

INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE



Teaching Technique 10

Quick Write

ACTIVITY TYPE

- Active/Engaged Learning
- Writing

TEACHING PROBLEM ADDRESSED


- Insufficient Class Preparation
- Lack of Participation

LEARNING TAXONOMIC LEVEL

- Foundational Knowledge
- Learning How to Learn

Quick Write

Quick Write is a learning assessment technique where learners respond to an open-ended prompt.

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- 1 Clarify your teaching purpose and learning goals for the *Quick Write*
 - 2 Identify the learning task's underlying problem and craft the prompt
 - 3 Set assignment parameters for completing the *Quick Write* prompts
 - 4 Develop a plan for learning assessment or grading
 - 5 Communicate assignment instructions to students
 - 6 Implement the technique
 - 7 Reflect upon the activity and evaluate its effectiveness

Step-By-Step Instructions

In this section we provide you with guidance on each of the seven steps involved as you consider this technique.

STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS

Quick Write prompts can focus on almost any aspect of the subject. Thus, it is a flexible, active, and engaged learning technique that can be used across many different disciplines and fields. It can be done at any point in the learning unit as a check-in on student learning.

Quick Write can help students achieve several learning goals. A *Quick Write* requires students to direct and focus their attention on recalling what they know about a topic and to communicate that succinctly in a limited amount of time. It encourages students to pay closer attention as they start to expect that they will be held accountable by having to recall and summarize the information later. It helps you gather information about students' foundational knowledge.

This technique provides you with a quick view of students' understanding along with their ability to communicate that understanding. It is a written assignment that can contain rich data, but it is brief, and thus is quickly administered and scored. In addition, it can be used as a one-time administration to assess learning at a specific point in time or alternately both pre- and post the learning unit to gauge a change in understanding.

STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT

Determine what students should know at a specific point in a learning unit. Craft a prompt that asks them to provide information about whether or how well they know it. For example, if you expect them to know a term (x), you might ask them to write for one minute to "define x."

STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS

Decide how long students should write. Typically, a minute is a useful amount of time. Decide how they should turn in the information. In an onsite class session, you might ask them to record their responses on an index card, while online, you might ask them to turn in their responses as an assignment. Alternately, you might do this as a timed quiz to ensure that they don't spend longer than you intend; the goal is to get an immediate and quick response, not to see how well they can research.

STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING

Because the writing is done in a short timeframe, student responses should be quick and easy to score. Consider a simple plus, check, or minus. This technique will work best as a formative assessment; if you'd like to assign a grade, consider it as part of a participation/engagement grade.

Step-By-Step Instructions (CON'T)



STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS

Onsite, you might simply announce the assignment orally. Online, you will likely want to provide a prompt in writing for the assignment or quiz.

STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE

- Announce the activity and explain the purpose of it.
- Present the prompt, and tell students how to respond (for example, incomplete sentences). Tell them how long they will have to respond.
- Ask students to begin writing.
- Call time, and collect the responses.
- Examine individual artifacts and give each a quick score, such as minus/check/plus.
- To assess at the class level, tally responses and determine how many responses were in each scoring category you created. Note any common gaps or misunderstandings.

STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS

When reflecting on the activity and how effective it was, consider the following questions:

- Did the technique match the course learning goals and objectives?
- Did it meet my goals for this learning module?
- Was it appropriate for the students?
- Did the technique keep the students engaged?
- Did it promote student learning?
- Did it provide me with information about student understanding?

If you answer yes to all or most of these questions, next consider how you might improve the activity for the next use.

Support Materials

The materials in this section are intended to help you with the process of implementing this technique.

WAYS TO USE QUICK WRITE

- **To assess Foundational Knowledge:** Ask a question. For example, define x, describe y, or list three kinds of z.
- **To assess student ability to Apply Knowledge they have Learned:** Ask students to make a prediction about how the outcome of a case or experiment or other will turn out.
- **To assess student ability to Integrate Information:** Ask them to find a statement in a reading or lecture with which they agree in a reading and then to describe the alternate points of view.
- **To assess learning in the Human Dimension:** Use a *Quick Write* to ask students to respond to a prompt, such as what was the most challenging or surprising fact about this course this first week or how they might use information from the course in working with others.
- **To assess student ability to Learn How to Learn:** Ask students to self reflect on their learning effort using a *Quick Write* (e.g. describe your effort in preparation for this exam). Alternately you could ask something class-specific, such as what is the most important thing they learned in the class session. This variation is called the *Minute Paper* (Angelo and Cross, 1993). You could also ask students to describe something that still confuses them and something they need to learn more about. This variation is at times called a "Muddiest Point" (Angelo and Cross, 1993).

Online Adaptation

This section is intended to help you with the process of implementing and assessing *Quick Write* in your online class.

TIME-LIMITED QUIZ

- Conduct a time-limited quiz in your Learning Management System.
- Determine the course content you want students to focus on, and craft a corresponding prompt as a single essay question.
- Provide appropriate information, such as the purpose of the assignment, in the instruction pane and set the time limit.
- Restrict the writing timeframe to 3 to 5 minutes to ensure students quickly recall what they know about a topic, rather than researching it, and communicate their knowledge succinctly.

