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Customize your Course Evaluations: Writing Meaningful Questions

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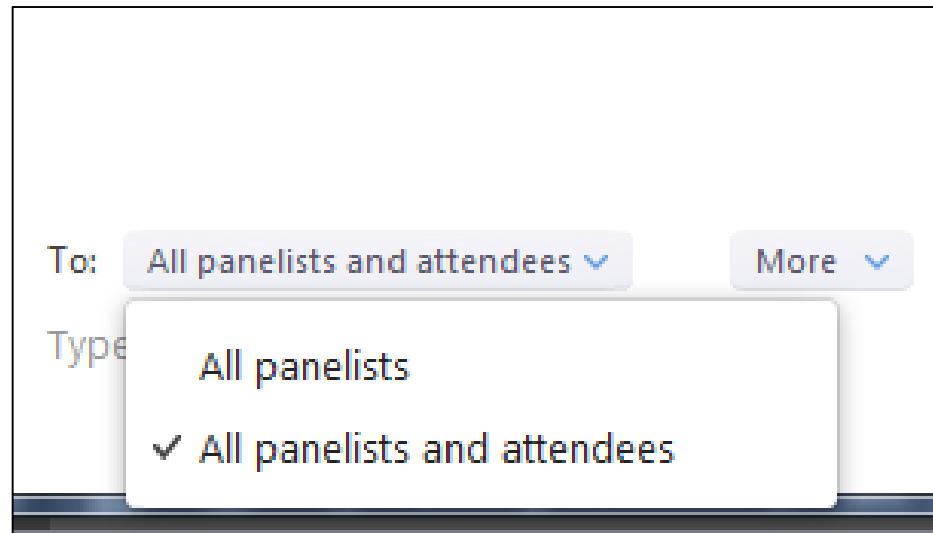TEACHING AND LEARNING SERVICES

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Introduction

Introduce yourself in the chat by typing your name and department.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this webinar, you will be able to:

- Distinguish between well- and poorly-written course evaluation questions;

- Write questions that follow sound design principles;

- Select appropriate questions from the recommended pool.

Mercury questionnaire format

Source	Number of questions
1. University core questions	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 (e.g., classroom);
- New technologies;
- Changes made in response to previous course evaluation feedback;
- Something not addressed in your unit's default questionnaire.

MERCURY
COURSE EVALUATIONS

What kinds of questions can you add?

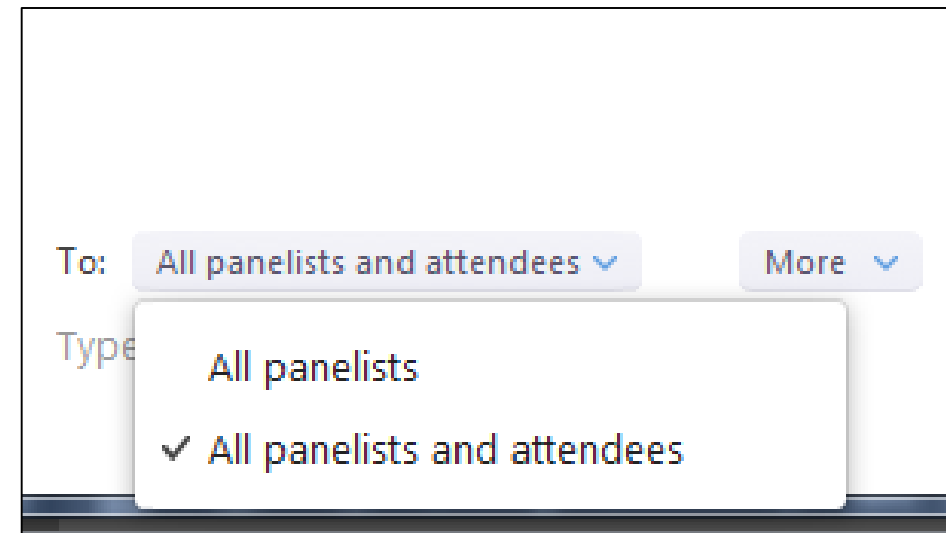1. Multiple choice questions
   - Answer scale
     - Default: "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"
     - Can be customized (up to 5 options)
   - "Not Applicable (N/A)" option
   - Comment box option

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.

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**]

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 may 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 should **start** doing to facilitate your learning.

Q2. Identify one thing the instructor should **continue** doing to facilitate your learning.

Q3. Identify one thing the instructor does that negatively affects your learning and should therefore **stop** doing.

Activity:
Practice writing questions

Checklist: Guidelines for question writing

- ❑ Ask for feedback on one aspect of your course or teaching.
- ❑ 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

I felt well-prepared 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 classroom

You have taught this course many times in a traditional lecture hall. This semester, you taught the course in an active learning classroom. You would like to know students' perceptions of their classroom experience.

Activity: Practice writing questions

Scenario 3: New classroom

Overall, the instructor's use of the classroom features had a positive impact on my learning in this course.

    [Strongly disagree to strongly agree]

    Comment: Explain your answer.

Question pool

- Available at www.mcgill.ca/mercury/about/questionnaires
- Organized by category:

1. Core
2. Learning environment
3. General learning outcomes
4. Course content
5. Expectations
6. Difficulty

7. Interest
8. Teaching strategies
9. Assessment and feedback
10. Interaction with faculty members
11. Institutional resources and support

Question pool

Sample:

	A. COURSE
	6.A.1. In general, the level of difficulty in this course was appropriate.
	6.A.2. Course topics were dealt with in sufficient depth.
6. Difficulty	6.A.3. Considering the number of credits assigned to the course, the workload was appropriate.
	B. INSTRUCTOR
	6.B.1. The instructor explained difficult material clearly.
	6.B.2. The instructor was able to simplify difficult materials.
	6.B.3. The instructor made adjustments to fit individual abilities and interests.

Next steps

- Review your unit's existing questionnaire at www.mcgill.ca/mercury/about/questionnaires

- For Winter 2018, submit your questions for each course no later than March 12, 2018, at www.mcgill.ca/mercury/instructors/customize
  - Questions must be submitted each term.

- Questions about course evaluations?
  Contact mercury.info@mcgill.ca

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

QUESTIONS?