

# University of Minnesota

## **Connecting Your Teaching Practices with the Student Rating of Teaching Form**

Revision 2015  
Short Form for Instructor Feedback

Instructor Items and Course Items

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# **Contents**

## **INSTRUCTOR ITEMS**

### **SRT Item 1**

**The instructor was well prepared for class.**

### **SRT Item 2**

**The instructor presented the subject matter clearly.**

### **SRT Item 3**

**The instructor provided feedback intended to improve my course performance.**

### **SRT Item 4**

**The instructor treated me with respect.**

## **COURSE ITEMS**

### **SRT Item 1**

**I have a deeper understanding of the subject matter as a result of this course.**

### **SRT Item 2**

**My interest in the subject matter was stimulated by this course.**

### **SRT Item 3**

**Instructional technology employed in this course was effective.**

### **SRT Item 4**

**The grading standards for this class were clear.**

## **SRT Item 1: The instructor was well prepared for class.**

### **1.1 Design your course backwards, starting from where you want students to be at the end of the course.**

a) *Identify desired results.* What specific knowledge and skills should participants master? What big ideas should students remember after they've forgotten the details of the course?

b) *Determine acceptable evidence.* What will you accept as evidence that students are making progress toward the learning goals of the course?

c) *Plan learning experiences & instruction.* What are the best tasks, problems, or questions for developing each student's ability to meet your learning goals?

### **1.2 Prioritize and limit the number of points you plan to explore in a single class session.**

Select carefully the content you present. Ask yourself "Why do I want my students to know this?" "What do I expect them to do with it?" "Is this the most appropriate time to get this information?" "Do I need to give them this information, or would it be more valuable for them to work it out for themselves?"

### **1.3 Match the teaching and assessment methods to your course goals.**

Consider a wide range of assessment methods (e.g., essay tests, term papers, short-answer quizzes, homework assignments, lab projects, problems) in order to ensure that you test for the type of learning you want from students. As well, visit the classroom that has been assigned. If you want an interactive classroom, how will you create an interactive environment if the room has auditorium-style seating?

**1.4 Be explicit about how students should prepare for your class.** Tell students up front about your expectations. What readings should they complete prior to class? Should they review their notes from last week? Are there some key points, questions, or terms that should be studied or reviewed before a class session?

### **1.5 Gather some feedback from a colleague on the direction and focus of your course.**

Each of us invariably benefits from the feedback provided by another set of informed eyes or ears. Talk to a trusted colleague--one you would label as a "critical friend"--and be prepared for the inevitable adjustments that arise from the feedback you receive. If you don't want to know, don't ask!

**1.6 Practice the presentation.** A rehearsal will help you judge timing and your own comfort with the material. Pay particular attention to the opening and closing parts of your lesson--students will!

## **SRT Item 2: The instructor presented the subject matter clearly.**

**2.1 Give students a road map.** Put a brief outline on the board or provide a handout that will help students follow along. Refer to the outline to alert students to transitions and to the relationships between points.

### **2.2 Use verbal cues to:**

a) *Introduce a topic and provide context.* For example, “Today we’ll learn three strategies for..... These strategies are part of our larger discussion on .....”

b) *Order your ideas.* For example, “The first strategy involves....The second strategy...”

c) *Highlight important points.* For example, “The most important thing to remember is...” or “This is something you will use many times so it’s worth your special attention.”

**2.3 Use memorable examples.** Students tend to remember images longer than they remember words, so be liberal in your use of stories, metaphors, analogies, and vivid images in examples. Spend time developing a repertoire of examples that link ideas and images.

### **2.4 Check student understanding regularly.**

a) *Ask for questions.* Ask for student questions in a way that makes it clear that you not only encourage them, you expect them. Instead of asking “Are there any questions?” try “Which points can I clarify for you?”

b) *Assign “Minute Papers.”* Every few weeks, ask students the following two questions: “What is the most significant thing you learned today?” and “What question is uppermost in your mind at the end of today’s class?” The resulting information can provide invaluable aid in allowing you to evaluate how well the class understands the material.

**2.5 Answer student questions concisely.** If you are uncertain of a precise answer to a difficult question, tell students that you need a chance to think about or research a response and that you will let them know what you have come up with at the next class meeting. Alternatives include asking if another student can answer the question or telling the students where and how they might find the answer themselves.

