

2015-2016 Teaching Issues Writing Consortium

Teaching Tips

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Facts and Fantasies about How Students Learn

What is the best way to learn content and skills in a new discipline? How much can we trust our intuitions about how we learn to guide decisions about how we should study new material?

Students and instructors wrestle with these questions. Popular culture is rife with advice about how to study, but not all of this advice is well-grounded in evidence.

One common misconception about learning is that individuals have specific “learning styles” (Lilienfeld, Lynn, Ruscio, & Beyerstein, 2009). An internet search will quickly produce web sites with questionnaires and diagnostic tests that claim to determine your optimal learning style, often categorized in terms of sensory modalities (visual learners, verbal learners, kinesthetic learners). These assessments depend on self-reported preferences to engage with material in one form or another (e.g., pictures, graphics, reading, listening, writing, manipulating objects or movement). Students do prefer to engage in some learning activities more than others. However, their preferences may not coincide with activities that work best as study strategies and create the largest benefit for learning. Pashler, McDaniel, Roher and Bjork (2009) reviewed the research literature on learning styles and found little support for the common belief that instructional strategies work best when they align with a student’s “learning style.” They report that, in many cases, students who used a “preferred learning style” learnt less than students who use a non-preferred learning style.

If learning styles don’t predict effective teaching strategies, can we ignore student preferences for how we present information and just lecture? Although little evidence supports the value of matching presentation modality to learning preference, an extensive body of research supports the value of presenting information in a variety of modalities to improve retention and retrieval. Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, Lovett and Norman (2010), Pashler, Bain, Bottge, Graesser, Koedinger, McDaniel and Metcalfe (2007), and Winne & Nesbit (2010) review evidence-based strategies for effective teaching and learning. A selected list of their recommendations appears below.

Effective Learning Strategies

- Present material in a variety of modalities: visual (pictures and graphics) and verbal (written and spoken).
- Provide concrete examples as well as abstract explanations of concepts. Discuss the connection between characteristics of the concrete examples and key elements of the abstract representation.
- Distribute learning activities over time. Repeated exposure and practice of new material with intervals of time (a few weeks) produces longer-term learning.
- Interleave review of examples of solved problems with activities that require students to solve problems independently. As expertise and problem-solving skill increase, ask

students to spend less time studying examples of solved problems and more time working independently to solve new problems.

- Use quizzes and exams as opportunities to learn. Tests require students to practice retrieving information from memory. Students get feedback during the test and from their test scores about how well they encoded new material and appropriate retrieval cues. Ask students to reflect on how they prepared for an exam and consider whether using a different study strategy might improve future test performance. Post-exam reflections (so-called “exam wrappers”) help students calibrate their judgments about how well they have prepared and how much they have learned. These insights can guide their choices for future study activities.

Resources

Ambrose, S. A., Bridges, M. W., DiPietro, M., Lovett, M. C., & Norman, M. K. (2010). *How learning works: Seven research-based principles for smart teaching*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Lilienfeld, S. O., Lynn, S. J., Ruscio, J. & Beyerstein, B. L. (2009). *50 great myths of popular psychology: Shattering widespread misconceptions about human behavior*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Pashler, H., McDaniel, M., Rohrer, D., & Bjork, R. (2009). Learning styles: concepts and evidence. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 9, 105-119.

Pashler, H., Bain, P. Bottge, B., Graesser, A., Koedinger, K., McDaniel, M., & Metcalfe, J. (2007). *Organizing instruction and study to improve student learning* (NCER 2007-2004). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Research, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://ncer.ed.gov>.

Winne, P. H., & Nesbit, J. C. (2010). The psychology of academic achievement. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 61, 653-678.

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Course Syllabus

When creating your syllabus, consider the message you want to convey to your students. The syllabus is likely the student's first point of contact with you. Often, they access the syllabus prior to coming to class, so it's important to consider the tone and subliminal messages within your syllabus. A learner-centered syllabus is suggested, as this conveys to the student that you care about their learning and you want them to have a clear understanding about the course and your expectations. Avoid using threatening language (e.g., "No late assignments will be accepted! EVER! So, turn in your assignments on time!"). While this states the policy on late assignments, it also makes the professor seem unapproachable and, perhaps, someone students should fear. Alternatively, a learner-centered syllabus might use language like, "To have the opportunity to perform well in this course, you should submit assignments by the deadline, as no late assignments will be accepted. I suggest putting all of the deadlines in your planner with a reminder prior to the deadline so you can set yourself up for success." Bottom line: Consider the tone of your syllabus.

Resources

Bain, K. (2004). *What the best college teachers do*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard.

