

## Conclusion

My advice ends where it began, by focusing on the personal—on what newcomers, chairs, and senior colleagues can do to improve the quality of academic life as we now know it. There is no doubt from studies of new faculty that despite our best personal efforts, systemic problems remain that prevent faculty, departments, and institutions from being the best that they can be, especially in the pursuit of excellence in teaching and student learning. But proactive, individual actions can build hopes, dreams, and accomplishments. Re-envision your career and your future in higher education. What is a meaningful faculty career? What is meaningful faculty work to you? What will you need to give—and receive—to shape an academic life and workplace that matters? |||

## References

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## Contact:

Mary Deane Sorcinelli  
Associate Provost and Director  
Center for Teaching  
301 Goodell, University of  
Massachusetts  
Amherst, MA 01003

Phone: (413) 545-1225  
Fax: (413) 545-3829  
Web: <http://www.umass.edu/cft>

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## TESTS

### Weekly Quizzes: Summative, Formative, or Something Else?

Jan D. Andersen  
*California State University, Sacramento*

Four years ago I made a fundamental shift in my teaching philosophy regarding the purpose of quizzes; this philosophical shift occurred during (perhaps even influenced by) a time of rapid technological change. Like many instructors, I administered in-class quizzes on the assigned reading. At first, my intent was not always clear. In my early years of teaching, I think (I'm chagrined to say) I primarily viewed quizzes as a mechanism for reducing the length of my lectures. As my confidence in teaching grew, I regarded weekly quizzes as a necessary assessment tool. However, it was not always clear to me what type of assessment the quizzes represented.

#### Was it summative or formative?

Influenced by what I perceived was "good" teaching practice, I initially justified quizzes as a formative assessment tool, but formative for whom? Was that fifteen-minute, ten-question, multiple-choice quiz really informing students of their progress, or helping them identify (and improve) areas of deficiency? I realized that the quizzes I gave were more summative for the students, but formative for me; I was primarily using them as a means of assessing my teaching ability, and providing points for the gradebook. However, the questions I asked on the quizzes lacked the breadth and depth necessary to be much use as either a genuine summative or formative tool. I considered using essay and short-answer questions in place of

multiple-choice, but the reality of all that grading quickly dispelled those thoughts.

#### Quizzes - BC

Before computers (BC) I had few options when it came to administering quizzes. Each week I would write and duplicate ten multiple-choice questions based on the assigned reading. The first 15 minutes of the first class meeting my students would take the quiz. For classes with few students, grading quizzes was not a huge chore. However, one of my courses consistently had enrollments of 80-90 students. The writing, printing, administering, and grading became an almost overwhelming burden. Additionally, I had to deal with the problems arising from students arriving late or not arriving at all.

I attempted to lessen my burden by having the students grade the quizzes in class. This not only took additional class time, but it also created a negative atmosphere: as

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one student said, “we felt we were back in elementary school.” I also tried an if-you're-not-in-class-when-the-quiz-starts-you-can't-take-the-quiz policy as well as a no-quiz-makeup-if-you're-absent policy. Both were difficult to enforce and seemed only to create student-teacher antagonism. I was ready to eliminate quizzes altogether.

#### Quizzes - AC (After Computers)

Then, four years ago, I was introduced to “classroom management technology” (in my case, WebCT because our university had already purchased it for instructors' use). This software allowed me to eliminate the paper-and-pencil quizzes that I was so used to giving. Now all of my quizzes are web-based and administered outside of the

classroom. I still have to write questions, but I no longer have the burden of grading the quizzes; the management software does that for me. Additionally, web-based quizzes have helped me make more efficient use of classroom time, reduced my use of departmental resources, and given me more flexibility in

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designing and administering quizzes. For example, I now have the option of allowing students multiple attempts for the same quiz, or giving a different version of the quiz to each student. Or I can also allow students several days in which to take the quiz.

### Something Else

A variety of factors—new technologies, pressure to conserve resources, a desire to improve classroom efficiency and to reduce grading time—forced me to ask the questions that I should have asked in the beginning: (1) “How do I want students to behave?” and (2) How will quizzes facilitate that behavior?”

It didn’t take much time to realize that I wanted students to keep up with the assigned reading because students who fall behind or put off reading until the night before the exam almost always perform worse in the course than those who keep up. For most students, weekly quizzes (and the resulting grade) provide the motivation to do the reading. Obviously, then, my real purpose in giving quizzes has only a little to do with assessment. Quizzes are my way of helping students manage their time and achieve success in my course. Since it’s help I want to offer, I don’t need in-class show-downs. Quizzes remind students and me that the course has a pulse. There’s life in a pulse and since learning is about building health, students should be able to take their pulse at any time, day or night. Now that the technology has

helped me see what I’ve been trying to do all along, students can do that, and I can use quizzes the way I’ve always wanted to. |||

#### Contact:

Jan D. Andersen  
Family and Consumer Sciences  
Department  
California State University  
6000 J Street  
Sacramento, CA 95819-6053

E-mail:  
[jan.andersen@csus.edu](mailto:jan.andersen@csus.edu)

## DAILY SHARED QUIZZES

*Neil Williams*  
*Eastern Connecticut State University*

Over the past few decades, the value of active and cooperative learning as effective teaching tools has been widely discussed. These teaching and learning strategies include such generalized categories of class work as discussions, group work, presentations, and experiments. In my courses, this list has been expanded to include daily group quizzes. Yes, “group” quizzes.

The learning benefits of “pop” quizzes have long been noted. In some contexts the idea of students working on quizzes together has been endorsed as a means of creating a sense of community in the class. Not surprisingly, frequent quizzes also promote better test-taking skills.

Most of us give occasional quizzes, announced or otherwise, at the start of class meetings and we use the scores from these quizzes as a small part of the final course grade for our students. In the “standard” procedures for these quizzes, our students generally take them alone and without referring to notes or talking to anyone else. But given ongoing trends toward group work and participatory learning, I’ve been using daily *shared* quizzes and the results have been very positive and satisfying.

## Procedure

In the daily shared quiz:

- With only occasional exceptions, a quiz is given at the start of every class meeting. The questions are always about the most important information and ideas from the previous class, and they are not designed to be difficult or probe for obscure facts. They are intended to encourage students to review their class notes or readings prior to coming to class.

- Students may read their notes until the precise start of the class meeting, at which time their course materials are put aside and the quizzes are handed out. The class knows the quiz is coming and there is no moaning, groaning, or whining. The students are ready to go.

- Students work in pairs (or occasionally in groups of three) on one copy of the quiz. Partners are usually already sitting next to each other, but students may move to be with the person they want to be with. This normally doesn’t happen because class members are very concerned about not offending each other and often get very comfortable in their working relationship with a regular partner. Students may also opt to take the quiz alone (a rare event even for the best students) or they may be forced to do so when they arrive late for

## Without these quizzes, students rarely arrive having looked over their notes.

class and there is still some “quiz time” remaining.

- Partners are free to talk quietly to each other to discuss the question and the answer. Talking is actually required: a student may not respond to the question without first telling the partner about the proposed answer.