**2.6 Pay attention to the clarity of directions for in-class tasks and homework assignments.** If a task involves several steps, provide written and oral directions as well as examples of correct answers. For assignments you expect students to complete outside of class, ask students to discuss their understanding of the assignment and possible procedures involved in completing the task with a partner.

### **2.7 Address language or delivery difficulties.**

a) *Face students when talking to them.*

b) *Use visual or written aids.* You can refer to pictures, diagrams, or a written outline of your presentation during your presentation.

c) *Watch and listen to yourself on videotape.*

d) *Request help from your students.* If you know that you tend to speak softly, ask your students to give you a sign when you need to increase your volume. Alternately, don’t be afraid to reconfigure students’ seating patterns in order to draw them closer to you.

### **SRT Item 3: The instructor provided feedback intended to improve my course performance.**

**3.1 Provide feedback frequently.** Feedback on how well students are meeting the objectives of the class should be provided early and often. The best way to initiate this involves committing to regular quizzes or other forms of grading that are spread out regularly across the semester.

#### **3.2 Give clear, precise feedback that guides students on how to improve.**

a) *Comment wisely but sparingly.* A few well-chosen, carefully articulated comments will draw attention to salient parts of an assignment more effectively than dozens of corrections and remarks scattered throughout the assignment. Provide most comments on the overall quality rather than focusing only on details.

b) *Use a well-established grading rubric.* A grading rubric is a scoring guide that lists the criteria and the achievement levels for evaluating student performance. Show students the rubric before an assignment is due, and use the rubric to both assess performance and educate students on your standards or expectations for high performance.

c) *Use questions and suggestions when commenting on written work.* Comments such as “awkward,” “unclear,” and “vague” are not helpful to students since they may refer to organization, content, or mechanics. Be more specific in your response to fuzzy passages: “How else would you describe this?” “Why is this so?” “Are you saying...?” “What about...”

#### **3.3 Consider possible cultural differences when providing feedback on writing by non-native students.**

Many non-native writers have fewer written connections between ideas. The rhetorical patterns of some cultures dictate that one not insults the intelligent reader by “stating the obvious.” American readers, on the other hand, want an entire line of reasoning stated in black and white. It may help to provide some examples of connective sentences to illustrate what an American writer would say to connect the two ideas.

**3.4 Budget your grading time.** Rushed grading does not lead to thoughtful feedback. Many instructors find that they need to set time and quota limits for reading and responding to student work.

**3.5 Provide examples of success.** Discussing examples of reports, papers, etc., during class can help students recognize the kind of work that meets expectations.

**3.6 Make yourself available to consult with students individually or in small group sessions.** Schedule extra office hours or appointments at the time of major projects or exams during this time.

**3.7 Assess the helpfulness of your feedback to students before the midterm of the semester.** Use the university’s early term rating forms to make appropriate adjustments before the final rating form is distributed in the last weeks of the course.

## **SRT Item 4: The instructor treated me with respect.**

**4.1 Know your students.** Unless class size is prohibitive, spend some time early in the first few classes learning students' names and finding out about their interests and concerns. Learning about their backgrounds will help situate your understanding of their capabilities as students.

**4.2 Include diverse materials and varied styles of presentation to accommodate different cultural backgrounds.** Create a syllabus that includes materials from diverse populations of scholars or reflect diverse positions.

**4.3 Speak up promptly if a student makes a distasteful remark, even jokingly.** Explain why a comment is offensive or insensitive. Let your students know that racist, sexist, and other types of discriminatory remarks are unacceptable in class.

**4.4 Deal with controversial issues constructively.** Spend time negotiating discussion ground rules. Examples include restating someone's idea if it is not clear or listening to everyone's ideas even if you don't agree. Prepare students ahead of time for conflict by starting out with less controversial topics in order to build trust.

**4.5 Avoid singling out students as spokespersons.** It is unfair to ask a student to speak for his or her entire race, culture, or nationality. Each member of a minority group is not an authority on the group; there are wide differences of opinion among members of any group.

**4.6 Examine your assumptions.** Stereotyping often influences teacher expectations and behaviors in unconscious ways. Do a radical, honest, self-examination of your biases.

