# An introduction to evaluating your teaching

Finding out from students how your teaching is or is not helping them to learn enables a more targeted approach to making changes in teaching practice. Having this information is particularly important when teaching in a new or unfamiliar setting, such as online learning. This resource highlights some of the basic steps to take in designing your approach to students’ evaluation data collection.

## Identify what you want to know

To ensure your evaluation is useful and has a clear objective, ask questions that you are interested in knowing the response to and which you are willing and able to take action to address. For instance, if you can’t do anything about the timing of classes, the number of sessions or the group size, then avoid questions that focus on these. Aim to collect data that will inform you about your students’ learning experiences, such as:

* whether students are learning what you intended
* if they’ve found any aspects of the session/course particularly helpful or unhelpful in supporting their learning
* parts of the course they feel less confident about or where they still have questions
* how they are using the learning resources you’ve provided

## Identify how to phrase your question

General questions that ask for a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer won’t give you enough information to act on, so instead try to phrase questions which ask students to elaborate or give examples. Examples such as ‘Give an example of one thing that is helping your learning’, ‘Name your key takeaways from today’s session’, and ‘At what points during the course did you feel most engaged? Why?’ will tell you more about students’ learning.

For more general feedback you can use a ‘Stop/Start/Continue’ approach in which you ask your students to list one thing you should 'stop' doing; one thing you should 'start' doing and one thing you should 'continue' to do in your teaching. This is an approach that works equally well for collecting data anonymously in online or in-person teaching contexts.

## Identify when to evaluate

Evaluating at the end of a course can be helpful if you want to think about ways to redesign the course for next time. However, if you’re teaching a group of students over multiple sessions, evaluating early on, rather than only at the end, will enable you to make changes that respond to directly to those particular students and have a positive impact on their learning, rather than just the learning of future cohorts.

When planning your evaluation, think about points in the course where you can ask students for feedback on their learning, for example, after the first session or in the middle of term, which will give you time to make some changes. If changes will need to be made in a short timeframe, be realistic about what you can implement in this time. Another way to time your feedback is to identify specific moments in students’ learning where evaluation would be beneficial, for example, if you’re implementing a new approach for a session or trying out a different type of learning technology.

## Identify your evaluation method

Evaluation data can be collected in-person using written evaluation forms or online using polling and survey tools. Regardless of the method, you should consider the issue of student anonymity; students may be more forthcoming and honest if they can respond anonymously. Asking for feedback on what students have found helpful, rather than asking them to point out what they might perceive as teaching ‘problems’, can be a useful way to gather data without compromising students who are concerned about their anonymity.

## Close the ‘feedback loop’

Once you’ve reviewed your evaluation data, it is good practice to inform students what you intend to do with their feedback. This doesn’t necessarily mean implementing all of your students’ suggestions. However, it does mean letting students know your next steps. For example, you could post an announcement in Canvas or send students an email thanking them for their feedback, highlighting the main findings, and briefly explaining how you’ve decided to respond and why. If there are aspects of students’ feedback you will not be implementing, it is helpful to use this as an opportunity to briefly explain why.