



# Reflections on the one-minute paper



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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 11 March 2015

Received in revised form 26 June 2015

Accepted 26 June 2015

Available online 1 August 2015

### JEL classifications:

A12

A20

A22

### Keywords:

One-minute paper

Economics lecture

Students' perception

Lecturer effectiveness

## ABSTRACT

This paper captures the perceptions of both a new academic and his students on the use of the one-minute paper (OMP). Much of the originality of this paper derives from the multi-layered qualitative approach which provides a deeper insight into the direct and indirect mechanism through which the OMP is perceived to work. This paper argues that, more than the prevailing literature suggests, in order to increase the benefits of using the OMP then considerable investment in time is required. The findings show that the academic's cost in terms of time is greatest when asking 'lecturer effectiveness' type questions, but the benefits derived are potentially longer term than standard 'lecture content' based question. Students value the use of the OMP, principally because it demonstrates respect for them; this helps to create an atmosphere of trust, which can encourage engagement and an active approach to student learning. The research informs a discussion on how practical implementation techniques can be used to maximise the benefits and limit the costs.

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## 1. Introduction

The effectiveness of the 'traditional lecture' as a vehicle for student learning has been questioned with educationalists espousing the value of a more dialogic approach (Cannon and Newble, 2000). At the same time, academia in the UK is entering a transformative period as it embeds itself in a market-based system where costs are weighed against the quality of the learning experience (Exley and Dennick, 2009). Traditional economics lectures are an efficient mechanism to 'transmit' information but it is less clear how effective they are at enabling students to construct deep and transformative knowledge. In response to these criticisms, various innovations have been implemented in an attempt to improve the student learning experience. This paper analyses one such innovation, the one-minute paper (OMP), by examining both lecturer and students' reflections on using the OMP in the economics lecture.

The OMP – also known as the one-minute wonder or the half page paper – is a diagnostic and formative classroom assessment technique which has become aligned with the philosophy of continuous quality improvement (Soetaert, 1998). The OMP is a valuable tool, not only to engage students and provide the lecturer with early feedback on classroom learning, but also to provide the lecturer with an insight into the perceived effectiveness of their teaching practices (Vonderwell, 2004).

To use the OMP, the lecturer typically brings the lecture to a close a minute or so before the end of the timeslot and asks the students to answer two questions; these are usually based on student understanding of content. For example the lecturer can gauge student comprehension by asking "What was the most important concept you learned in the lesson today?" and "What concepts were less clear in the lecture today?" Students reply to these questions either by filling in a pre-prepared

Abbreviations: OMP, one-minute paper; RL, reflective log; FG, focus group; SR, student response.

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response slip, or by using a ‘half page’ scrap of paper. These responses are generally collected anonymously at the end of the lecture.

Prior research suggests there are many potential benefits and limited costs of using the OMP, yet it is still not widely used in the economics lecture. The reasons suggested include a lack of knowledge of the technique itself; lecturers being unconvinced about the benefits and concerned about the costs; and instructors preferring to use other means of collecting feedback—such as asking student questions in lectures or using remote polling devices. This paper in itself raises awareness of the technique, albeit only to those educators already engaged with the teaching methods literature; provides new insights into the benefit and costs; and argues that OMP should supplement, not supplant, other progressive lecturing techniques.

Previous studies have mostly focussed on either lecturer or students’ perceptions; this analysis unusually draws from both which provides a broader insight into the dynamics the OMP has on both teaching and learning, particularly in the context of the economics lecture. It analyses lecturer reflections documented in a reflective log (RL), students’ reflections recorded in OMP responses, and discussions from a student focus group (FG).

## 2. Literature review

Sloman and Mitchell (2002) recognise that there are many inherent problems with the traditional (economics) lecture, but emphasise its resilience and longevity in academic practice. They promote a progressive approach to lecturing, suggesting ways in which the economics lecture can be shaped to better meet student learning needs and achieve a deep, as opposed to surface or strategic, learning experience (Marton and Säljö, 1976; Ramsden 1992). Sloman and Mitchell (2002) suggest that a deep learning experience is encouraged when students have a choice over content and study methods, knowledge is built on previous experience, and students are actively involved in their learning. Lecturing then becomes a mechanism for increasing engagement, comprehension and encouraging cognitive reflection—a skill linked with positive effects on exam performance in economics classes (Orlov and Roufagalas, 2012). This learner-centric approach is embraced by others who believes that the main role of the lecturer is to inspire, influence and engage (Birdi, 2013; Gunderman, 2013).

The OMP is based on a two-way flow of information which has the potential to encourage engagement and reflection, leading to a more active approach to learning (Biggs, 2003; Gibbs and Habeshaw, 1989; Kolb, 1984). In part, this is because the OMP can help build relationships between the student and lecturer, which Brockbank and McGill (2007), p. 54 report as an important factor for deep learning to occur:

“the facilitation of significant learning rests upon . . . qualities that exist in the personal relationship between the facilitator and learner”.

However, despite this theoretical argument, Harwood (1996), p. 230 acknowledges that the evidence for the effectiveness of the OMP is weak:

“rarely, however, have I seen any evidence that students are actively engaged because of this exercise”.

This partly reflects the fact that the operationalisation of approach is subject to much debate (Anderson and Burns, 2013). For example, instead of feedback to the whole class, Lucas (2010) gave personalised feedback to students using email. The benefits of this approach were gauging individual misunderstanding and establishing personal contact, but the effectiveness of this approach was questioned due to its lack of anonymity. Ludwig (1995), p. 18 used the OMP to enhance discussion in a multicultural seminar and reported that “anonymity of responses encourages honesty and is better received than if it came from an identifiable individual”. Meagher and Whelan (2001) reviewed student evaluations by economics and business students and concluded that lack of anonymity influenced any assessment.

Anderson and Burns (2013) chronicled students’ perception of learning gains when using the OMP. Students indicated that the OMP helped them to construct knowledge by building a connection between their prior knowledge and key ideas. Stead (2005) also provided evidence of favourable student perceptions of the OMP, concluding that benefits to both students and teachers are sizeable, particularly for the small amount of time and effort involved. Much of the literature presents either the student, or the lecturer perspective; this paper examines both perceptions together. This approach allows for a broader analysis of the mechanism through which the OMP affects both learning and teaching, and the interactions between the two.

Quantitative approaches have provided support to the claims that the OMP are effective at improving student learning outcomes. For example, Chizmar and Ostrosky (1998) conducted an experiment to empirically estimate the effect of using an OMP in an introductory economics course. They concluded that OMP enhances economic knowledge and that this effect was independent of instructor or students’ ability level.

The OMP is not without costs. For example, Sloman and Mitchell (2002) question whether face-to-face contact time is the most efficient way to clarify student understandings. In order to release face-to-face contact time, they suggested using other solutions such as discussion boards and student self-support groups. Format and content of the OMP have been subject to numerous variations. In this tradition, this paper presents the findings from using two different types of questions – lecturer effectiveness and lecture content questions – to assess the costs and benefits associated with each.

Stead (2005) also raised concerns that the OMP can be used to excess and cited evidence of declining response rates as an indication of this. Harwood (1996) on the other-hand offers an alternative perspective; he reported that as response rates dropped, engagement in the lectures increased, suggesting that the OMP raised student confidence to a level where they are willing to ask questions during the lecture, rather than just waiting till the end to fill in the OMP. Falling response rates are a

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