

# Creating Open-Ended Questions for Student Feedback on Courses Surveys

Starting Fall 2014, you can add two open-ended questions to the Student Feedback on Courses survey for each of your courses. You may want to focus your questions on a new activity or assignment that you have added to your course, an element of the course that students often struggle with, or a particular teaching strategy.

## Good feedback practice:

- Craft open-ended questions that encourage a diversity of student responses
- Ensure questions are simple, clear and specific
- Evaluate why you are asking the question: what do you hope to learn from student responses?
- Ask a colleague (or the FCDC) to proof-read your questions
- For background information on Student Feedback on Courses, please click [here](#)

What does good quality feedback practice look like?

| <b>Simple</b>  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| Description  | Poor Example  | Stronger Example  |
| Avoid overly complicated or elaborately written questions. Use simple English and sentence structure | “Describe three aspects of the course that contributed to your learning (Canvas, field trips and guest speakers notwithstanding)”<br><i>The question is more complicated than necessary. Revise to make it more specific.</i> | “Describe three aspects of the course that contributed to your learning”; “How did the in-class discussions contribute to your learning?”             |
| <b>Open-ended</b>  |   |   |
| Description  | Poor Example  | Stronger Example  |
| Avoid questions that have yes or no answers.   | “Did this course help improve your understanding of the topic?”<br><i>Students will answer yes or no. They are unlikely to elaborate.</i>   | “Explain how this course improved your understanding of the topic”  |
| <b>Specific</b>  |   |   |
| Description  | Poor Example  | Stronger Example  |
| Rather than ask a broad question, ask about specific topics, assignments or teaching methods.        | “What part of the class did you like?”;<br>“If you could make a change in the course, what would it be?”<br><i>These questions aren’t bad, but the feedback may benefit from directing or guiding student responses</i>       | “Describe how the second print-making assignment contributes to your learning”; “How could Canvas be used more effectively to support your learning?” |
| <b>Realistic</b>   |   |   |
| Description  | Poor Example  | Stronger Example  |
| Avoid asking students questions that they do not have knowledge to comment on                        | “Elaborate on how this course furthers the institutional goals of OCAD U”<br><i>It is unlikely that students know the institutional goals of the university.</i>  | “How did this course built on the knowledge and skills of your previous OCAD U courses?”  |

| <b>Ambiguous</b>  |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| Description   | Poor Example  | Stronger Example   |
| Avoid questions or wordings that may have alternative interpretations   | "How did this course help you?"<br><i>Which part of the course? Help in what capacity? This question is far too broad.</i>  | "Which reading was the most valuable for your learning and why?"   |
| <b>Double-Barrelled</b>   |   |  |
| Description   | Poor Example  | Stronger Example   |
| Avoid questions that contain more than one idea   | "Were the readings and assessments appropriate for a second year course?"<br><i>Question asks about two different components: readings AND assignments.</i>   | "How do the readings align to the learning outcomes of the course?"*<br><i>*Challenge: Students may not know what the learning outcomes are if they have not been explicitly/repeatedly told them.</i> |
| <b>Jargon-Free</b>  |   |  |
| Description   | Poor Example  | Stronger Example   |
| Avoid questions that include jargon that may be misunderstood by students   | "How did the classroom-based activities synergize with the content of our Canvas discussions to produce a cohesive learning experience?"<br><i>"Synergize" and "cohesive" could be challenging to students.</i> | "How do the in-class activities complement the online Canvas discussions?"   |
| <b>Universal Quantifier-Free</b>  |   |  |
| Description   | Poor Example  | Stronger Example   |
| Avoid questions that employ quantifiers such as "always", "never", "every"...   | "Did this class always maintain your interest?"<br><i>It is difficult to agree with statements that ask such a firm delineation</i>   | "Which topic interested you most and why?"<br><i>*Challenge: do students need to be interested in the subject? What is the intent of this question?</i>  |
| <b>Connotation/Emotion Free</b>   |   |  |
| Description   | Poor Example  | Stronger Example   |
| Avoid questions that include words with strong (emotional) connotations   | "Did you love the field trip to the AGO?"; "Which assignment traumatized you the most?"<br><i>Students may not have strong emotions, or may feel uncomfortable by the word choice of these examples</i>         | "How did the field trip to the AGO contribute to your learning?"; "Which assignment challenged you the most and why?"  |
| <b>Negative (and Double Negative) Free</b>  |   |  |
| Description   | Poor Example  | Stronger Example   |
| Avoid questions that include negatives and double-negatives. These questions are easily misinterpreted and can produce false results. | "Were you ever not challenged by the subject we were discussing?"<br><i>These questions are grammatically and logistically difficult to interpret.</i>  | "Which topic was the most challenging for you to learn and why?"   |
| <b>Leading</b>  |   |  |
| Description   | Poor Example  | Stronger Example   |
| Avoid questions that cue the students to give a particular  | "How would you describe the excellent teaching of this award winning  | "Discuss the faculty member's teaching strengths"; "How can  |

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| ("right") answer   | artist/faculty member?"<br><i>There are several leading words: "excellent" and "award winning" suggests students should praise this faculty member</i>             | the faculty member increase student engagement?"          |
| <b>Future Oriented</b>   |  |   |
| Description  | Poor Example   | Stronger Example  |
| Avoid questions that require students to speculate about future events | "How does this course prepare you for a career post-graduation?"<br><i>Students cannot know what they require for future courses or careers with any certainty</i> | "What skills and knowledge did you learn in this course?" |

### References

- Borgatti, Stephen P. (1996). [Principles of Questionnaire Construction](#). Access Oct 23, 2014
- Kwan, Kam-Por (1999). Developing a feedback questionnaire: Principles and steps. Accessed Oct 22, 2014