How Can I Use Low-stakes Quizzing to Enhance Learning?

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Quizzing for class management, comprehension, confidence, conversation

Class management
- Begin every class with a quiz, which provides structure to the start of class and encourages students to arrive prepared and on time
- Don’t allow make-ups, but drop a certain number of quiz grades
- Provide four to ten straightforward short answer questions, and read them out loud or display them simply on an overhead or using a computer
- Keep the questions simple

Comprehension
- Regular quizzes can help students read with engagement & attention
- **Do** ask questions about plot, macro events in a reading, key points, or major characters
- **Don’t** ask questions about plot nuances, very specific information, or open-ended points
- **Sometimes** ask vocabulary, but keep any words in context from the reading

Confidence
- **Easy** questions: If quizzes are too hard, students will be stressed, and you will undermine the objective of building confidence
  - Tougher questions can be extra credit
- Provide immediate feedback so students know how they did on the quiz
  - Ask questions out loud and have students answer out loud
  - If you find you’ve asked an overly tricky question, you can be lenient right on the spot, demonstrating the quiz is not a “gotcha” exercise
- Students who read can start the class with the feeling: “I got an A!”
- Class begins with confident students; the review can even be fun

Conversation
- Open quiz review builds conversation, as students have spoken out loud
- Student exchanges: “How did you get that answer?”
- Students can defend their answers, segueing to class discussion
- Quiz reviews develop & define an open class culture/learning environment
Assessment/grading of quizzes

- Make the quizzes **substantive** in terms of the overall course evaluations: They can count for 15% to 20% of the course grade.
- Embrace the concept of **low-risk assessment**: Allow students to drop 10% to 20% of their quizzes. (This also means you never have to give a make-up quiz!)
- If your questions are **straightforward** they will be easier for you to grade.
  - Short answer quizzes are fine
  - Multiple choice can work as well
- You can have students **swap quizzes** to streamline the grading and emphasize the low-risk nature of what you are doing.
- **Learning technologies** can be a big help in implementing a quiz strategy.
  - Most learning management systems have an assessment/quizzing tool built in
  - You can use “question sets” so students don’t all have the same questions
  - You can grade multiple choice quizzes with a scanning technology
  - You can automate grading
  - Clickers and cell phone apps can make administering short, multiple-choice quizzes easy and convenient
- Remember, the **goal** is not punishment!: The goal is to help your students learn more effectively.
Resources and References