**4.7 Monitor your behavior in responding to students.** Try to be conscious of the following:

- a) *Calling on or hearing from only members of one gender or ethnic group.*
- b) *Listening attentively and responding directly to students' comments and questions.*
- c) *Addressing students by name, with correct pronunciation.*
- d) *Giving students time to answer a question before moving on.*
- e) *Interrupting students or allowing them to be interrupted by their peers.*

**4.8 Use language patterns and examples that do not exclude or demean any group.**

- a) Use terms of equal weight when referring to parallel groups, such as, "men" and "women" rather than "men" and "ladies."
- b) Use both "he" and "she" during lectures, discussions, etc.
- c) Your students may come from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds; avoid remarks that make assumptions about your students' experiences, e.g., "Now, when your parents were in college..."
- d) Avoid comments about students' social activities that tacitly assume that all students are heterosexual, such as "When you get married and become a father (mother)..."

**4.9 Respect the individual needs of the learners.** Treating students equally does not necessarily mean treating all students the same way. For example, a non-native English speaker may be allowed to use a dictionary when taking a test, or a student with a disability may be allowed more time or the help of a reader when taking a test.

**4.10 Get an outside opinion.** Because the differences in the ways in which we treat groups are often unintentional, you may wish to have your teaching observed as part of a teaching consultation. To arrange an observation, visit the CEI website under the *Consultations and Customized Workshops* header.

## COURSE ITEMS

### **SRT Item 1: I have a deeper understanding of the subject matter as a result of this course.**

Because the entire Manual examines a host of issues that ultimately affect student learning, this section is confined to a series of principles on human learning based on a task force report completed in 1998 by the American Association for Higher Education, American College Personnel Association, and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. The edited list appears below.

**1.1 Learning is fundamentally about making and maintaining connections**--biologically through neural networks; mentally among concepts, ideas, and meanings; and experientially through interaction between the mind and the environment,

**1.2 Learning is enhanced by taking place in the context of a compelling situation that balances challenge and opportunity**, stimulating and utilizing the brain's ability to conceptualize quickly and its capacity and need for contemplation and reflection upon experiences.

**1.3 Learning is an active search for meaning by the learner**—constructing knowledge rather than passively receiving it, shaping as well as being shaped by experiences.

**1.4 Learning is developmental, a cumulative process involving the whole person**, integrating the new with the old, starting from but transcending personal concerns and interests.

**1.5 Learning is done by individuals who are intrinsically tied to others as social beings**, interacting as competitors or collaborators, constraining or supporting the learning process.

**1.6 Learning requires frequent feedback if it is to be sustained, practice if it is to be nourished, and opportunities to use what has been learned.**

**1.7 Learning is grounded in particular contexts and individual experiences**, requiring effort to transfer specific knowledge and skills to other circumstances or to more general understandings and to unlearn personal views and approaches when confronted by new information.

**1.8 Learning involves the ability of individuals to monitor their own learning**, to develop strategies for learning based on discerning their capacities and limitations, and to be aware of their own ways of knowing in approaching new bodies of knowledge.

## **SRT Item 2: My interest in the subject matter was stimulated by this course.**

**2.1 Show enthusiasm and energy.** Give reasons why you're interested in the subject. Share your passion in an honest and forthright manner. Students connect your verbal and non-verbal behavior as signs of your commitment to them and to the course material.

**2.2 Grab attention with your opening.** Begin with a thought-provoking question, mention a recent news event that relates to the topic of the day, or start with an interesting example that stirs the emotions of students.

**2.3 Place course material in context.**

a) *Tell students why you have organized the course and individual class sessions around your selected learning goals.*

b) *Ask contextual questions.* To help the students place course materials in context, ask questions like: "Why are biologists interested in this topic?" "What goes through a mathematician's head when she tries to solve a problem she's never seen before?"

**2.4 Use examples that relate to the students' interests and backgrounds.** Start your examples from what they know, and slowly move them toward examples that require students to stretch or transfer course material to new contexts. Students should also be put on the hook for generating examples as well--a good sign of their deepening connection to course material.

**2.5 Represent the content in multiple ways.** Multiple representations can include:

- a) *Narrative*--telling stories about the topic and the people involved
- b) *Quantitative*--using numerical examples connected to the topic
- c) *Graphic*--placing material in a figural representation
- d) *Logic*--identifying key elements and exploring their logical connections
- e) *Hands-on*--working directly or experientially with tangible examples
- f) *Cooperative* or social--engaging in projects with others where each makes a distinctive contribution

**2.6 Structure frequent opportunities for active student participation.** There are many ways to generate and sustain student interest through their active involvement. For example, if you are using student involvement activities in a lecture format, give the students a three to four minute discussion task every 10-15 minutes.

**2.7 Give students choices.** Student input and choice usually affects their level of investment and responsibility for learning. For example, you could allow students to choose between writing a report or giving an oral presentation; writing one longer paper or two shorter papers; working alone on a project or with a partner.

