

[P26] In-course assessment using 'seen' class tests: evaluation of their feedback role and their influence on study patterns

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Introduction

Part of the assessment of undergraduate Chemistry courses at Keele University involves the use of a 'seen' Class Test system that forms a component of the assessment of each module at levels 1 and 2. The 'seen' Class Test system (2003) replaced assessed 'assigned' problems, which students attempted in their own time and which suffered from a rather narrow focus on the curriculum, poor student engagement and plagiarism.

The 'seen' Class Test system was therefore originally designed with the aim of increasing student engagement across the breadth of the curriculum whilst seeking to achieve a more uniform distribution of student effort throughout the semester, rather than concentrating study effort in the weeks prior to the unseen exam. The 'seen' Class Test system therefore seeks to meet the following conditions of 'effective formative assessment' as specified by the FDTL4 FAST (Formative Assessment in Science Teaching) project (<http://www.open.ac.uk/science/fdtl/>, Gibbs and Simpson, 2004):

- Assessed tasks capture sufficient student time and effort.
- The tasks distribute student effort evenly across topics and weeks.
- The tasks engage students in productive learning activity.
- Feedback is provided quickly enough to be useful to students.
- Feedback is acted upon by students to improve their work or their learning.

The current operation of the 'seen' Class Test system is as follows: In each module two 1-hour tests account for 20% (2 x 10%) of the module mark. Each module has ~10 'seen' class test questions that are displayed on the modules sites within the VLE. Class tests take place at specified times throughout each semester and for each test the module tutor selects two questions. Students do not know in advance which questions will be used. Class tests are preceded by problem classes (usually 7 days prior to the class test), which employ different problems from those in the Class Tests, but which address the same curriculum material. The problem classes are intended to provide useful feedback to students on their grasp of the module material.

Assessment Experience Questionnaire Items	1 st Year 2004-2005 41 Responses	2 nd Year 2004-2005 16 Responses	1 st Year 2006-2007 42 Responses
	% Agree/Strongly Agree		
I have to study regularly if I want to do well on these modules	74%	69%	83%
Tackling the Class Test problems really makes me think	93%	88%	86%
The feedback helps me to understand things better	78%	93%	81%
The feedback shows me how to do better next time.	78%	86%	81%

Table 1: Student feedback of the 'seen' class tests

Student Feedback

Student feedback on their experiences of the 'seen' Class Tests was obtained using an Assessment Experience Questionnaire (AEQ, Brown, Gibbs and Glover, 2003). A selection of this feedback is given in **Table 1** and in representative student comments.

Student Comments

'The class tests force me to learn things in detail, to get the best marks I can for a given question, I then remember these details, even for questions that were never assessed by a class test. Details that would not otherwise be learned for an exam, or at least a memory of them are already in my mind when it comes to exam time. This makes exam questions relating to class test material more easy to recall'

'The class test system encourages me to study the course material. The fact that the questions are "seen" means more of the course is revised and allows me to see what is needed for the exam'.

'Makes you revise throughout the module instead of all at the end. Very useful, although we could do with going through them afterwards so we know the correct answer and why'

I believe it is a good system, forcing people to learn as you go along. It gives incentive to work at a time when there is usually not very much.

'I like that it test understanding. It makes clear the material you need to go over again'.

'It would be helpful to publish answers to all class test questions after the class test is over, i.e. for questions not on the test you don't know whether you would have done well'.

'The fact that they are 'seen' is helpful – allows more time to go back over things and understand topics more fully. A good system and 'model answers' are very helpful'.

'Very useful process – makes sure you keep revisiting/revising material – very good aid for learning'.

Conclusions and Future Developments

The evidence obtained from student feedback on the 'seen' Class Test system indicates a positive impact on the distribution of effort across the curriculum and throughout the semester (although there are clearly peaks in the vicinity of class tests). Students really do engage in tackling problems that they know may not appear in the Class Test. However, it is clear that whilst feedback on questions selected for tests (and therefore marked and returned) is rated quite highly by students, they generally don't receive sufficient feedback on questions that are not selected for the tests. Future developments may involve the use of more frequent, but shorter 'seen' class tests (see for example, Thin, 2006) with the use of peer-assessment to provide rapid and more effective feedback.

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References

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