



Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATS) are designed to allow the classroom instructor to find out in a relatively short time what students are learning and to use that information to make changes in the delivery method used or in the assignments required. According to Angelo and Cross (1993), a CAT has the following characteristics:

(1) It is learner-centered. Classroom assessment should allow the instructor to focus on gathering information from observation and using that information to improve student learning, rather than on observing and improving the instructor's teaching.

(2) It is teacher-directed. A CAT that is chosen by the instructor will be used by that instructor in a specific context. Therefore, the "individual teacher decides what to assess, how to assess, and how to respond to the information gained through the assessment" (Angelo and Cross 1993, 4). This information can be used only by the instructor and need not be shared with anyone else.

(3) It should be mutually beneficial to both students and instructor. Angelo and Cross (1993) believe that "because it is focused on learning, Classroom Assessment requires the active participation of students. By cooperating in assessment, students reinforce their grasp of the course content and strengthen their own skills at self-assessment. Their motivation is increased when they realize that faculty are interested and invested in their success as learners" (pp. 4-5). An instructor can also improve teaching by asking these three questions: What are the essential skills and knowledge I am trying to teach? How can I find out whether students are learning them? How can I help students learn better? As teachers gather information from students and answer these questions, they improve their teaching and better understand the learning process.

(4) It is formative in nature. The purpose of using classroom assessment techniques is to improve student learning - not to grade student's work. It is extremely important to remember that assessment is not about comparing student work to understand who understands the material and who does not. Assessment should focus the instructor on finding out how to improve activities so that all students (or at least most of the students) have a better learning experience.

(5) It is context-specific. Classroom assessments are designed to address the specific needs of a specific class. In addition, the personality, methodology, and time available will all have some impact on the CAT that is chosen and how much information is given. Angelo and Cross (1993) state that "what works well in one class will not necessarily work in another" (p.5).

(6) It should be ongoing. Classroom assessments should be an ongoing process that informs the instructor of how the class is going on a regular basis. This "feedback loop" is essential in assessment. Instructors who use a variety of CATS over time and use that feedback to make appropriate changes will find that students begin to participate more actively in the assessment process and in the class. After the first assessment and implementation of feedback, the instructor can use the same (or different) assessment again to check on the efficacy of the new/revised activity. Thus continuing the feedback loop.

(7) It is rooted in good teaching practices. Using a classroom assessment technique and, even better, a series of CATS, simply involves what good instructors are already doing. "Teachers ask questions, react to students' questions, monitor body language and facial expressions, read homework and tests, and so on. Classroom assessment provides a way to integrate assessment systematically and seamlessly into the traditional classroom teaching and learning process" (Angelo and Cross 1993, p.6). In order to use a CAT, it is best to start with one simple technique and then follow up on that feedback with another. In other words, start simple! Angelo and Cross (1993) suggest using these three steps in the process.

Step 1 Planning - Select one, and only one, of your classes in which to try out the classroom assessment. Decide on the class meeting and select a Classroom Assessment Technique. Choose a simple and quick one.

Step 2 Implementing - Make sure the students know what you are doing and that they clearly understand the procedure. Collect the (usually anonymous) responses and analyze them as soon as possible.

Step 3 Responding - Make sure that your students know what type of information you received and how you will use that information. This can be done in an informal way: "About half of you seems confused by this point and another third by this point. Let's talk about these two points."

Angelo, T.A., and Cross, P.K. 1993. Classroom assessment techniques, 2nd ed. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass