

Designing feedback forms for educational courses

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Abstract

Obtaining and analysing participant feedback is an important part of any educational course. Whereas the instructor and his superiors are keen to get honest and frank feedback, often the participants themselves do not have enough motivation to spend time and effort in this exercise. Feedback should be made a painless exercise, both for the teacher and the taught. This article summarises some design considerations for feedback sessions. As usual, feedback on this article itself is welcome. Please send your opinions and suggestions to the author.

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1 Design issues

Designing a feedback mechanism for educational courses is a serious and tricky matter. It is important to understand the psychology of the teacher, and the psychology of the students when designing feedback mechanisms. The teacher needs the feedback system, to evaluate the effectiveness of his teaching. However, this should not become a personal slander campaign. The feedback should be on the course delivered, and not on the person who delivered the course. The student must get an opportunity to express his happiness or displeasure about how the course was conducted. He should be able to specifically identify and indicate what exactly he appreciates (or does not like) However, this should not be too cumbersome for the student. There must be a structured way of giving opinion, but at the same time, it should not be too rigid. There must be scope for giving unstructured opinion and suggestions.

After studying the feedback forms used by many institutions, I came to the following set of guidelines. The form I generated using these guidelines is given in Section 2, and is described below :

1. *The feedback must be in a quantifiable form.* Instead of verbose comments which cannot be analysed easily, this form uses a simple rating mechanism. The form does not ask the student to give numeric values. It asks the student to place tick marks on a scale of 5 (1 to 5)). The scale is annotated in unambiguous terms. Numeric values are usually a source of confusion (does a higher score mean a favourable rating ? Or, does it mean an unfavourable rating ?)
2. *The student must know what he is commenting about.* The course feedback lists nine distinct aspects of the course. The tenth aspect is an overall, global, summary.
3. *The feedback must help for identifying the strong points and the weak points of the course.* By observing the number of tick marks an item has got, we can conclude the relative acceptability, or otherwise, of the same.
4. *The feedback should be in a form which will help review and discussion* It is easy to form an aggregate summary of all the feedback forms collected, and get an overall picture of the course. Specific aspects can be taken up for discussions and improvements.
5. *The feedback form should be concise* The form does not exceed a single A4 page. If necessary, the student can add comments on the reverse side of the form.
6. *The feedback form should be such that a consolidated summary would fit in it.* The consolidated summary can also use the same form and entries. The only change would be that instead of tick marks, the summary will show the total number of tick marks each entry has received. We get an overall view of the course by looking at the totals. It is also a simple matter, to automate the analysis of the course using the total scores.
7. *No verbose response should be needed.* Students usually hesitate to give a verbose written report about the teacher. When they do, they either add irrelevant details or give disrespectful comments. This form helps the students to stay focussed and give precise indications. The form provides the option of adding additional comments, albeit in a concise form.

8. *The feedback should be about the course, and not about the teacher* It is a common mistake to confuse a feedback session as an evaluation of the teacher, and not about how a course was taught. The sample feedback form shown below, prompts the student to stick to details about the course. There is no entry for personal opinions on the teacher personally. It avoids provoking a student to express his personal prejudices which he may have.

2 The feedback form

A blank specimen form, designed using the above guidelines, is shown below. You can modify this form to suit your specific requirements.

3 Concluding remarks

In the spirit of the principles of FOSS, this form, or its format, can be copied, modified, distributed, and used freely. The rendered version (pdf version) can be accessed from The L^AT_EX source of this form may be obtained by sending a request to drpartha@gmail.com.

Opinions, suggestions and all feedback on this article or the enclosed form are welcome (you can use relevant parts of this form itself, for giving your opinion). Please write to drpartha@gmail.com.

Give title and location of course here

A consolidated summary of this feedback will be sent to all participants.

Date : 99999999

No.	Aspect being evaluated	For each aspect of evaluation, put a tick mark in the box provided					Remarks, if any
		Very Good	Good	Fair	Bad	Very Bad	
1.	Organisation and structure						
2.	Clarity of explanations and presentations						
3.	Quality of visuals						
4.	Quality of demos						
5.	Time spent on each topic						
6.	Technical content of topics covered						
7.	Responses to your questions						
8.	Handout material						
9.	Punctuality, time management						
10.	Your overall opinion of the course						
Did we miss out on any topic ? What topics need to be covered in more detail ?							
What topics should not have been included in this course ?							
Indicate any general remarks or suggestions you may have (use the other side of this form, if necessary... THANK YOU)							