## ADULT CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT SCALE

**G.G Darkenwald**

**Form A**

**Directions:**
The purpose of this questionnaire is to find out what your class is like. This is not a test. There are no right or wrong answers. Please give me your honest opinions about the class you are teaching now.

For each of the statements below, go through the following steps:
- Read the statement carefully and decide how well it describes the class you are now attending.
- Indicate your option by circling the number that indicates your opinion.
  - 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= agree, 4= strongly agree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
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<td>1. Students help to decide the topics to be covered in the class.</td>
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<td>2. The class is flexible enough to meet the needs of individual students.</td>
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<td>3. The teacher comes to class prepared.</td>
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<td>4. Students are often bored in class.</td>
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<td>5. The teacher seldom talks about things not related to the course.</td>
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<td>6. Many students think that the class is not related to their lives.</td>
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<td>7. Students often ask the teacher questions.</td>
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<td>8. The students in the class work well together.</td>
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<td>9. Learning objectives were made clear at the start of the course.</td>
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<td>10. The teacher makes all the decisions in the class.</td>
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<td>11. Most students enjoy the class.</td>
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<td>12. The teacher expects every student to learn all the same things.</td>
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<td>13. Students in the class can select assignments that are of personal interest to them.</td>
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<td>14. The teacher makes little effort to help students succeed.</td>
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<td>15. The teacher talks down to students.</td>
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<td>17. Students often share their personal experiences during class.</td>
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<td>18. Students often discuss things not related to course content.</td>
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<td>19. Activities not related to course objectives are kept to a minimum.</td>
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<td>20. Most students look forward to the class.</td>
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<td>21. Most students in the class pay attention to what the teacher is saying.</td>
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<td>22. The class is well organized.</td>
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<td>23. The teacher encourages students to do their best.</td>
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<td>24. Students do a lot of work in class.</td>
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<td>25. A few students dominate the discussions in the class.</td>
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<td>26. The class lacks a clear sense of direction.</td>
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<td>27. The subject matter is adequately covered.</td>
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<td>28. The teacher sticks to the lesson plan regardless of student interest.</td>
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<td>29. Most students take part in class discussions.</td>
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<td>30. Students do not know what is expected of them.</td>
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<td>31. The students in the class learn little from one another.</td>
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<td>32. Most students in the class achieve their personal learning goals.</td>
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<td>33. The students in the class enjoy working together.</td>
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<td>34. The teacher cares about students’ feelings.</td>
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<td>35. The teacher tries to find out what individual students want to learn.</td>
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<td>36. Getting work done is very important in the class.</td>
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<td>37. Students participate in setting course objectives.</td>
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<td>38. The class is more a social hour than a place to learn.</td>
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<td>39. The teacher rarely dominates classroom discussion.</td>
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<td>40. The teacher respects students as individuals.</td>
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<td>41. Learning activities follow a logical sequence.</td>
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<td>42. Students seldom interact with one another during class.</td>
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<td>43. Students have the opportunity to learn at their own pace.</td>
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<td>44. The student likes the students in the class.</td>
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<td>45. Students in the class feel free to disagree with one another.</td>
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<td>46. Friendships have developed in the class.</td>
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<td>47. Students feel free to question course requirements.</td>
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<tr>
<td>48. The teacher cares whether or not the students learn.</td>
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<td>49. The teacher seldom insists that you do things his/her way.</td>
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<td>50. I enjoy the class.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>51. I am learning a lot from this class.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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</table>

1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= agree, 4= strongly agree

ADULT CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT SCALE FACTORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTORS</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>MEAN</th>
<th>POSSIBLE MINIMUM</th>
<th>POSSIBLE MAXIMUM</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Affiliation</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Teacher Support</td>
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<td>3. Task Orientation</td>
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<td>4. Personal Goal Attainment</td>
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<td>5. Organization</td>
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<td>6. Student Influence</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Involvement</td>
<td>____/7</td>
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</table>

