

# **eTools: Using Packback Questions in the Classroom**

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## **Introduction**

In an age of constant access to technology and social media, getting students to read about, engage with, and critically reflect on course content is increasingly difficult. As such, instructors are challenged with finding ways to authentically assess as well as motivate students to plan for and participate in a classroom discussion given that some students are “hand happy,” whereas other students are much more reticent. Packback Questions helps instructors create an environment that assists students in developing their understanding of the course material through effective participation and engagement in an online forum.

## **What is Packback Questions?**

Packback Questions is an online question and answer discussion platform that specializes in the management of open-ended, student-led class-content discussion that has the look and feel of social media. The goal of Packback Questions is to increase student confidence, curiosity, and higher order learning. This platform not only provides an online forum space for students, but it also provides both instructors and students with an effective experience in managing participation assessment.

Instructors are able to harbor an online community for their classes, whether it is a seminar or large lecture style of classroom. In managing this community, Packback

Questions aids in increasing student engagement outside of the classroom by supporting student critical thinking, conscientiousness, and communication with others in the classroom. The forum and curious nature of the platform further allows students to make connections between subjects, apply concepts to real-world experiences, and expect a safe environment for which their original thoughts and questions are rewarded. (And, interestingly for students, the company was featured on Shark Tank and financially supported by Dallas Mavericks owner, Mark Cuban.)

### **How can I get Packback Questions for use in the classroom?**

Packback Questions currently is free to instructors with a small cost (\$18) to each student. These costs are offset as the company then gives discounts to students in academic book rentals. Go to <https://www.packback.co/questions> to view a free demonstration of the Packback Questions services. This link also will provide you with an option to tour a sample community, view user feedback, and watch a Tedx Talk by one of the co-founders. Once you subscribe to Packback Questions, a Packback team member will assist you in creating a community for your course.

### **How can I use Packback Questions in the classroom?**

Packback Questions is meant to increase student participation and engagement through a student's natural curiosity. Specifically, Packback Questions can be used to:

1. *build classroom community.* By using Packback, students are provided opportunities to interact with one another between class sessions as they relate their

experiences to classroom content. In doing so, they begin the process of audience analysis needed in most communication classes. Packback also provides the opportunity for classes to interact with one another. For example, we have combined several honors sections to create communities between classes.

2. *foster critical thinking.* Using Bloom's Taxonomy, Packback provides several guidelines for posing and answering questions that move beyond course content. Packback provides moderators that will monitor student contributions and provide instruction on how to pose insightful questions and responses. They will remove knowledge level questions, anything too class specific, or duplicate answers, and provide coaching to prompt critical thinking.

3. *manage assessment of student engagement.* While instructors can provide discussion prompts as well as student feedback, Packback will work instructors to determine the grade percentage awarded to participation and provide them with weekly reports and classroom analytics. These reports reveal hot topics, top students, and top questions in the community, which can then be used to foster in-class discussions.

4. *maximize instructional time.* Because insightful discussion of course concepts takes place between class, instructors can highlight and reinforce the conversations in class. Packback offers several suggestions to help move the discussion into class. Instructors then can use the remaining class time to reinforce the content through experiential activities.

5. *allow reticent students to contribute to the discussion.* Although it is important to provide students the opportunity to articulate and defend ideas in class, some students are reticent to communicate orally in a classroom environment. Packback affords these students opportunities to demonstrate engagement with the course content and lend their voice to the conversation.

### **Conclusion**

Packback Questions is driven by student curiosity, which is demonstrated through student classroom participation and engagement. To assess student participation, students must have an outlet to express their curiosity. Packback Questions does so by providing a platform for students to engage in effective participation, both in and out of the classroom.