Huba, M. E., & Freed, J. E. (2000). *Learner-centered assessment on college campuses: Shifting the focus from teaching to learning*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

O'Brien, J. G., Millis, B. J., & Cohen, M. W. (2008). *The course syllabus: A learning-centered approach*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass

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Make Courses More Engaging – and More Manageable – with Technology

A Learning Management System (Blackboard; Bb) can be a powerful tool when it comes to organizing your course content and communicating with your students. It can also make your work simpler, with less time spent preparing handouts and collecting papers, and more time spent teaching and interacting with students. Here are some ways you can leverage Bb to take advantage of its features.

Better Organization

1. **Make your course [available](#) to your students in Bb.** Note: course shells are created automatically, and students are enrolled into these courses upon registration. The courses are **not** made available to students automatically. You need to do so **manually** (takes about 30 seconds or so) for students to have access to the materials you post in Bb.
2. **Upload your syllabus to the course shell in Bb.** If you make any changes to the syllabus during the semester, you can easily repost your updated syllabus to the course shell and students will have immediate access to it.
3. **Create a “Schedule of Dates.”** List important dates, course topics, study materials and assignments, and post it as a separate document. Students can refer to this document quickly for the most relevant information in order to be prepared for class.
4. **Post your course materials to Bb.** Save all that time you spend at the photocopier by posting handouts, related course readings, references and assignments in your course. If everything’s available to the students on Bb, you won’t need to worry about misplaced materials. Simply create Weekly Folders and post materials relevant for each week to help your students stay on track.

Better Communication

1. **Create a welcome announcement** for your students and send it as an email. Welcome your students to your course virtually even before they come to class. You can send a welcome email through Bb’s Announcements feature. Include a link to the syllabus and ask the students to review it prior to the first class meeting. Then, on the first day of class, highlight only the most important elements of the syllabus and start with your first unit. You can ask students to read the syllabus and take a Syllabus Quiz, which can be automatically graded in Bb.
2. **Create a “Virtual Office.”** Set up a separate forum on the discussion board called “Instructor’s Office.” Use this forum as a location for students to post questions related to the course content or to an assignment. All students can see the responses, so you answer each question only once, and all students receive the same information. As with the

course Announcements, students who miss a class will still be able to access the information.

3. **Use Bb's Announcements tool to send reminders, notifications and updates.** This is probably one of the easiest ways to communicate with your students, and it has the added benefit that all messages are posted in the course shell on the Announcements page. You can easily see what you have shared with your class earlier in the semester. Students who don't check their email, or who delete their email, can still find the information.
4. **Create a Discussion Board on a specific topic.** It can take as little as 5 minutes to set it up and can really help your students learn and achieve learning goals by engaging them with course materials and each other. You can simply ask students to respond to a question on the discussion board related to course readings, share their experiences, come up with examples and share resources. You can also assign students to lead a weekly discussion.

Each of these items can be implemented quickly and easily, and together they can have a significant impact on your course!

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How Accurate are Your Assumptions about the Students in Your Class?

How much do you know about the students enrolled in your class? When was the last time you checked your assumptions about how much time your students spend studying versus working or playing, how motivated they are to learn, or how well prepared they are to tackle the content and skills in your course? Even if you reviewed the most current [Beloit Mindset list](#), how well do the descriptions of students from the current entering class of students align with the students sitting in your classroom?

Holding faulty assumptions about student comprehension and motivation emerged as the second most common mistake made by instructors of large lecture classes (Richards & Velasquez, 2014). Faulty assumptions can misrepresent the actual characteristics of students and undermine an instructor's ability to build rapport with students; worse, faulty assumptions can interfere with the learning process.

Faulty assumptions might include:

- Instructors overestimate the quantity and quality of prior knowledge, particularly for first-year students in introductory level courses. They may cover basic material too quickly (or not at all), believing this is a review. In fact, students might be experiencing this material for the first time.
- Instructors assume that their explanations are understood by students and move on to new material before students fully understand the content and the explanations.
- Instructors over-estimate or under-estimate student interest and motivation to learn the course content.

How to correct faulty assumptions?

Use a pre-class survey to gather information about students' previous learning experiences, determine how comfortable they now are with course content and learn about their expectations for the course. Include a few questions to identify students' other interests. When it makes sense to do so, connect course content and skill to these interests to highlight the relevance of the course to things that students already find motivating and interesting.

Use in-class writing assignments or clicker questions to directly evaluate how well students understand key concepts. Ask students to spend 5 minutes writing a paraphrase of an explanation of a key concept you've just discussed in lecture. Or ask students to take 5 minutes at the end of class to describe any concepts discussed in class that continue to confuse them (muddiest point paper). If you discover that large numbers of students are still confused, you will only lose them permanently if you do not take some time and attempt to clarify the concept.