1. Involvement (extent students are satisfied with class and participate actively)
2. Affiliation (extent students like and interact positively with each other)
3. Teacher support (extent of help, encouragement, concern and friendship of educator directs toward students)
4. Task orientation (extent students and educators maintain focus on task and value achievement)
5. Personal goal attainment (extent educator is flexible, providing students with the opportunities to pursue individual interests)
6. Organization and clarity (extent class activities are clear and well organized)
7. Student influence (extent the educator is learner-centered and allows students to participate in course planning decisions).
It's the first day of class. They shuffle in, spot similar life-forms, and slip in with that group. Hipsters sporting wild hair and tats, buttoned-up and serious young scholars, middle-aged moms and dads, maybe a couple of aging hippies. One or two sad souls choose spots isolated from the others; they don't want to identify with them for reasons of insecurity, arrogance, or something else.

Every good teacher knows that learning doesn't happen in isolation. Creating a learning community gives students a sense of security, study pals, and somebody to double-check with about assignments. While once upon a time classrooms were largely homogenous, filled with young white males who shared many of the same real-life experiences, these days most classrooms can, at first glance, seem to be a wild cacophony of humanity, tender and tough, curious and hostile, open-minded and most definitely, absolutely closed.

Here's the question: How do you get them to connect? How do you get them to feel safe enough to express ideas in front of such a varied group, listen to one another's ideas, engage in authentic dialogue, and push their own academic, social, and personal limits in order to grow?

From the moment the class passed the threshold, I feared this was one pot of stew that was never going to mingle flavors. It wasn't just that there were a number of different “types,” it was that already, 43 seconds into class, an invisible but palpable distrust was rumbling just below the pitch of human hearing. However, it was not below the pitch of teacher hearing, and it filled me with fear. I had Goths and girly-girls, straight-shooters and loose cannons, bookworms, and back-row mutterers. I had a guy proudly sporting a spaghetti stained chef’s hat, and another proudly displaying a bald and vibrantly tattooed skull, and they were glaring at each other.

I opened my mouth to say, “Class dismissed.” Fortunately, my inner administrator reminded me that if I dismissed them before the first class had even started, I would lose my job. My mouth has a mind of its own (often not a good thing) and instead, I said, “Let’s dump the desks.”

“Huh?” the class sang in unison. A good sign. Unison.

“Shove them out of the way and make two circles facing each other.”

“Huh?” they sang again.
“You with the gorgeously tattooed skull, you’re in charge. Make them do it!”

He glared. They scrambled. It was done.

The circles formed, the inner circle facing the outer one. They looked almost ready for some spontaneous folk-dancing.

“Inner circle: You’ve got one minute to pry out as much interesting information from the person you are facing as you possibly can. Skip the boring stuff parents ask their kids’ dates. Ask what they’re afraid of, if they’ve ever been lost, or what makes them laugh hysterically.”

“Ummm,” a girlie-girl trilled, “Like, what are we supposed to be doing?”

“You are speed dating,” I said. She perked up immediately, as did several of the older returning students who probably hadn’t dated in a while. “When I flick the lights, everyone absolutely stop talking—even if you’re in the middle of a word. When I flick them again, outer circle has one minute to ask questions. After your two minutes are up, inner circle steps to the left, outer circle stays put, and do it again. Go!”

“Are you crazy?” my inner administrator said. I didn’t bother to answer. The room became a concert hall filled with glorious word-music—murmurs and mutters, giggles and snorts, the rapid gallop of syllables leaping atop one another, all rising to a beautiful crescendo…

I flicked the lights.

Silence.

I flicked again.

Words. Conversations. Eye contact. Here and there, a hand reached out to touch a shoulder, mouths slipped from crescent-moon grins to open laughter.

And thus it went. Round and round the room they probed and questioned and probably overstepped bounds, but nobody complained so I let them be. When everybody had finally met everyone else and it was time to sit down, I saw several students grab their bags and books and slip next to someone from a completely different group. We reviewed policies and talked about my grading system, and they actually listened. But that wasn’t the best part. The best part was when the chef-hat guy and the tattooed skull guy left class together, their charmingly ridiculous heads tipped, chuckling over who-knows-what.

