

IMMEDIATE FEEDBACK ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUE (IF-AT): ENHANCING COLLABORATIVE LEARNING WHILE PROVIDING IMMEDIATE FEEDBACK

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Instructional faculty face several challenges in today's teaching environment. All of us, at one point or the other have debated whether to keep teaching the way we have taught for years or to learn how to adapt our teaching styles to a new generation of students. In the past three decades, university instructors have been experimenting with alternative approaches to active, experiential, and collaborative learning. Today's students learn differently, they are easily bored with regular lectures. They also need instant gratification, which, in the classroom, translates to giving them immediate feedback. We are all constantly bombarded with questions from students such as, "when do we get our exam grades back?" or "when will our papers be graded?" There are several techniques that have been used to address the issue of "instant gratification." Objective style quizzes where the instructor provides the answers immediately after quiz is taken, in-class assignments graded immediately by peers, and in-class pair-share activities that are immediately graded are some examples of how this issue has been addressed in recent years. The question is, do these activities and assignments that provide instant feedback to students really enhance learning and motivate students to study?

Collaborative learning is a component in all my classes, both undergraduate and graduate. My courses include several group assignments and usually a major group project that students work in teams of four or five. In order to avoid the common problem associated with group activities – "free riders" – I always incorporate individual accountability into my assignments and also include tools and techniques to motivate groups to engage in a great deal of discussion. Last but not the least, it is also important to provide group members with immediate and meaningful feedback.

My role is as the facilitator of learning in the classroom. Student learning is significantly impacted by the various processes used in the classroom. . . . My objective as a facilitator is to continuously improve student learning by using an assortment of processes. In order to accomplish

this, my specific goals are: to enhance interactions between students, to enhance interactions between instructor and students, provide a variety of opportunities for both active and collaborative learning, and to motivate students to learn by providing immediate feedback on as many in-class activities as possible. I have been using the Immediate Feedback Assessment Technique (IF-AT) in my classes for the past year. IF-AT is a good fit with my goals because it helps in providing immediate feedback while motivating students to learn.

What is Immediate Feedback Assessment Technique (IF-AT)?

"The IF-AT uses a multiple-choice answer sheet with a thin opaque film covering the answer options. Instead of using a pencil to fill in a circle, students scratch off their answers as if they were scratching a lottery ticket. The student scratches off the coating of the rectangle corresponding with the first-choice answer. If the answer is correct, a star or other symbol appears somewhere within the rectangle. The student's learning is immediately re-enforced, and the student receives full credit for the answer. If incorrect, the student must re-read the question and remaining answer options and scratch off a second or even third choice until the correct answer is identified. Students will earn partial credit for multiple attempts and learn the correct response for each question while taking the test" (Epstein Educational Enterprises).

In my classes, students take an objective/multiple choice exam or a quiz individually first. Immediately following this, they take the same exam in their respective groups using the IF-AT form as their answer key. The difference between the individual and group exam is that, the group gets to see the correct answers as they complete the exam because of using the IF-AT form and the group is given more than one chance to identify the correct answer. See Figure 1 for a sample form.

FIGURE 1
Sample IF-AT Form

IMMEDIATE FEEDBACK ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUE (IF AT®)

Name _____ Test # _____
 Subject _____ Total _____

SCRATCH OFF COVERING TO EXPOSE ANSWER

	A	B	C	D	Score
1.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
2.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
3.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
4.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
5.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
6.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
7.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
8.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____

The Impact of IF-AT in My Classes

I have used the Immediate Feedback Assessment Technique in both my undergraduate and graduate classes and have found the outcome to be extremely gratifying to both myself and the students. From an instructional perspective, it is rewarding to see students actually study and understand the material and explain it to their fellow classmates. This is a sign of true learning, when students

are able to teach other students. They engage in meaningful discussions with each other in the process of taking the exam in their groups, because, every team member's grade is at stake.

Students have actually referred to my exams as "fun." They have commented to other instructors that they are motivated to study because they are accountable to their group. I believe that IF-AT has helped me provide students with a new perspective on academic testing. They are inclined to involve themselves in "analytical" learning rather than in rote memorization because they are required to justify their answers to other team members.

Concluding Remarks

There are a few limitations in using this technique, but most are not difficult to overcome. The IF-AT form comes in a limited number of formats. For example, one may have a choice between a 25 question form and a 50 question form. A form may come with four answer choices per question or five answer choices per question. One can certainly use the form for a fewer number of questions for a given exam or a quiz. If the number of questions on an exam exceeds 50, one can combine two or more forms. There are a variety of answer keys available for each type of IF-AT form, but the instructor has to write questions to match the answer key or revise an existing exam to match the answer key, which takes time, but is not a major limitation. When IF-AT was first developed, the star or other symbol that appears within the rectangle was placed in the same position for every rectangle, which resulted in some student cheating. In the latest IF-AT forms, however, the star is randomly placed in different positions within each rectangle, resolving this problem. Overall, I would highly recommend using this technique in your classes.

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