

# Mid-semester evaluations

## WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

A stepwise procedure for implementing mid-semester surveys of students directed toward the improvement of a course, plus some tips on survey question creation.

## HOW DO I USE IT?

To implement mid-semester surveys in your course, follow the steps provided. Review the tips for writing questions that produce actionable responses. For assistance, please [contact CET](http://cet.usc.edu/).

A mid-semester course evaluation is a short survey administered to students during weeks 4-7 of the semester to elicit their feedback on actionable focus areas that would improve the course. These anonymous evaluations may be deployed during or outside of class time, on paper or online.

### Importance

* Soliciting mid-semester feedback from students allows instructors to hear student concerns while there is still time in the semester to make appropriate changes.
* It also enables instructors to get targeted feedback on new teaching strategies and new courses.
* Students in courses where the instructor solicits midterm feedback and discusses the feedback with students indicate higher satisfaction on their end of term evaluations (McGowan and Osguthorpe, 2011).
* Seeking mid-semester feedback demonstrates that instructors are committed to enriching students' learning experiences.

### Characteristics

Mid-semester course evaluations are unique surveys in that they have the following characteristics.

* Confidential
* Formative
* Focused
* Brief
* Actionable
* Early

### Facilitation Process

#### Pre

* Instructor writes/chooses 3-5 questions
* Instructor plans incentives (e.g., minimal points awarded, class time given, some degree of change promised)
* Instructor introduces process and purpose

#### During

* Instructor distributes survey (e.g., paper, Blackboard, Google, Qualtrics, SurveyMonkey)
* Students complete survey anonymously
* Instructor collects surveys (e.g., envelope or via same online method used for distribution)

#### Post

* Instructor analyzes surveys (i.e., trends, multiple students with similar response)
* Instructor implements incentives
* Instructor debriefs findings and response (e.g., integrate results into class discussion or activity, call attention to changes implemented as a result, explain why some changes not made)

### Question design tips

* Select 3-5 focus areas, such as those below, on which you would like student feedback.
  + Course materials
  + Course organization
  + Time management
  + Communication/clarity
  + Classroom management
  + Subject matter and instruction
  + Grading and assessment
  + Learning environment
* Craft specific, actionable questions that you could truly do something about halfway through a course (i.e., imagine the student responses you may receive to your question and if/how you would be able to make changes mid-semester based on that feedback).
* Avoid questions that generate personal feelings like satisfaction, or those that cannot be acted on mid-semester (e.g., asking about effort students put into the course, if they like the course).
* Provide Likert-scale answer options.
* End the evaluation with an open-ended question soliciting any other suggestions for improving the course.

### Tips to encourage completion

Instructors can motivate students to provide feedback on the course by explaining how they will use the feedback and by giving them direct instruction on how to give feedback (e.g. telling students how to access the evaluations and directing them toward any specific topic you seek feedback on). High response rates are strongly related to the importance instructors place on student feedback. The following are specific strategies to increase response rates:

* Talk about the importance of student feedback.
* Give ample notice of when evaluation responses are due and give students ample time to complete evaluations.
* Give explicit directions on how students can access and complete the evaluations.
* Explain to students that you are interested in both positive and constructive feedback.
* Tell your students that you use student evaluation feedback to modify the course when appropriate.
* Remind students that evaluations are anonymous.

### Sample open-ended and Likert-scale questions

These are mid-semester evaluation questions that you may decide to customize for your course. Select 3-5 questions that will provide course design and teaching practice feedback on a specific area for which you would like to gather data.

#### Assignments

* Did the assignments allow you to demonstrate what you learned? Why or why not?
* Did you find the assignments relevant to your studies and future? Why or why not?

#### Discussions

* How do the course discussions add \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (e.g., clarity, relevance, diverse perspectives, etc.) to your learning experience?
* What would encourage you to participate more?

#### Labs

* What suggestions do you have for making the labs in this class more productive?
* Are the lab assignments clearly explained?

#### Course strengths and challenges

* What about this course has been especially useful for you thus far? Why?
* What about this course has been the least useful? Why?
* Which idea/concepts have you found most difficult to grasp? Why do you find this idea/concept difficult?

#### Likert-scale questions

* I have the resources I need to succeed in this class.
* The activities, materials, and assessments are relevant to my educational development.
* There are diverse approaches and voices represented in the course content and teaching.
* The instructor encourages student questions and participation.
* The feedback I receive from my instructor/my TA is helpful in improving my work.
* The instructions for completing assignments are clear.
* The course (or section) provided an appropriate balance between instruction and practice.

Sample wording for syllabus or LMS

Consider including language in your syllabus that a mid-semester evaluation will be distributed. This reminds students to be mindful of their learning experiences and prepared to respond to mid-semester evaluations. Sample verbiage around mid-semester evaluations that instructors may modify and include on syllabi or post in the learning management system is shown below:

* At the midpoint of this course, you will be asked to complete an evaluation. It will be a chance to reflect on what we have accomplished up to that point and to propose ways the course might be modified.
* Near the midpoint of the semester, you will be asked to complete a course evaluation. Your feedback on the course is extremely valuable to me. I read my students’ comments carefully and use them to improve the course, when appropriate.

References

Chapman, Diane D., & Joines, Jeffrey A. (2017). Strategies for Increasing Response Rates for Online End-of-Course Evaluations. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 29*(1), 47-60.

McGowan, W. R. and Osguthorpe, R. T. (2011). Student and faculty perceptions of effects of midcourse evaluations. *To Improve the Academy, 29*(1), 160-172.

Svinicki, M. D. (2001). Encouraging your students to give feedback. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning, 2001*(87), 17– 24.