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Ideas for Group Activities

http://www.cte.cornell.edu/teaching-ideas/engaging-students/collaborative-learning.html

Stump your partner
- Students take a minute to create a challenging question based on the lecture content up to that point.
- Students pose the question to the person sitting next to them.
- To take this activity a step further, ask students to write down their questions and hand them in. These questions can be used to create tests or exams. They can also be reviewed to gauge student understanding.

Think-pair-share/ Write-pair-share
- The instructor poses a question that demands analysis, evaluation, or synthesis.
- Students take a few minutes to think through an appropriate response.
- Students turn to a partner (or small groups) and share their responses. Take this a step further by asking students to find someone who arrived at an answer different from their own and convince their partner to change their mind.
- Student responses are shared within larger teams or with the entire class during a follow-up discussion.

Catch-up
- Stop at a transition point in your lecture.
- Have students turn to a partner or work in small groups to compare notes and ask clarifying questions.
- After a few minutes, open the floor to a few questions.

Fishbowl debate
- Ask students to sit in groups of three.
- Assign roles. For example, the person on left takes one position on a topic for debate, the person on right takes the opposite position, and the person in the middle takes notes and decides which side is the most convincing and provides an argument for his or her choice.
- Debrief by calling on a few groups to summarize their discussions.

Case study
- Create four to five case studies of similar difficulty.
- Have students work in groups of four or five to work through and analyze their case study.
- Provide 10-15 minutes (or adequate time to work through the cases).
- Walk around and address any questions.
• Call on groups randomly and ask that students share their analysis. Continue until each case study has been addressed.

Team-based learning (adapted from L.K. Michaelsen in Davis, 2009. p.215)
• Start a course unit by giving students some tasks to complete, such as reading or lab assignments. Consider assigning these to be completed before class.
• Check students’ comprehension of the material with a quick multiple-choice quiz. Have students submit their answers.
• Assign students to groups and have them review their answers with group members to reach consensus. Have each group submit one answered quiz.
• Record both the individual student assessment scores and the final group assessment score (both of which are used toward each student's course grade).
• Deliver a lecture that specially targets any misconceptions or gaps in knowledge the assessments reveal.
• Give groups a challenging assignment, such as solving a problem or applying a theory to a real world situation.
• For more information on this strategy at teambasedlearning.org.

Group problem solving
There are many instructional strategies that involve students working together to solve a problem, including inquiry based learning, authentic learning, and discovery learning. While they each have their own unique characteristics, they all fundamentally involve:

• Presenting students with a problem.
• Providing some structure or guidance toward solving the problem. Note, however, that they are all student-centered activities in which the instructor may have a very minimal role.
• Reaching a final outcome or solution.

More Ideas for Group Activities
http://www.calstatela.edu/dept/chem/chem2/Active/main.htm
1. **Cooperative Groups in Class** - Pose
   a question to be worked on in each cooperative group and then circulate around the room answering questions, asking further questions, keeping the groups on task, and so forth. After an appropriate time for group discussion, students are asked to share their discussion points with the rest of the class. (The ensuing discussion can be guided according to the "Questions and Answers" techniques outlined above.)

2. **Active Review Sessions** - In the traditional class review session the students ask questions and the instructor answers them. Students spend their time copying down answers rather than thinking about the material. In an active review session, the instructor
posses questions and the students work on them in groups. Then students are asked to show their solutions to the whole group and discuss any differences among solutions proposed.

3. **Work at the Blackboard** - In many problem solving courses (e.g., logic or critical thinking), instructors tend to review homework or teach problem solving techniques by solving the problems themselves. Because students learn more by doing, rather than watching, this is probably not the optimal scenario. Rather than illustrating problem solving, have students work out the problems themselves, by asking them to go to the blackboard in small groups to solve problems. If there is insufficient blackboard space, students can still work out problems as a group, using paper and pencil or computers if appropriate software is available.

4. **Concept Mapping** - A concept map is a way of illustrating the connections that exist between terms or concepts covered in course material; students construct concept maps by connecting individual terms by lines which indicate the relationship between each set of connected terms. Most of the terms in a concept map have multiple connections. Developing a concept map requires the students to identify and organize information and to establish meaningful relationships between the pieces of information.

