

Quick Sort Approach – Open-ended Comments

This approach is designed to identify major ideas found within open-ended responses without taking a great deal of time. This way of sorting and analyzing is ideal if you need to identify broad themes in a short amount of time.

1. Read through open-ended responses one question at a time.
2. Initially sort responses into overall positive and overall negative piles.
 - a. An alternative approach is to sort first by major themes and then by positive and negative within those themes.
3. Read through the positive pile and sort them according to the major point being made.
 - a. Often open-ended responses will contain several different points, so keep it simple by identifying what stands out the most.
4. Begin with the pile with the most responses and read through them looking for specific details about what is working well.
 - a. Identify several comments that represent the range of responses.
5. Continue working through the positive comments from piles with the most to least number of responses.
 - a. You may want to pull together all the single responses together into a catchall category like "Other."
6. Repeat steps #3-5 for the negative stack of responses.
 - a. One challenge is not to fixate on "one-off" negative comments, but focus efforts on issues and recommendations, which are supported by the majority of students.
7. Compare the major themes that emerged from the positive and negative piles to identify areas where changes may need to be made this semester.
 - a. Are there common areas regarding particular instructional approaches or recommendations for change?
 - b. You may also uncover ideas for changes that can be addressed the next time you teach the course.
8. Repeat steps #1-7 for each of the remaining open-ended questions.
9. Reflect upon what you are striving to accomplish with this course, your current instructional approaches, and the recommendations for change that could help improve student learning.
10. Summarize the feedback by major themes include your comments about what changes will be made this semester, next semester, and what changes will not be made and why.