LIVE RESPONSES

Alternatively, you can use a *Quick Write* in a synchronous session such as a video conference, in three easy steps:

- Explain the assignment.
- Announce the timeframe.
- Have students respond with a few sentences in the chat pane.

Consider assigning participation points rather than grading responses due to the fact that *Quick Writes* work best as a formative assessment.

Technique Template

Following are two templates to assist you as you think through how you might implement this technique in your own class. The first is a completed template, providing an example of how Claire Major adapted *Quick Write* in her course, *Introduction to Scientific Methods*. The second is a blank template for you to fill out to tailor this technique for your course.

Technique Template

Sample Quick Write Completed Technique Template:

Content from Claire Major

Introduction to Scientific Methods

Course Name

COURSE CHARACTERISTICS

What are the situational factors that impact this course? For example, is it on campus or online? How many students? Is it lower division or graduate? Are there student attributes such as attitudes, prior knowledge, reasons for enrolling, and so forth that should be taken into account as you consider this technique?

This online course enrolls students from a wide range of backgrounds. Furthermore, many of the students suffer from "math anxiety" and don't believe that they will need to use math in their futures.

STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS

Why are you choosing this technique? What do you hope to accomplish?

One of the course objectives is development of problem-solving skills through making connections between mathematics and modern society. He hopes that students will learn to value mathematics and see the importance of mathematical skills in their daily lives while learning core concepts. The professor decided to use Quick Writes in the course, believing that the writing activity could help students deepen their thinking about critical math facts and recognize how they could use math in their lives or potential future careers. He also felt it would be a good way to demonstrate student attainment of learning outcomes.

STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT

What is the question you want learners to address, or problem you want them to solve?

He developed a list of prompt questions drawing from a variety of sources (including Cleland, et al., nd). Some examples are as follows:

- Describe a practical career responsibility that might require you to measure an object's surface area, other than by a gift wrapper. Explain your rationale.*
- Describe how those planning food preparation at a fast food restaurant might benefit from knowing the average amount of food eaten by males and females.*
- Describe an algebraic technique that you could use to add and subtract positive and negative numbers. Identify one way that you might use the technique in the real world.*

STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS

What are the assignment logistics? For example, will this be assigned individually or is it group work? How long will the assignment take? Will students be submitting a product? What materials, resources, or additional information do you anticipate needing?

He posted one prompt at the start of each learning module and asked students to upload their responses to the questions as one of their assignments, completed at the end of the module.

STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING

If you decide to assess learning, how will you determine that learning has occurred? For example, will you use a simple +/check/- grading system? If you use a rubric, will you use an existing one or create one? What will be your criteria and standards?

The Professor created a 4-1 rating scale for problem-solving with 4 representing the highest level of feasibility of the solution to 1 being the lowest.

STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS

How will you communicate assignment parameters to students? For example, through a handout? A prompt on a presentation slide? Assignment instructions in your online course?

He communicated the prompts to the students through the prompts in the assignment in their course Learning Management System (LMS).

STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE

How will you adapt steps/procedures for your students? Are there any additional logistical aspects to consider?

He assigned one prompt at the beginning of the module and one at the end so that he could see changes over time.

STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS

Note: This step will be completed after you have implemented the technique.

Did this technique help you accomplish your goals? What worked well? What could have been improved? What might you change if you decide to implement the activity again?

He had a couple of his colleagues also score the student cards to help to ensure that his ratings were accurate. He took an average score from the three ratings he and his colleagues created and used a clustered bar graph to illustrate the different scores in each week of the semester. He could see that students had improved their written expression of problem-solving skills throughout the term and included the chart along with his description of the activity and his process of peer ratings in his promotion and tenure file.


Technique Template

This template is intended for use when planning to implement **Quick Write** in your class. Fill in the blanks below, and use the information provided elsewhere in the Instructor's Guide to assist you in your thinking.

Course Name

COURSE CHARACTERISTICS

What are the situational factors that impact this course? For example, is it on campus or online? How many students? Is it lower division or graduate? Are there student attributes such as attitudes, prior knowledge, reasons for enrolling, and so forth that should be taken into account as you consider this technique?




STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS

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STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT

What is the question you want learners to address, or problem you want them to solve?



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Note: This step will be completed after you have implemented the technique.

Did this technique help you accomplish your goals? What worked well? What could have been improved? What might you change if you decide to implement the activity again?

References and Resources

PRIMARY SOURCE

Content for this download was drawn primarily from “Learning Assessment Technique 6: Quick Write” in *Learning Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty* (Barkley & Major, 2016), pp. 105-110. It includes material that was adapted or reproduced with permission. For further information about this technique, including examples in both on campus and online courses, see the primary source:

Barkley, E. F., Major, C. H. (2016). *Learning Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

CITATIONS AND ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- Angelo, T. A., & Cross, K. P. (1993). CAT 7: Muddiest Point. In *Classroom assessment techniques: A handbook for college teachers* (2nd ed., pp. 154-158). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Cleland, J., Rillero, P., & Zambo, R. (nd). Effective prompts for quick writes in science and mathematics. <http://ejlts.ucdavis.edu/sites/ejls.ucdavis.edu/files/articles/Jocleland.pdf>
- On course E-Newsletter. (nd). Six ways to use quick writes to promote learning. <http://oncourseworkshop.com/life-long-learning/six-ways-use-quick-writes-promote-learning/>.

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