

Classroom Assessment Techniques: Minute Papers

What is a Minute Paper?

A minute paper is a short informal writing assignment that typically occurs at the end of a lecture. Minute papers are one of the most commonly utilized assessment methods in large lectures as they are straightforward, require relatively little time, and can be assessed easily.

Minute papers can be used to assess whether students have grasped the key idea(s) presented during lecture. The papers may focus specifically on an important concept that students should understand but more commonly take the form of the response to the general question such as "What is the most important thing we discussed today?" The latter question challenges students to evaluate the lecture material and allows the instructor to identify whether students can discriminate between critical and routine information.

How to use Minute Papers

- 1. Present the topic.** Ask a specific question that involves a key concept from lecture or use a general question such as "What is the most important thing we discussed today?"
- 2. Student reflection.** Either have students work individually or divide the class into informal groups and give them up to few minutes to consider their answer to the question. Groups of two or three students work best.
- 3. Writing.** Have each group appoint a reporter and have them write a few sentences to answer the question. Collect the writing assignments for later review. Give one minute only for writing. Students should be encouraged to explain a single concept. It is best not to include student names on the assignments.
- 4. Assessment of content of minute papers.** It is important to review the minute papers following class to determine if student perceptions of lecture material corresponded to your teaching and learning goals. If there is a common misconception or a gap in comprehension it should be addressed at the start of the next lecture period.
- 5. Alternative 1.** Rather than asking students what they know, we can instead focus on the concepts that they don't understand. These assignments are known as Muddiest Point exercises and may start with the question, "What was the most confusing idea (muddiest point) presented in today's lecture?"
- 6. Alternative 2.** Minute papers are short forms of open-ended questions. Longer form questions may replace minute papers if students are given more time for analysis of a specific question. Such questions should be asked to groups rather than individual students and more time (10-15 minutes) can be given to complete such exercises.

Further thoughts: The reference below further explores the use of students' open-ended questions that use instructor-provided question-stems to assess learning.

King, A., *Enhancing peer interaction and learning in the classroom through reciprocal questioning*. American Educational Research Journal, 1990. 27(4): p. 664-687.