5. **Visual Lists** - Here students are asked to make a list--on paper or on the blackboard; by working in groups, students typically can generate more comprehensive lists than they might if working alone. This method is particularly effective when students are asked to compare views or to list pros and cons of a position. One technique which works well with such comparisons is to have students draw a "T" and to label the left- and right-hand sides of the cross bar with the opposing positions (or 'Pro' and 'Con'). They then list everything they can think of which supports these positions on the relevant side of the vertical line. Once they have generated as thorough a list as they can, ask them to analyze the lists with questions appropriate to the exercise. For example, when discussing Utilitarianism (a theory which claims that an action is morally right whenever it results in more benefits than harms) students can use the "T" method to list all of the (potential) benefits and harms of an action, and then discuss which side is more heavily "weighted". Often having the list before them helps to determine the ultimate utility of the action, and the requirement to fill in the "T" generally results in a more thorough accounting of the consequences of the action in question. In science classes this would work well with such topics as massive vaccination.
programs, nuclear power, eliminating chlorofluorocarbons, reducing carbon
dioxide emissions, and so forth.

6. **Jigsaw Group Projects** - In jigsaw
projects, each member of a group is asked to complete some discrete part
of an assignment; when every member has completed his assigned task, the
pieces can be joined together to form a finished project. For example,
students in a course in African geography might be grouped and each assigned
a country; individual students in the group could then be assigned to research
the economy, political structure, ethnic makeup, terrain and climate, or
folklore of the assigned country. When each student has completed his research,
the group then reform to complete a comprehensive report. In a chemistry
course each student group could research a different form of power generation
(nuclear, fossil fuel, hydroelectric, etc.). Then the groups are reform
so that each group has an expert in one form of power generation. They
then tackle the difficult problem of how much emphasis should be placed
on each method.

7. **Role Playing** - Here students
are asked to "act out" a part. In doing so, they get a better idea of the
concepts and theories being discussed. Role-playing exercises can range
from the simple (e.g., "What would you do if a Nazi came to your door,
and you were hiding a Jewish family in the attic?") to the complex. Complex
role playing might take the form of a play (depending on time and resources);
for example, students studying ancient philosophy might be asked to recreate
the trial of Socrates. Using various sources (e.g., Plato's dialogues,
Stone's *The Trial of Socrates*, and Aristophanes' *The Clouds*),
student teams can prepare the prosecution and defense of Socrates on the
charges of corruption of youth and treason; each team may present witnesses
(limited to characters which appear in the Dialogues, for instance) to
construct their case, and prepare questions for cross-examination.

8. **Panel Discussions** - Panel discussions
are especially useful when students are asked to give class presentations
or reports as a way of including the entire class in the presentation.
Student groups are assigned a topic to research and asked to prepare presentations
(note that this may readily be combined with the jigsaw method outlined
above). Each panelist is then expected to make a very short presentation,
before the floor is opened to questions from "the audience". The key to
success is to choose topics carefully and to give students sufficient direction
to ensure that they are well-prepared for their presentations. You might
also want to prepare the "audience", by assigning them various roles. For
example, if students are presenting the results of their research into
several forms of energy, you might have some of the other students, role
play as concerned environmentalists, transportation officials, commuters, and so forth.

9. **Debates** - Actually a variation of #27, formal debates provide an efficient structure for class presentations when the subject matter easily divides into opposing views or multiple considerations. Students are assigned to debate teams, given a position to defend, and then asked to present arguments in support of their position on the presentation day. The opposing team should be given an opportunity to rebut the argument(s) and, time permitting, the original presenters asked to respond to the rebuttal. This format is particularly useful in developing argumentation skills (in addition to teaching content).

10. **Games** - Many will scoff at the idea that one would literally play games in a university setting, but occasionally there is no better instructional tool. In particular, there are some concepts or theories which are more easily illustrated than discussed and in these cases, a well-conceived game may convey the idea more readily. For example, when students are introduced to the concepts of "laws of nature" and "the scientific method", it is hard to convey through lectures the nature of scientific work and the fallibility of inductive hypotheses. Instead, students play a couple rounds of the Induction Game, in which playing cards are turned up and either added to a running series or discarded according to the dealer as pre-conceived "law of nature". Students are asked to "discover" the natural law, by formulating and testing hypotheses as the game proceeds.

