



Faculty and Curriculum Development Centre

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Creating open-ended questions for student feedback on courses surveys

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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?

Simple		
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)” <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?”
Open-ended		
Description	Poor Example	Stronger Example
Avoid questions that have yes or no answers.	“Did this course help improve your understanding of the topic?” <i>Students will answer yes or no. They are unlikely to elaborate.</i>	“Explain how this course improved your understanding of the topic”
Specific		
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?”; “If you could make a change in the course, what would it be?” <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?”
Realistic		
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” <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?”

Ambiguous		
Description	Poor Example	Stronger Example
Avoid questions or wordings that may have alternative interpretations	“How did this course help you?” <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?”
Double-Barrelled		
Description	Poor Example	Stronger Example
Avoid questions that contain more than one idea	“Were the readings and assessments appropriate for a second year course?” <i>Question asks about two different components: readings AND assignments.</i>	“How do the readings align to the learning outcomes of the course?”* <i>*Challenge: Students may not know what the learning outcomes are if they have not been explicitly/repeatedly told them.</i>
Jargon-Free		
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?” <i>“Synergize” and “cohesive” could be challenging to students.</i>	“How do the in-class activities complement the online Canvas discussions?”
Universal Quantifier-Free		
Description	Poor Example	Stronger Example
Avoid questions that employ quantifiers such as “always”, “never”, “every”...	“Did this class always maintain your interest?” <i>It is difficult to agree with statements that ask such a firm delineation</i>	“Which topic interested you most and why?” <i>*Challenge: do students need to be interested in the subject? What is the intent of this question?</i>
Connotation/Emotion Free		
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?” <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?”
Negative (and Double Negative) Free		
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?” <i>These questions are grammatically and logistically difficult to interpret.</i>	“Which topic was the most challenging for you to learn and why?”
Leading		
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

("right") answer	artist/faculty member?" <i>There are several leading words: "excellent" and "award winning" suggests students should praise this faculty member</i>	the faculty member increase student engagement?"
Future Oriented		
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?" <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