

### Strategy: Assessing Students' Existing Knowledge on a Topic

Knowledge surveys provide a tool for instructors to use to gauge the level of students' existing knowledge on a topic. This can ensure that instruction builds on prior knowledge as a means for student engagement and increased higher-order thinking and learning.

### Origin

Barkley, E. (2010). *Student engagement techniques: A handbook for college faculty*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass.

Nuhfer, E. & Knipp, D. (2003). The knowledge survey: A tool for all reasons. In C. M. Wehlberg & S. Chadwick-Blossey (Eds.), *To improve the academy*, (pp. 59-78). San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass.

### Application

A knowledge survey can contain course or unit-level learning objectives or other key course concepts framed as questions or directions, here called prompts, that test students' knowledge of the topic.

Often, even if students can't directly answer the prompts, students' responses indicate their levels of confidence in their competence.

Here are the instructions for this survey:

*This is a survey to measure your knowledge of topics that we will discuss in this course. Our class will use this survey to measure individual and group learning progress in this course.*

*You don't actually answer the prompts on this survey; instead you rate (on a three-part scale) **your confidence to answer the prompts with your present knowledge**.*

*Please do your best to provide a totally honest assessment of your present knowledge since these results will be used to structure this course as well as measure your progress at the end of the course (you will re-take this survey).*

*For each question, please choose one of the following responses:*

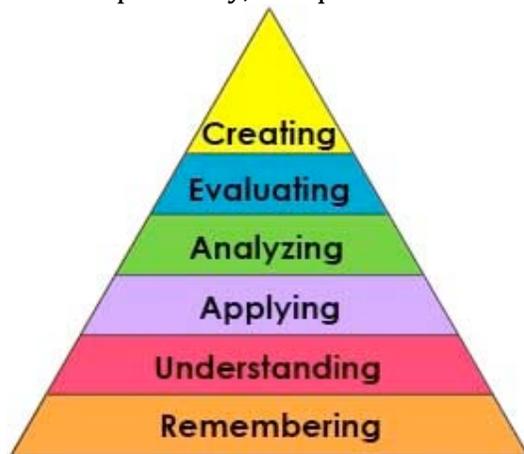
A	<i>You feel confident that you can now answer the question sufficiently for graded test purposes.</i>
B	<i>You feel you can now answer at least half of the question and/or you know precisely where you could quickly get the information needed to provide a comprehensive answer in 10 minutes for graded test purposes.</i>
C	<i>You feel you cannot adequately answer the question for graded test purposes at this time.</i>

The number of questions should be well suited to the amount of information you would like to collect about students' levels of knowledge.

Here is a sample survey from a communication course:

<i>A, B, or C</i>	<i>Bloom's level</i>	
	1	1. What is a social movement?
	1	2. What is a social movement organization?
	4	3. How is a social movement different than a social movement organization?
	1	4. What is rhetoric?
	2	5. Give an example of each of the rhetorical functions of social movements.
	2	6. List five social movements of the past or present.
	2	7. List five social movement organizations of the past or present.
	6	8. Evaluate the effectiveness of a social movement past or present.
	2	9. List five social movement leaders.
	4	10. Distinguish between at least three leaders within a social movement.
	4	11. How are social movements different than social issues?
	4	12. Compare the communication tools necessary for the success of a social movement.
	3	13. How are you civically engaged?
	2	14. Why do social movements involve civic engagement?
	5	15. Build a social movement campaign plan.
	4	16. Compare the social movements that college students are most involved in.
	2	17. Explain how social movements communicate with their members.
	6	18. Evaluate how technology has changed social movements.
	3	19. What social movements impact your life?
	3	20. Why should communication students study social movements?

Most importantly, the questions should draw from all six of the levels of Bloom's Taxonomy:



**Reflection**

- How does this compare to what you are already doing?
  
- What learning objectives/course content could benefit from a better understanding of students' prior knowledge?
  
- Develop a Knowledge Survey to use in one of your courses.