

## Using Questionnaires to Gather Student Insights

### Why Use a Questionnaire?

In recent years, many faculty have developed a practice of querying students in preparation for writing midterm critique sheets and/or to better understand how their learning is progressing. The process usually involves distributing a questionnaire for students to complete in class and then (in the next class) reporting back on some of the salient points. When directed toward critique sheets, such documents set us up to be efficient and increase the likelihood that our comments will be useful to students; when used to gather insights into the students' experiences of the class, they set us up to teach better.

### With Names or Anonymous?

If the main purpose of the questionnaire is to prepare for critique sheets and midterm grades, clearly names need to be included. These questionnaires can still solicit thoughts about the class, and students tend to be honest even when their names are attached. But if the main purpose is to gather input into how students are experiencing the class and to gauge how their learning is progressing, you always have the option of an anonymous survey. Both formats have proven effective in collecting valuable information.

### A Few Tips

Asking students to complete the questionnaires in class will probably get more responses. Ten or fifteen minutes should be enough time. (If not, the questionnaire is probably too long.)

Make abundantly clear to students what the purpose is and whether they are meant to be anonymous. If you use Google Forms and want them to be anonymous, be sure to toggle off the option to capture email addresses of respondents.

In the next class, report back on the results. If you are making adjustments to the class, explain what you are changing and why. (An example from a colleague: switching the due date for a weekly reflection from Friday to Monday was a welcome change for a number of students.) Often, however, the responses set us up to frame and recommit to existing features of the course: just because students object to an aspect of the course doesn't mean we should discard it. Discussing the results of a questionnaire gives us a chance to explain why we have included a particular aspect of the course. For example, if students say they don't like working in small groups, you can acknowledge that not everyone likes working in pairs or teams and then explain why you value collaborative exercises. (You may have already explained this on day one or in the syllabus, but no matter. Hearing the explanation in week 8 will land differently.)

One question often yields important information: "Is there anything else you want me to know about how this class and this semester are going for you?" Frequently used as a concluding question, this prompt invites students to offer information that previous questions have missed. In the event that students disclose information you feel unprepared to handle or find worrisome,

you should reach out immediately to our excellent colleagues in the Dean of Students Office: [<dosa@bard.edu>](mailto:dosa@bard.edu).

### **General Course-Related Questions**

Most questionnaires fit on one or two sides of a page. Here are some questions to choose from:

- What is the most curious or interesting thing you have learned in the course thus far?
- What is the concept/topic that has been the most difficult thus far?
- What are one or two things you could do to succeed in the remainder of this course?
- In a few sentences, how would you explain what you are learning in this course?
- What are one or two things that would be most useful for me (as your instructor) to do to help you do well in the remainder of this course?
- What do you like best about this course thus far?
- What is most frustrating about this course?
- Which of these resources have you used? (Select: textbook, slides, tutor, office hrs)
- Are there other resources that you feel like would improve your class experience?
- What changes could you make to your own behavior (studying, class participation, etc.) that would improve your experience in this class?

### **Questions re. Accessibility**

As we approach midterm, please let me know how you are experiencing the in-class and out-of-class work so far:

- What's working well for you? (Please include any strategies we use to make meaning together in class and out of class)
- What, if anything, is proving to be an obstacle to your learning?
- Do you have any access needs that are not being met? (Feel free to communicate these needs to me, anonymously or not, and/or to speak with Erin Braselmann, Director of Disability and Access Services at Bard. Erin can be reached via email at [<disabilityservices@bard.edu>](mailto:disabilityservices@bard.edu)).

### **Questions re. Participation**

This short assignment, developed by Kirby Conrod at Swarthmore College, asks students to assess their class participation, and submitting it contributes to (but does not dictate) their overall participation grade. Note, too, that simply asking these questions will nudge students to be more intentional about their participation; to this end, like any rubric, it would be useful to share it with students early in the semester, even if they won't fill it out till later.

- How do you rate your participation in class discussions, group discussions, office hours, online discussions, or any other related form of activity in this class? (Rating from 1 - 10)
- What were some of the ways that you participated in the class? Please use this space to tell me ways that you shared and contributed actively to the learning environment through group work, discussion, online discussion, or any other methods.

- What were the forms of participation that were the most challenging for you? Did you try them out? If so, what didn't work for you? Please use this space to tell me ways that you did not feel able to participate or contribute actively.
- Of the types of participation that you shared above, which were most helpful to your learning? How did these ways of learning help you understand or remember material?

### Three Generative Questions

- What is going well for you in this class? Where do you find yourself leaning in and/or excited about what you are learning?
- What aspects of the course have been challenging? Where do you find yourself leaning out or otherwise less engaged in the course? Do you have any suggestions about how we might address this?
- As we enter the second half of the semester, what are some goals you have for your own learning? For example, do you aspire to participate more (or less) in class, to devote more time to your writing and reading, or to contribute differently when we do small group work? Something else?

### Pre-Crite Sheet Questionnaires

For samples of questionnaires to be used in preparation for midterm grades, [click here to open a docx file](#). These are Word files, designed to be easy to borrow from and adapt.

### Variation: The Exit Ticket

We don't need to wait till midterms to gather information, nor are we restricted to doing it just once. Here is a sample "exit ticket," which gathers information anonymously and can be used as frequently as every class or every week:

- Which class is this the exit ticket for? (Date)
- How well did you understand the material covered in class today?
- What is one thing you would like to see covered in more detail next class?
- What is one thing that you feel like you understand very well from today's class?
- Is there anything else you would like to comment on?

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*Note: This document and the attached samples are in progress. Please forward additions, including sample questionnaires, so that we can develop it further. We are grateful to Jaime Alves, Justin Dainer-Best, Greg Moynahan, and Kristin Scheible for contributing language and ideas. Questions or additions can be emailed to Phil <[pardi@bard.edu](mailto:pardi@bard.edu)>.*