**Activities for large classes**
https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/educational-technologies/all/activities-large-classes

**Questions**
Questions are the simplest form of interactive teaching tool, particularly in large classes, and are useful in any discipline. They can help promote active learning and gauge students’ level of interest and comprehension. Ask questions from the first day of class to set a precedent; you will have a much better participation level than if you try to change your routine midway through the term.

- Develop key questions before class (they won’t occur to you on the spot – this also allows you to plan your time).

- Decide when you’re going to ask them. During lectures, ask questions early on to stimulate interest and gauge students’ level of knowledge; in the middle, to break the pace of the lecture; and/or at the end, to review main ideas and gather ideas for future classes.

- Ask questions that can be answered, but favour ones with complex answers.
Vary the form of questions: those that gauge knowledge, require diagnosis or explanation, or challenge conclusions.

Ask only one question at a time.

Pause between asking and accepting replies (pausing gives students a chance to think of an answer, and by not asking the first person who raises his/her hand, you encourage quieter students to participate).

Acknowledge all answers – repeat so the class can hear and/or write them on the board (this also helps to show you understood the answer).

Move around the room – avoid focusing exclusively on the respondent.

**Brainstorming**

Brainstorming can be simple and useful in all disciplines but it must be used appropriately to be effective. Choose a strategic point in your class for brainstorming: for example, when beginning a new topic or at the end of a lecture as review. Use students’ input to decide on sub-topics to focus on during your class, to identify possible lines of questioning, and to assess students’ level of comprehension and interest in your topic.

Decide exactly how much time you’ll allot to the brainstorming, and enforce it.

Present students with a question or issue that you want their ideas on: emphasize quantity over quality. For large classes you should use a prompt that asks for tentative responses rather than declarative statements. For example, “tell me what you know, have heard, or have read about this topic.” This allows your students to offer responses without having to fear being “wrong”.

Use a few minutes of silence for students to write down their ideas before hearing them.

Accept students’ input and organize it into logical groupings, if relevant.

Apply only two rules: acknowledge every offering by writing it down and don’t allow judgements of any idea until brainstorming is over (this includes your judgements!).

**Quescussion**

Quescussion, as the name indicates, combines questions and discussion into one activity. The professor asks a question or makes a statement to the class (this question should be written on the blackboard or overhead projector). There are four basic rules when responding to this prompt:

- Discussion has to be in question form (No statements!)

- A person may speak only every nth time.

- No fake questions (i.e., a statement disguised as a question. For example, "small classes are better than large ones, aren't they?").
• No ad hominems: an attack on someone else (i.e., "a person would be crazy if they thought that, wouldn't they?" - this is also a disguised statement).

By following these four rules, the quescussion can occur effectively. All questions are recorded, grouped, and used to determine students’ exposure to and understanding of a specific topic. It can also be used to determine topics to cover in each lecture. By framing the discussion into questions, students feel less intimidated to speak in front of the large class. As well, the questions are tentative (impossibly wrong) responses rather than declarative (possibly wrong) responses. The rule of speaking every n times (for example, 3 or 4) generates a variety of voices and allows for reflection while waiting for a turn to speak.

Debate
A debate is a good way to encourage class participation in large groups without losing control, and they can work in any discipline – not just the social sciences. They can emerge spontaneously from classroom material but are best used with planning.

• The first step is to describe the background context, and explain why you are having a debate.

• Then decide on the two (or more) sides to the debate and physically group the class according to points of view. For example, the people sitting on the right-hand side of the room are for a concept, while the people on the left-hand side are against it.

• For large groups, you should have speakers raise their hands while you moderate. The debate will probably start slowly at first, but the intensity will pick up.

• You, as moderator, can ask provocative questions, but don’t express judgement on any point of view (at least not until afterwards!).

• After 10 to 15 minutes of debating, end the debate and reflect on what was said.

• You can use ideas and conflicts from the debate to lead into your lecture, review lecture concepts to end the class, or make a segue to your next class.

