How many times have you asked a class if they have any questions only to be met by silence? In our educational culture, we value the students who engage with our readings, ask questions during our lectures, and make connections between our courses and the world around them. We relish the students who thrive in this environment, and we lament to each other in our hallways and workrooms when our classes seem to lack such students. We forget that many of our students may not be comfortable with our expectations for such academic discourse. Some have been discouraged from asking questions due to peer ridicule or disengaged teachers. Others come from cultures where asking questions is seen as a sign of disrespect or an indication of poor teaching. Here is a quick classroom assessment technique that fosters a classroom culture of asking questions, engages students in the topic of the day, and encourages students to ask more questions.

At the beginning of the semester, I require all students to complete three statements at the end of each class. If I’m concerned that students won’t complete the forms, I tell them that I will use these forms to track attendance and participation. Here are the statements:

1. Today I learned that …
2. I’m confused about …
3. My question is …

I usually provide these statements on a half sheet of paper during the last five minutes of class. A quick review of student responses lets me know what concepts are clear for the students, and what concepts I might need to review during the next class session. I also use this information to reinforce the value of asking questions by reporting out at the next class. Some report out ideas include:

1. The Top Three Questions Are … (This reinforces the idea that many students have the same question and encourages students to ask questions in the future because they are not alone.)
2. PayDay - Reward the student with the best question with a PayDay bar.
3. Can You Answer This Question? Put a student question from the previous class session on the board, and let students work in groups to answer the question.

After a few weeks, students are quick to complete the statements at the end of class, but, more importantly, they readily ask questions during the class session. Later in the semester, I have the forms available at the end of class, but don’t require every student to complete a form at every class session. This is also a great technique for review before an exam.