

Customize Your Course Evaluations: Writing Meaningful Questions

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Teaching and
Learning Services

Learning outcomes

- Distinguish between well- and poorly-written course evaluation questions
- Write questions that follow sound design principles
- Select appropriate questions from the recommended bank

Mercury questionnaire format

Source	Number of questions
1. University core questions Policy, 5.2 (https://www.mcgill.ca/mercury/about/policy)	4
2. Faculty questions (if any)	Variable
3. Department questions	Variable
4. Teaching Assistant questions	2 required, up to 1 more
5. Questions from you (the instructor)	Up to 3

Why add questions?

Tailor the course evaluation questionnaire to your course context.

Seek feedback about ...



new teaching
strategies



new teaching
environments



new
technologies



changes made in
response to
previous course
evaluation feedback



something not
addressed in
your unit's
default
questionnaire

What kinds of questions can you add?

1. Multiple choice questions

- Answer scale
 - Default: “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”
 - Can be customized (up to 5 options)
- “Not Applicable (N/A)” option
- Comment box option

2. Comments only questions

What's problematic about this question?

Did you enjoy the activities in class (e.g., think-pair-share, one minute papers) and the video assignment?

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

What's problematic about this question?

Did you enjoy the activities in class (e.g., think-pair-share, one minute papers) **and** the video assignment?

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Ask for feedback on **one aspect of your course or teaching per question.**

What's problematic about this question?

Did you **enjoy** the activities in class (e.g., think-pair-share, one minute papers) and the video assignment?

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Ask about learning rather than enjoyment.

What's problematic about this question?

Did you enjoy the activities in class (e.g., think-pair-share, one minute papers) and the video assignment?

- **Strongly disagree**
- **Disagree**
- **Neutral**
- **Agree**
- **Strongly agree**

**Match the answer options
to the question type.**

What's problematic about this question?

Did you enjoy the activities in class (e.g., **think-pair-share**, one minute papers) and the video assignment?

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Use language that your students will understand.

Here's an improved version:

Original:

Did you enjoy the activities in class (e.g., think-pair-share, one minute papers) **and** the video assignment?

[Strongly disagree to strongly agree]

Revised:

Q1. The activities in class (e.g., talking with a partner, writing reflections at the end of class) helped me learn.

[Strongly disagree to strongly agree]

Q2. The video assignment helped me learn.

[Strongly disagree to strongly agree]

Here's an improved version:

Original:

Did you **enjoy** the activities in class (e.g., think-pair-share, one minute papers) and the video assignment?

[Strongly disagree to strongly agree]

Revised:

Q1. The activities in class (e.g., talking with a partner, writing reflections at the end of class) **helped me learn.**

[Strongly disagree to strongly agree]

Q2. The video assignment **helped me learn.**

[Strongly disagree to strongly agree]

Here's an improved version:

Original:

Did you enjoy the activities in class (e.g., think-pair-share, one minute papers) and the video assignment?

[Strongly disagree to strongly agree]

Revised:

Q1. The activities in class (e.g., talking with a partner, writing reflections at the end of class) helped me learn.

[Strongly disagree to strongly agree]

Q2. The video assignment helped me learn.

[Strongly disagree to strongly agree]

Here's an improved version:

Original:

Did you enjoy the activities in class (e.g., **think-pair-share**, **one minute papers**) and the video assignment?

[Strongly disagree to strongly agree]

Revised:

Q1. The activities in class (e.g., **talking with a partner**, writing **reflections at the end of class**) helped me learn.

[Strongly disagree to strongly agree]

Q2. The video assignment helped me learn.

[Strongly disagree to strongly agree]

What's problematic about this question?

I did not attend class on a regular basis.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

What's problematic about this question?

I did **not** attend class on a regular basis.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

**Phrase statements in the
positive.**

What's problematic about this question?

I did not attend class on a **regular** basis.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Define terms used in your question.

Here's an improved version:

Original:

I **did not** attend class on a **regular** basis.

[Strongly disagree to strongly agree]

Revised:

Approximately how often have you attended the classes in this course?

[50% or less, 60-70%, 70-80%, 80-90%, 100%]

What's problematic about this question?

What was your cumulative grade as of mid-semester?

- A range (80-100%)
- B range (65-79%)
- C range (55-64%)
- D range (50-54%)
- F (below 50%)

What's problematic about this question?

What was your cumulative grade as of mid-semester?

- A range (80-100%)
- B range (65-79%)
- C range (55-64%)
- D range (50-54%)
- F (below 50%)

**Do not ask questions that
might compromise
student anonymity.**

What's problematic about this question?

The instructor has up-to-date knowledge of the subject matter.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

What's problematic about this question?

The instructor has up-to-date knowledge of the subject matter.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

**Ask questions that your students
are well-placed to answer.**

What's problematic about this question?

(Comments only question)

What did you think about the course?

What's problematic about this question?

(Comments only question)

What did you think about the course?

Be specific about the feedback you want so that you can act on it.