**2.8 Gather information from students at regular intervals.**

Understanding how students experience the course is the most important knowledge teachers need to do good work. Getting early and regular assessments on what's working in class keeps your finger on the pulse of student interest and enthusiasm.

**2.9 Move seats around when appropriate to support interaction.** For activities in which you wish to encourage student-to-student interaction, use a U-shape or circle(s) to allow students to see and speak directly to each other. Sit among the students for discussions instead of sitting on or behind a table. Bringing students forward when they are sparsely scattered in a large lecture hall can have a considerable effect on the class climate and demonstrates your interest in their learning.

### **SRT Item 3 Instructional technology employed in this course was effective.**

**3.1 The objectives of the lesson should drive the technologies chosen for a given class.** There are a variety of easy-to-use technologies available—e.g., whiteboards, document cameras, PowerPoint, clickers, web-based content—and each of them have a purpose that is best driven by your goals for the day. The role and purpose of technology in the course should be made clear to students verbally and via the syllabus.

**3.2 Be well prepared to use the technology you have chosen.** Necessary files and/or web content need to be cued and ready to be used. Practice using the projection system, and be able to switch between various kinds of media easily. You want to be prepared to recover quickly if there is a problem with technology during class.

**3.3 Materials made available via course web sites, study guides, or other means should be clearly written,** well organized, and designed for reading on a computer. The course web site itself needs to be clearly organized, with a structure that is readily apparent to students, and easy to navigate.

**3.4 Make your PowerPoint slides readable** with a minimum of text per slide. “Minimum text” allows you to elaborate upon what you have written and also interact with students during the session. Images, graphs, or other multimedia attract student attention and need to mesh well with the text that appears on the screen.

**3.5 Use email to support timely communication and interaction with students.** Instructors should have communication policies that are clearly stated in the syllabus. For example, note how quickly students can expect a response from you, when and under what circumstances you’ll respond, and how students should format their emails to you.

**3.6 Help students to use the classroom technology they need for assignments and projects.** Instructors should provide access to technology tutorials for the tools students will need to use for course assignments.

**3.7 In the end, instructional technology should provide efficiencies for students and support time on task.** Instructors should use technology in such a way that students gain efficiency in completing homework, accessing course material, completing projects, and communicating with others.

## **SRT Item 4 The grading standards for this class were clear.**

### **4.1 Communicate early with students about the meaning of your grading standards.**

Because grading draws student attention early and regularly, you can expect to have a captive audience when assignments, tests, or projects are looming in the background. Talk to students prior to due dates about your grading expectations, and spend the time necessary to address student questions and concerns.

**4.2 Construct a system that keeps student learning at the center and “gatekeeping” at the periphery.** Student learning is the most important goal of grading. Grades can help to solidify—and challenge—what students know and can do. The idea of using grades to weed-out or gate-keep is not uncommon, but it seems more productive to build a system where you are regularly asking yourself “how does this test/project/activity lead to sustained and substantial student learning?”

**4.3 The syllabus is a key source for answering initial questions about grading.** Students will pore over the text surrounding grading in your syllabus, which is a sobering reminder to use language that is direct, brief, and unambiguous. Consider using reasonable disclaimers that indicate the syllabus is a “guide” whose terms can be altered in the best interests of the class rather than an immutable “contract” that is not subject to discussion or revision.

**4.4. A grading rubric can be judiciously used to promote clarity.** Not all assignments are appropriate for a rubric, but use thorough procedures to develop your rubric and provide it to students before they begin a project. A good rubric helps students learn the standards of your discipline and gives you a common framework to improve consistency in grading.

**4.5 Cultivate sound, professional judgment to establish clear and thoughtful grading criteria.** Faculty select the test questions, design parameters for projects, and ultimately determine what constitutes a grade for a given assignment. Each of these curricular decisions—and many others—have a measure of subjectivity attached to them. Your professional judgment trumps the belief that one can design a purely objective test or grading scheme. Trust your judgment and get feedback from colleagues as you build your system.

**4.6 Appreciate the complexity of grading; it has diverse meanings for both faculty and students.** The values that drive your grading system may well be different from students’ values. And your values probably differ compared to other university faculty that students encounter. Recognize the unique context that surrounds grading at universities and accept the likelihood that well-intentioned efforts may still contain flaws and constraints. Experienced teachers constantly revise and refine their grading processes each semester.