



## Muddiest Point

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### Description

The Muddiest Point is just about the simplest Classroom Assessment Technique imaginable. It is also remarkably efficient, since it provides a high information return for a very low investment of time and energy. The technique consists of asking students to jot down a quick response to one question: “What was the muddiest point in \_\_\_\_\_?” The focus of the Muddiest Point assessment might be a lecture, a discussion, a homework assignment, a play, or a film.

### Purpose

As its name suggests, the Muddiest Point technique provides information on what students find least clear or most confusing about a particular lesson or topic. Faculty use that feedback to discover which points are most difficult for students to learn and to guide their teaching decisions about which topics to emphasize and how much time to spend on each. In response to this CAT, learners must quickly identify what they do not understand and articulate those muddy points. Consequently, even though the technique is extremely simple to administer, responding to it requires some higher-order thinking.

### Related Teaching Goals

- Improve skill at paying attention
- Develop ability to concentrate
- Improve listening skills
- Develop appropriate study skills, strategies, and habits
- Learn terms and facts of this subject
- Learn concepts and theories in this subject.

### Suggestions for Use

While this technique can be used in virtually any setting, it is particularly well suited to large, lower-division classes. Since students’ responses to the Muddiest Point question usually consist of a few words or phrases, a teacher can read and sort a great many in a few minutes. The Muddiest Point question should be posed at the end of a lecture, at the close of a discussion or presentation, or immediately after a reading assignment. This CAT can be used quite frequently in classes where a large amount of new information is presented each session – such as mathematics, statistics, economics, health sciences, and the natural sciences – probably because there is a steady stream of possible “muddy points.” On the other hand, the Muddiest Point is best used sparingly in courses where the emphasis is on integrating, synthesizing, and evaluating information.

### Step-by-Step Procedure

1. Determine what you want feedback on: the entire class session or one self-contained segment? A lecture, a discussion, a presentation?
2. If you are using the technique in class, reserve a few minutes at the end of the class session. Leave enough time to ask the question, to allow students to respond, and to collect their responses by the usually ending time.
3. Let students know beforehand how much time they will have to respond and what use you will make of their responses.
4. Pass out slips of paper or index cards for students to write on.



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5. Collect responses as or before students leave. Stationing yourself at the door and collecting “muddy points” as students file out is one way; leaving a “muddy points” collection box by the exit is another.
6. Respond to the students’ feedback during the next class meeting or as soon as possible afterward.

### **Turning the Data You Collect into Useful Information**

As with everything else about this technique, data analysis can and should be kept very simple. Quickly read through at least half of the responses, looking for common types of muddy points. Then go back through all the responses and sort them into piles – several piles containing groups of related muddy points, and one “catch-all” pile made up of one-of-a-kind responses. You may want to count the responses in each group before you decide which to deal with. Or you may want to group together the muddy points that concern facts and principles, those that concern concepts, and those that concern skills.