Think-pair-share
This is a good ice-breaking technique for early in the term. It’s also an easy way to make large classes interactive and encourages more students to participate than regular question strategies. Use the offerings of students after think-pair sharing to lead into a lecture or discussion of class material.

• Pose a question or problem to entire class: answerable but complex.

• Give students one to three minutes to think about it individually then divide students into pairs.

• Have them discuss their answers with each other for two to three minutes.

• Invite students to share responses with entire class: those whose ideas have been challenged, reinforced, or refined will probably volunteer.
One-sentence summary
This is one possible ungraded written in-class activity. This exercise not only enhances comprehension, but also writing skills, and can provide you with valuable written feedback. Used at the end of the class, the one-sentence summary can be a good review of material just covered. At the beginning of the class, it can review material covered previously and serve as a starting point for the lecture of the day. The one-sentence summary can also be used in its own right to enhance general writing ability.

- Objective is for students to state the major point of an entire lecture or section in a limited amount of writing.
- Select a recent issue covered in class, in relation to that issue, answer the following questions as quickly as possible in front of your students: “who did what to whom, when, where, how, and why?” and turn your answer into a grammatical sentence.
- Announce another, similar topic to your students and give them five minutes or so to produce their own one-sentence summaries.
- Collect these to determine if students recognized the key points of the lecture. One optional extension is to have students swap with the person next to them – have a few minutes’ silence for reading and formulation of comments, then a few minutes of discussion in pairs before discussing the summaries as a class.

One-minute paper
This shows students that they can write quickly and spontaneously, and enhances general writing ability. Like a one-sentence summary (and the ungraded quiz that will be discussed next), a one-minute paper can provide you with a source of candid feedback on course material and your presentation style. It can also encourage students to think about the key concepts discussed during this class. You can assign one-minute papers at the end of a class to gauge comprehension, provide general writing practice, and give students an incentive to absorb and comprehend course material. Consider using the content of one-minute papers to plan content of upcoming classes: when students see that the instructor responds to their concerns, they will be motivated to participate in future classes.

- Give a prompt for the paper such as “what was the most important concept of this lecture and what was the muddiest point of this lecture?”
- Give students one or two minutes to think about the topic without writing anything.
- Give students one minute (or another short period of time) to write all they can.
- Collect papers (depending on the class atmosphere, you may ask students to put their names on them or keep them anonymous).
- You can also use this exercise as a measure of participation or as a short assignment and assign a grade to each.

Ungraded quiz
An ungraded quiz encourages students to pay attention during lectures by presenting them with a short-term, non-threatening learning objective. It can be done very quickly, and also provides you with a source of candid feedback on students’ knowledge level.

Use ungraded quizzes at the beginning of a lecture to determine the level of knowledge, or at the end of a lecture as a review and incentive for students to retain and comprehend information. Alternatively, use an ungraded quiz at the end of a lecture to gauge how successful you’ve been in teaching the material.

- Write question(s) on the board, overhead, or handout.
- Give students five to ten minutes to respond on a blank sheet of paper (depending on the atmosphere in the class, you may keep the quiz anonymous or ask students to put their names on papers).
- Collect papers and report on responses next time the class meets. One variation: prepare multiple-choice answer options and present each one in turn, asking for a show of hands. Another variation: before (or instead of) collecting quiz papers, have students exchange and “grade” each other’s quiz papers based on the answers you present. This grading is to allow students to gauge their understanding and should not be used as a formal assessment.

**Student liaison committee (“Ombuddies”)**

“Ombuddies” or the student liaison committee can be an excellent way of getting feedback from large classes in particular. With this tool, a group of student volunteers act as a liaison between you and the class. The group can meet independently on a regular basis and then periodically meet with you to provide you with the feedback they have gleaned from their classmates. Or, this can be less formal, with the students simply reporting to you questions or concerns as they arise. The class should always know who the volunteers are and should receive regular reports from the “ombuddies” and/or you.

There are two components that make this activity work:

- Provide the volunteers with some guidance about how to function as a committee and how to solicit and collect feedback from their peers.
- Students should know one another. Ombuddies should be used in highly structured programs or upper-year classes where students are going to be familiar with each other. If a student is reluctant to talk to you about an issue, they will most likely be apprehensive about talking to a fellow student who is a total stranger.

