

# Making a course evaluation plan in 11 steps

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## Step 1. What is the object of your evaluation?

Determine what the “piece of education” is that you want to evaluate. This could be a lecture, a series of lectures, a course, a semester, or even an entire programme. Possibly also of interest: What contextual factors are influencing the object?

The steps listed below focus on making a plan for course evaluation.

## Step 2. What is the function of the plan?

Decide what you want the plan to deliver. Is it an overall impression of the quality of the course that you're interested in, or do you need to have a detailed image of specific aspects of the quality of the course? As to the latter: you might for example want to focus on the study book, or on the lecturer.

## Step 3. What is your goal for evaluating this object?

Are you evaluating to provide accountability for the “piece of education” that is the object of your evaluation? Or is educational improvement your goal? Or maybe both are?

- In case of giving account: to whom? What would this person need to know?

- In case of improvement: are there any clues about potential problems or improvements?

Evaluation is mainly about (assuring and) improving the quality of education. Sometimes however, giving account is also very important, for example in case of a self-evaluation (as part of a formal accreditation process).

## Step 4. What would you like to know about your evaluation object?

Phrase your main question or hypothesis: the single most important question you want to be able to answer by looking at your evaluation results. Phrase this question as specific as possible.

*For example:*

- Example question 1. How do the learning results of the course “Introduction to sociology” relate to the learning goals that were set for the course and how can this be improved?
- Example question 2. How is the course “Design Engineering” being valued by teaching staff and students and what aspects of the course can be improved?

When phrasing your main question, also think about the following question: what is the nature of the evaluation? Is it a process or a product evaluation? Or a combination of both?

- Product evaluation focuses on learning results and student performance. What are the learning results in relation to the learning goals of the course? This can be determined in an objective way (assessment of learning results) as well as in a subjective way (what is the student's perception of what they have learned?) See also: example question 1.
- Process evaluation is aimed at evaluating the teaching and learning process. Was the course carried out as planned? Is the structure of the course clear to students? How are different aspects of the course (teacher, course materials, teaching methods, assessment, feasibility, etc.) being valued by students? See also: example question 2.

In many cases, a combination of product and process evaluation is at hand. It is good, however, to make a clear distinction between these two.

## Step 5. What are your evaluation questions?

The main question of the hypothesis can be divided into several sub questions in which one aspect of the course you are evaluating is addressed. This sub questions will provide the actual evaluation questions.

The evaluation outcomes for the sub questions can lead to choices to be made by the lecturer and/or programme management. It is a good thing to consider these possible eventual choices in phrasing the sub questions. For example:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Are the teaching methods that were used, in line with the learning goals of the course?</li> <li>▪ Does the planned study load of the course match the actual study load?</li> <li>▪ Is the content of the course sufficiently challenging for students?</li> <li>▪ Are the study materials that were used suitable for the course?</li> </ul>	<p><i>For all questions: If not, what can be done to improve this?</i></p>
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*Criteria for phrasing evaluation questions:*

- phrased as an interrogative sentence (interrogative words like 'where' are used in questions (*Where is he going?*) and in interrogative content clauses (*I wonder where he is going*)
- offering a choice from two or more realistic and specified alternatives
- aimed at aspects of education which can realistically be changed
- to be answered by using practical and feasible evaluation methods
- not aimed at aspects already set to be changed
- design the questionnaire so that the data analysis and reporting will be efficient and effective.

### **Step 6. How will you evaluate?**

Determine the methods you will use to collect the information needed to answer your evaluation questions.

For example:

- observation of lectures
- interviews with involved teaching staff
- an evaluation panel with course participants
- analysis of assessment data
- a handwritten, machine-read or online questionnaire
- analysis of website log files
- etc ...

### **Step 7. Who (or what) are your sources of information?**

Determine what sources you will use for collection of your data. Who will you interview / what will you observe, etc. (e.g. students, teachers, managers, support staff, alumni, etc.),

### **Step 8. Who will carry out the evaluation?**

Will you do this yourself as the course-teacher or will this be done by students or fellow-teachers? Or is there an independent evaluation committee who will carry out the evaluation?

*Remark 1: preferably, the person who teaches the course or participates in the course, the evaluator and the person taking the decision based on the evaluation results are three different persons. For example: decision-maker = programme director, evaluator = evaluation committee. In actual practice this often isn't feasible.*

*Remark 2: some Faculties of our university run standardized and centralized evaluation schemes.*

### **Step 9. When (and how) will the evaluation take place?**

Plan how you will carry out your evaluation (evaluation procedure). If for example you plan to use questionnaires: when and how will you distribute these amongst the respondents? How to make the response rate as high as possible?

### **Step 10. What should the results of the evaluation look like?**

In what format will you present the evaluation results? Will it be a written evaluation report or something else? Who will have access to the results? How will the results be distributed amongst stakeholders?

### **Step 11. What will you do with the evaluation results?**

Who will take a decision based on the evaluation results? Based on which criteria? (target values or quality indicators)

Follow-up: who will specify actions for improvement? When and by whom will these actions be carried out?

### **After making your course evaluation plan ...**

- Construction of evaluation instruments (questionnaires, interview format, analysis tool, etc.) based on the evaluation questions and the methods chosen (step 5 – 7).
- Executing the evaluation according to plan (step 8 – 9) **(Check)**
- Analysis of evaluation results
- Drawing conclusions (based on previously set target aims)
- Deliverance of evaluation report (step 10)
- Deciding on actions to undertake and planning the execution thereof (step 11) **(Act)**
- Preparation of next execution of the course **(Plan)**
- Execution of the course in new or improved format **(Do)**
- Evaluation of the new or improved course **(Check)**
- Etc ...

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#### References (in Dutch):

- Oriëntatie op Evaluatie (B. Camstra, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 1977)
- Evaluatieplan (E.B. Smuling, Universiteit Twente, 2003)
- Hoe maakt je een evaluatieplan? (J. van den Berg, Universiteit Twente, 2007)
- Leren en doceren (Kallenberg e.a., 1<sup>e</sup> druk, 2000)

#### References (in English):

- Heather Fry, Steve Ketteridge and Stephanie Marshall (Ed.'s), A Handbook for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: Enhancing Academic Practice. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. Routledge. 186-211

#### Weblinks (in English):

- Course evaluation methods. <http://reviewing.co.uk/evaluation/methods1.htm>
- Evaluation Cookbook Online: <http://www.icbl.hw.ac.uk/ltidi/cookbook/contents.html>