



Teaching Concerns

Newsletter of the Teaching Resource Center for Faculty and Teaching Assistants

Hotel D, 24 East Range (434) 982-2815 trc-uva@virginia.edu <http://www.virginia.edu/~trc/>

January 1991

Teaching Idea: The One-Minute Paper

by B. Magnan

As teachers we usually know what we think our students should get out of a class session, but how often do we know how close their understanding is to our expectations? Do we have to wait for a test or final paper to find out? Similarly, do we need wait for the end of the semester to determine students' reactions to our teaching?

The one-minute paper may be used to fulfill either function: ascertaining students' understanding of a particular class and/or getting a sense of how students would rate the course. The procedure is simple: give students the last few minutes of class to write the answer(s) to one or two specific questions you choose to ask them; collect the answers and synthesize them in any way you like; respond in some way during the following class period.

If you wish to focus on student understanding, your question may be general ("What was the most important point in the lecture?") or rather specific ("Summarize two conflicting points of view about global warming."). Colleagues at UVa who have tried this feedback device have been surprised sometimes to learn that what they believed they had driven home as the central issue was not what a number of their students had perceived to be the essential point. Students know you are paying attention to them and to their needs if you then begin the next class by clarifying where necessary. You

can also give the students a certain say in their own education by asking them what they would like to learn more about. If a consensus results and if you can work from it, you know you are addressing student interests. The one-minute paper is a quick assessment tool that, with little time and little effort, can keep you in touch with your students.

You can also use a version of the one-minute paper to get a sense of how students perceive your course. At any time in the semester, ask your students to write in answer to specific questions. Depending on the course and your concerns, you might ask about organization ("How well do the discussions integrate with the reading?"), style ("How comfortable do you feel asking questions?"), clarity ("How clear was today's lecture for you?"). Students will generally respond generously and positively to a request for information that will make a course better for them, not only for the students next year. If you summarize responses for them and convey your plans for desirable changes, students will tend to find you a responsive teacher.

The few minutes of class time the one-minute paper may actually take is worthwhile because the feedback you receive is invaluable. If you have alternate types of feedback or quick assessment techniques, please let us know.

(Inspired by Frederick Mosteller, "The 'Muddiest Point in the Lecture' as a Feedback Device." *On Teaching and Learning* (April 1989), 10-21.)