Use Bloom's Taxonomy to increase metacognition and encourage self-monitoring

Students who are more aware of their learning process can monitor, assess, and ultimately improve their own learning. Teaching students Bloom's Taxonomy is an effective way to increase students' metacognition.

Create a Reflection Journal in Blackboard's Course Portfolios

Reflection Journals are widely used across the disciplines to foster critical thinking, to reflect on one's own writing or assigned readings, or to reflect on clinical or service-learning experiences.

Using BB's paperless portfolios, instructors can:

- assign prompts to stimulate critical thinking (e.g. identify two underlying assumptions in a text; write a SEE-I on this concept; write 2-3 reasons to support your working thesis; describe a situation in which you witnessed an example of intellectual autonomy, etc.)
- conveniently respond to student entries
- assess student understanding of content
- prod students to read/prepare for class
- engage students in pre-writing to prepare for a formal writing assignment.
- use feedback to shape in-class discussion or activities as part of "Just in Time Teaching"
- efficiently administer short-answer Classroom Assessment Techniques like the "Minute Paper" or "The Muddiest Point"

My goals for first-year students in a writing course include getting them to think about their thinking and learning. Using Bloom's Taxonomy and responses from student portfolios in spring 2013, we discovered that they overwhelmingly prefer class activities higher up the Taxonomy, yet prefer evaluation methods (i.e., grading) at or near the bottom.

Collecting and using data on critical thinking via Blackboard ©

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Instructors striving to increase critical thinking and deep learning need frequent feedback from their students to increase their own and their students' understanding of what is occurring in the learning process.

- Blackboard offers practical ways to gather vital information without interrupting the flow of the class.
- Some Blackboard tools allow instructors to quickly collect and analyze assessment data in order to modify instruction "on the spot" to improve student learning outcomes or to heighten students' awareness of their own learning.
- Bloom's Taxonomy is a way to get students to think critically about their own learning.
- Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs) and other similar strategies also offer instructors a way to assess student learning and to push students to take more responsibility for their own learning, the first step toward becoming a life-long learner.

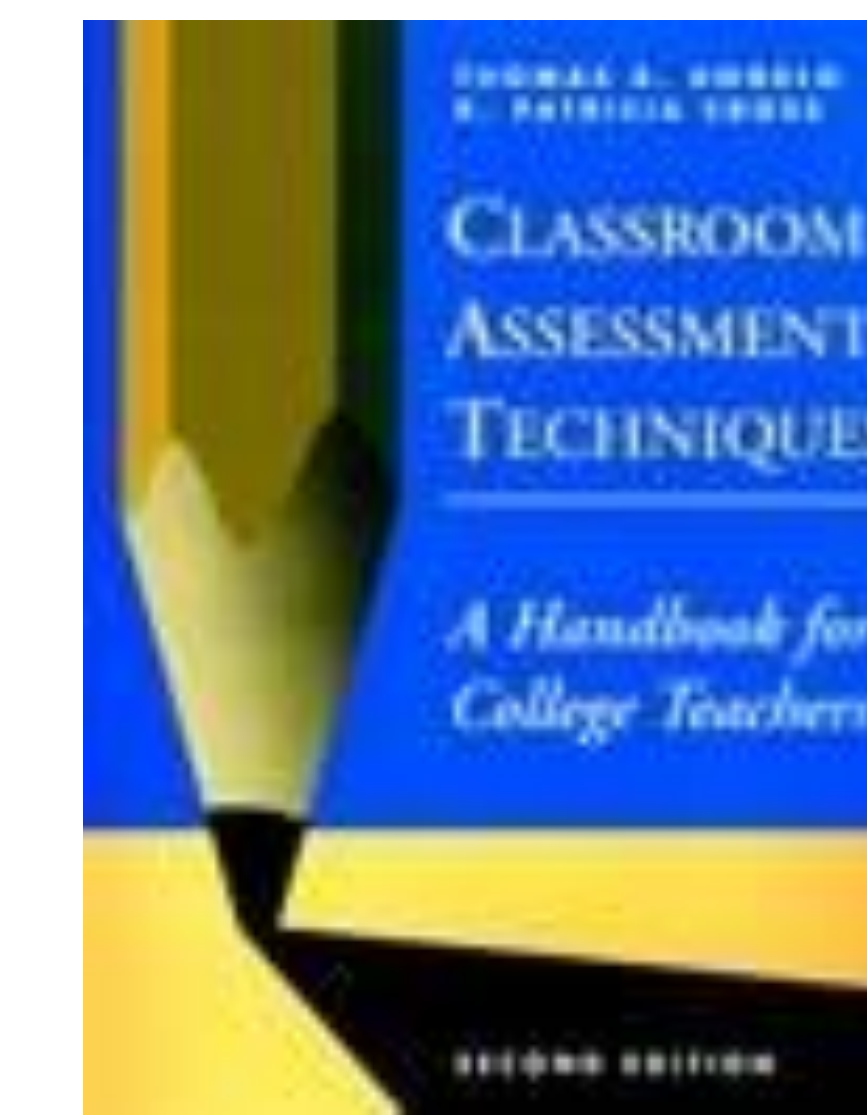## Use Blackboard's "survey" as a pre-reading activity to spur interest in a topic

Blackboard's "survey" is an option under "Tests" in the Grade Center. The results are anonymous. Students get credit through a "check" in the appropriate Grade Center column for completing the survey. (The same survey could be used as a post-reading assignment).

Carefully-devised, anonymous survey questions can:

- encourage students to read the assignment
- identify opinions which some students are unwilling to voice in class discussion
- make students more aware of their pre-existing opinions and assumptions about a topic
- lead students to consider the extent to which their opinions change after reading the assignment or gathering new information

I have used pre-reading/post-reading surveys on topics ranging from global warming to the value of general education courses for college students. These surveys provide useful information for instructor and students alike.

Use Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATS) and similar strategies to give students appropriate feedback earlier and more often

Thomas A. Angelo and K. Patricia Cross's handbook:
- Offers faculty fifty classroom assessment techniques (CATs).
- Is useful for assessing critical thinking.
- Can be used as a departure point to Invent your own CATs
- Modify Angelo and Cross's CATs to suit your course
- Modify Angelo and Cross's CATs to assess students' critical thinking.

Use Blackboard to administer Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs) or to allow students to "practice" with an anonymous quiz

Many students feel anxious when instructors who have emphasized critical thinking ask them to demonstrate their learning. Blackboard Tests and Quizzes include assessments with the final score and feedback for each incorrect answer returned only to the student.

Blackboard tests and surveys (graded or not) can:

- offer an efficient way to administer some critical thinking CATS like the defining features matrix or categorizing grid
- encourage students to "bring content" to face-to-face class sessions
- give students initial practice as they are learning the Paul-Elder model of Critical Thinking
- give students practice using the Paul-Elder Elements of Thought or Intellectual Standards to analyze written and visual texts