

## It's Not a Clicker, It's a *Plicker*

*Technology can be our best friend, and technology can also be the biggest party pooper of our lives. ---Steven Spielberg*

Some of us are intrigued by student response systems, but prefer that students keep their phones out of their hands during class. In this situation, the *Plicker* system is an interesting possibility because students use cards, and the technology stays in the instructor's hands. (For "*Plicker*," think paper + clicker.) Here's how it works:

- Each student has a card with a different bar code.
- The teacher poses a question, and students rotate their cards to choose A, B, C, or D.
- The teacher scans the room with a smart phone or iPad.
- The *Plicker* software records each student's answer and also prepares a graph with the distribution of student responses.

Like the more familiar clicker systems, *Plicker* provides retrieval practice and quick formative feedback. Students know right away if they can solve the equation or define the key term. The instructor also knows if a topic needs more attention. Because the software records each individual student's answer (and because each student has a different card), *Plicker* can easily work for graded quizzes, too.

*Plicker* can also be used in a survey mode. Here the instructor asks a question without a right or wrong answer. Displaying the distribution of answers sets the stage for a discussion of alternative opinions on a controversial subject or contrasting interpretations of a text.

Like any teaching tool, *Plicker* has its strengths and weaknesses. On the positive side, *Plicker* gets lots of students involved and provides immediate feedback on their learning; moreover, it does that without exposing students to the tempting distractions of the internet. On the negative side, the system involves some advance preparation, since instructors must prepare their questions in advance.

The *Plicker* software and cards are a free download. The system works on Apple or Android devices and can be used by 63 students per class.

--Brian McBurnett (chemistry)

What to learn more?

Visit the *Plickers* site <https://www.plickers.com/> or take a look at a tutorial <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qpx56rjCVjQ>