

Questions to Ask Yourself as You Consider Using Clickers

Clickers can be incredibly useful for getting students engaged in class and helping them reach the learning goals you have set for them. However, it does take some planning to make sure you take full advantage of them. This guide is a list of questions intended to help you start planning, if you want to learn more or discuss your individual class the Center for Teaching and Learning is a resource that can help you think about how you want to use clickers.

As you design a course in which you plan to use clickers ask yourself these questions:

1. What do I want students to get out of using clickers in class?

There are a wide range of things for which instructors use clickers; these range from simply being able to repeat information from lecture to having students apply what they have learned to providing a provocative question that gets students started discussing a complicated topic. One of the most common and powerful ways to use clickers is to have students answer a question, discuss their answer with another student and then ask the students to answer again. How you decide to use clickers will structure your answer to many of the questions that follow.

2. What types of questions do I want to ask?

Once you decide on your goal for using clickers, you can think about designing questions. While many instructors have found clickers useful for quizzing students about factual material, students report that they respond best to clicker questions that ask more challenging questions. Instructors do this in a number of different ways. You might consider asking students a question that you do not expect them to know before you start covering the material that might get them curious about the subject. Or you might ask them to apply what they have learned to a case or a new problem. Finally, some instructors use clickers to ask students questions for which there is no clear answer and then ask students to defend their answer. The most important issue is to align the questions with both your content goals and your goals for how you want students to think.

3. How many questions do I want to include in each class session?

Even the most simple multiple-choice questions will take some time for students to answer. If you plan to have students answer and discuss that may take 5 to 10 minutes depending on the difficulty of the question you ask. Many instructors who use clickers find that they can cover less material in class than they could otherwise but are willing to give up that coverage because they feel clickers deepen students' understanding and engagement with the material. Whatever you decide to do, be aware that having students answer questions will take some time and that you need to think about the trade offs involved.

4. How much will clicker responses count toward students' grades?

Clickers have the ability to record individual student responses and to count them as either right or wrong. Alongside that power, many instructors have found that if students' responses are ungraded students will not take the clicker activities seriously (however much those activities might help them better understand the material.) So many instructors include clickers as a percentage of students' grades (anywhere from 5 %to 15%). You may want to give credit to students for any answer or you may want to give students credit only for right answers or you may want to develop a hybrid system (giving students slightly more credit for right answers or grading some exercises but not others). How you decide to grade should depend on what you want students to get out of the class.

5. What do I want to do with the answers to the questions?

In addition to the range of questions, you also have a number of choices about what to do with student answers. You can use them to illustrate demographics to the class or the range of possible answers to a question. Instructors often find that responses to clicker questions can tell them if the students are following the lecture or not. This can be helpful to students as long as you are willing to return to material that they clearly do not understand. In addition, you may want students to discuss their answers in class – either as a large group or in smaller groups. After class, some instructors post their clicker slides and answers after class to help students study.