**Suggestion box**

This tool could involve bringing a suggestion box to your classroom every class or hanging an envelope on your office door. Students can use this method to provide you with anonymous suggestions regarding your teaching or the course in general.

- Be sure to tell students about what types of suggestions you would like: the more open you are, the more unfocussed the suggestions will be.
- Scan the suggestions regularly to put them into context, summarize them for the class, and indicate which ones you will act on and why.
Keep in mind that students who write their suggestions by hand may not be totally honest since you may recognize their writing. Encourage students to submit typed suggestions if they are concerned.

**Blank index cards**
Similar to the one-minute paper, blank index cards enable you to gather a small amount of feedback quickly and easily.

- Students respond to two questions that you pose, answering one question per card side.
- Questions could be very general (i.e., What do you want more of? Less of?) or more specific (i.e., Are the problem sets too difficult?).
- Allow students one to two minutes to jot down their ideas. With any more time, they may become frustrated with the limited paper space.
- Collect students’ responses and answer any questions they have during the next lecture.

**A Classroom Icebreaker with a Lesson that Lasts**
By: **Virginia Freed**  FACULTY FOCUS  FEBRUARY 23, 2010

I bring a box to the first day of class — especially if it’s a course with beginning students. At precisely the time class starts, I walk into the room with my box filled with random, quirky objects. I like to include a small Alf doll, a pad of Post-its, some scissors, perhaps a can of Slim-Fast, a candle, a rock, a comb, and maybe six or seven other objects indiscriminately gathered as I leave for class. As soon as I enter the room, I put the box on the table; take each article out; place it on the table; and finally, when all of them are out, return them to the box. Then I ask the students to take out a piece of paper and write down as many of the items as they can remember.

Interesting things begin to happen here, and I can make some immediate points about classroom expectations. Students sitting in the back of the room have not been able to see the items on the table. The point? Sit as close to the front of the room as possible. Some students have been engaged in conversations and did not see me or the box. The point? Pay attention right from the beginning of the class; professors often offer the most interesting and important information at the beginning and ending of class. Some students come in late. The point? Arrive on time. Some students don’t have anything to write with or on. The point? Come prepared. We discuss all this with humor, but the inferences are clear.
Now that I have everyone’s attention, I repeat the process, slowly taking each item out one by one, placing it on the table, then returning them all to the box and asking students to list as many as they can remember. As expected, everyone lists more the second time around. The obvious advantage of paying attention is illustrated. We notice that the most frequently remembered items are those that came out first and last, so we talk about the advantages of studying in shorter stints rather than in marathon sessions. Before proceeding, they determine how many items are in the box by sharing their lists with each other and pooling the items.

When the exercise is repeated yet again, everyone gets even more of the items. This time we talk about each item as it is taken out and put back. This, too, aids their ability to recall, because using another of the five senses is an important technique for remembering the contents. Through this process we note similarities to learning any kind of content: simple repetition helps; verbalizing material they are trying to master helps; noting the total range of material helps when they are learning it in smaller chunks; talking about it with others helps. All this is, of course, fundamentally obvious, but isn’t the obvious what we often miss?

The assignment for the next class is to find a way to remember all of the box’s contents. Foolish? Unrelated to actual course content? Maybe, maybe not. To many students, the material they are required to learn for basic psychology or biology or history can seem as disconnected and random as the items in the box, and yet they must find ways to place it in a context, make it relevant, and retain it. When they come to the second class, many have somehow managed to remember the 15 or so items. And all have improved their recall from the first class.

We discuss their methods for mastering the contents. Some have grouped them alphabetically; some, by color; some, by use, e.g., grooming items, desk items, toy items; and some have created a narrative. The number of approaches they devise is always astonishing, and they love to share and hear how everyone else has accomplished the task. They capture so much from these discussions that at any point during the semester I can ask, “Anyone still able to list all the items in the box?” and most can. So, yes, this is an excellent first-day-of-class icebreaker: it clearly gives everyone in the room a common focus in a nonthreatening way. Its benefits, however, go way beyond that to real conversations about how to learn in this new, strange academic environment.

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