback (if you've collected it), soliciting follow-up feedback from students, seeking input from colleagues, or consulting with the CTL.

- <u>Look for patterns:</u> Several students writing similar responses may be evidence of wider agreement on an issue. At the same time, comments that disagree with one another can also point to areas where student experience varies; such variation may signal an area to address in the future.

- <u>Sort answers:</u> Finding patterns and making sense of qualitative data is not always easy, especially if you have more than just a few responses. One method is to copy and paste the qualitative answers into another program (e.g. Excel, Word, etc.) where you can sort them into categories that are helpful to you. There is no one right sorting strategy for everyone and you should choose the one that works best for you.

- <u>Follow up:</u> You can always collect another round of feedback to assess changes you make. If this is a course-level change (and not just a change to a specific activity), give several weeks for the change to take effect before assessing.

Potential Advantages and Challenges of Open-ended Survey Questions

While designing your survey, consider the advantages and challenges associated with open-ended survey questions.

Advantages:
- Provides a low-barrier opportunity for students to share concerns and suggestions

- Can help you interpret and respond to results of the closed questions without additional follow-up

Challenges:
- Reviewing open responses can be time consuming, especially for a large course.

- Open questions require more effort from students and can reduce response rates.

Some form of open-ended feedback is crucial to pinpoint problems and identify potential improvements. If you chose not to initially ask open-ended questions, you might consider following up with students via class discussion, email, or another survey on any specific areas of concern identified by your initial survey. While leaving open-ended questions for follow-up steps can help you control the amount and type of feedback you receive, there are also drawbacks to this approach. It creates extra logistical steps for yourself and your students, and surveying people frequently can significantly lower response rates. In general, open-ended questions are easiest to implement in smaller courses and more difficult (although not impossible) to use in larger ones.

Additional Resources

[Feedback on Teaching](#) / [Observation and Feedback](#) / [Course Evaluations](#) / [Tips for Student Evaluations of Teaching](#) / [WashU Canvas Support Hub](#) / [Qualtrics at WashU](#) / [Google Forms Documentation](#)

The Center for Teaching and Learning also offers [individualized consultations](#).