Here's an improved version:

Original:

What did you think about the course?

Revised:

Q1: Identify one thing the instructor did that positively affected your learning.

Q2: Identify one thing you wish the instructor had done to support your learning.

Activity:

Practice writing questions

Checklist: Guidelines for question writing

- Ask for feedback on one aspect of your course or teaching per question.
- Ask about student learning rather than enjoyment.
- Match the answer options to the question type.
- Use language that your students will understand.
- Phrase statements in the positive.
- Define terms used in your question.
- Do not ask questions that may compromise student anonymity.
- Ask questions that your students are well-placed to answer.
- Be specific about the feedback you want so that you can act on it.

Activity: Practice writing questions

Scenario 1: Midterm exam preparation

You hear “murmurs” from students during the course that they did not feel well-prepared for the midterm exam. You would like to get more information about these murmurs. Written feedback about how you can better prepare students would be helpful, too.

Activity: Practice writing questions

Scenario 1: Midterm exam preparation

Learning activities (e.g., in-class discussions; homework; myCourses quizzes) prepared me for the midterm exam.

[Strongly disagree to strongly agree]

Comment: Explain your answer.

Activity: Practice writing questions

Scenario 2: Team project

In previous offerings of this course, students chose their team members for a case study project. This semester, you chose the teams for the students. You would like feedback on students' experiences working with team members they did not choose.

Activity: Practice writing questions

Scenario 2: Team project

Overall, I had a productive learning experience with my case study team members.

[Strongly disagree to strongly agree]

Comment: Explain your answer.

Activity: Practice writing questions

Scenario 3: New technology tool

You have taught this course many times. This term, you tried out Polling @ McGill. You would like to know if students felt this strategy helped them learn.

Activity: Practice writing questions

Scenario 3: New technology tool

Overall, the instructor's use of Polling @ McGill had a positive impact on my learning in this course.

[Strongly disagree to strongly agree]

Comment: Explain your answer.

Bank of recommended questions



Category	Questions
1. Expectations 1.A.1. The course objectives were clearly articulated. 1.A.2. Learning expectations were clearly communicated. 1.A.3. Gr 1.A.4. Th 1.A.5. Th 1.A.6. Ex 1.A.7. Ex 1.A.8. Th 1.A.9. Ch B. INSTR 1.B.1. Th 1.B.2. Th 1.B.3. Th 1.B.4. Th A. COUR	<p>A. COURSE QUESTIONS</p> <p>2.A.1. The course content matched the course objectives. 2.A.2. There was close agreement between the stated course objectives and what was actually addressed. 2.A.3. The material addressed is relevant for my future.</p> <p>B. INSTRUCTOR QUESTIONS</p> <p>2.B.1. As the course progressed, the instructor showed how each topic fit into the course as a whole. 2.B.2. The instructor identified key pieces of information in the course. 2.B.3. The instructor incorporated current developments in the field. 2.B.4. The instructor incorporated current events in the course content.</p> <p>3. Teaching Strategies</p> <p>A. COURSE QUESTIONS</p> <p>3.A.1. The assignments were engaging. 3.A.2. The assignments were helpful for my learning. 3.A.3. I had the opportunity to share my ideas and knowledge. 3.A.4. The course materials (e.g., readings, lecture notes, in-class exercises) contributed to learning the subject matter. 3.A.5. The use of teaching technology (e.g., myCourses, videos, Polling @ McGill) was effective. (N/A recommended if included on unit questionnaire) 3.A.6. The learning activities were integrated effectively into the course. 3.A.7. Teaching Assistant (TA) support was essential to this course. (N/A recommended if included on unit questionnaire) 3.A.8. Activities outside of class (e.g., myCourses discussions, homework) complemented in-class activities. 3.A.9. Lecture recordings helped my learning. (N/A recommended if included on unit questionnaire) 3.A.10. The course materials were easy to access. 3.A.11. Having co-instructors teach this course supported my learning. 3.A.12. This co-taught course was well coordinated among the multiple instructors.</p> <p>B. INSTRUCTOR QUESTIONS</p> <p>3.B.1. The instructor encouraged students to participate actively. 3.B.2. The instructor's teaching strategies helped me learn.</p>

Next steps

- Review your unit's existing questionnaire at www.mcgill.ca/mercury/about/questionnaires
- Questions must be submitted each term.
 - Watch for an email.
- View webinar slides: <https://deptkb.mcgill.ca/display/TLK/Webinars>

References

Kember, D., & Ginns, P. (2012). *Evaluating teaching and learning: A practical handbook for colleges, universities and the scholarship of teaching*. London: Routledge.

Rando, W. L. (2001). Writing teaching assessment questions for precision and reflection. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 87, 77-83. doi: 10.1002/tl.30

What else would you like to know?

<https://www.mcgill.ca/mercury/instructors/customize>

<https://www.mcgill.ca/mercury/files/mercury/course-evaluation-questionnaires-en-jan-2021.pdf>