Request formative feedback from your students about the class with three questions:

- What am I doing in class that *helps you learn*?
- What am I doing in class that *does not help your learn*?
- What might I do differently to *improve your ability to learn*?

Resources

Richards, K. A. R., & Velasquez, J. D. (2014). First-year students' perceptions of instruction in large lectures: The top-10 mistakes made by instructors. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, 25 (2), 25-55.

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Using Background Knowledge Probes

In the classic book, *Classroom Assessment Techniques* by Angelo and Cross (copies in most college libraries), the authors share several methods for ascertaining what students know and what they don't as a way for guiding faculty in planning course content or tutorial support for students who do not have adequate prerequisite knowledge for a course. The Background Knowledge Probe (BKP) is one of those methods. It is particularly useful in disciplinary areas where students are likely to have had courses in high school or are required to have taken another course as a prerequisite to yours. They are also useful in documenting pre-post knowledge gains. For example, you can give them a host of multiple-choice or open-ended questions (copy of your comprehensive final exam?) and have them code each question as follows:

1. I don't even recognize the content of this question.
2. I can't answer the question but know where I can look it up.
3. I know the answer to this question.
4. I know the answer and could give at least one example.
5. I know this well enough to teach my classmates about it.

When using a BKP on the first day of class, collect them for a whole-class analysis on what students know – this can be enlightening and helpful in knowing where to start.

Alternatively, BKPs can be useful to students in helping them identify which areas they are weak in and need to devote study time in preparing for a final exam. In this case, you can give them randomized questions from a test bank over the same content your test items measure and have them rate the questions as above. Next, the students can work in study groups to locate the information for each item in the textbook, class notes, etc., marking page numbers on the BKP for later studying. Active discussion of the items and sharing notes can be a good review also!

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Innovative Ways to Prevent Conflict in Student Groups

[Peace is not absence of conflict, it is the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means.](#)

-- Ronald Reagan

[Student Group Work Conflict](#) video (5:51)

Do your semester group projects frequently result with unmanageable student conflict? Have you already tried consequence-oriented strategies (e.g., group grade, peer evaluations to reduce grades, threats to fire a group member or professor intervention) without success? Consider these preventative strategies:

- Start the first day of class with an icebreaker prompt allowing students to “vent” past negative group work experiences (e.g., before students are grouped, ask “what has been your experience with group work and what should group members do to make it a positive experience?”); this creates a common bond, actually decreasing their anxiety and increasing motivation.
- Give students a conflict styles [inventory](#) to learn more about their communication tendency.
- Ask groups to create an action plan or contract for **when** conflicts occur.
- Use class time to introduce conflict case studies; ask students to brainstorm multiple ways to respond.

All of our students will one day be on a job interview and asked, “tell me about a past conflict and how did you handle it.” Instead of being frustrated with their student group conflicts today, help them create a rock-star response that lands them a job.

Resources

Huang, L.S. (2014). Students riding on coattails during group work? Five simple ideas to try. *Faculty Focus*, September, 29. <http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-teaching-strategies/students-riding-coattails-group-work-five-simple-ideas-try/>

Weimer, M. (2010). Group work recommendations. *Faculty Focus*, June 1. <http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-teaching-strategies/group-work-recommendations/>

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Negotiating Your Course Curriculum: What, How, When and Where?

Negotiated curriculum, also known as integrated, co-designed or co-constructed curriculum, is “a dynamic process in which what is taught and learned (the curriculum) is negotiated between teacher and students, rather than being solely pre-determined by the teacher” (Edwards, 2011, p. 144). Negotiating the what, how, when and where of a course gives students greater ownership of their learning experience, increases student motivation and fosters heightened engagement in the learning process. Harris (2010) explains: “the idea is that dialog will encourage learners to understand their responsibility in their own learning process, motivating them to engage positively in its activities so that they can accomplish the objectives they have helped determine” (p. 23).

Used successfully in elementary through graduate-level college classrooms, negotiated curriculum increases students’ self-responsibility for learning in a format that offers greater flexibility in terms of scheduling and how learning time is spent (Yazid, Musa, Ghaffar, Noor, Azamri, & Majid, 2013). Perhaps more importantly, negotiated curriculum models an innovative pedagogical approach that can be replicated across the educational system to create more authentic learning experiences for students (Edwards, 2011).

A Step-by-Step Process

Chua (2015), a doctoral candidate who teaches classes for the School of Engineering Education at Purdue University, offers the following steps for negotiating curriculum with college students:

- **Step 0: Prep the class to expect the process.** Preparation may take the form of a “heads up” that students will have a voice in the design of the course (Chua, 2015), providing students with materials in advance of the first day of class (Harris, 2010) or asking students to complete a survey or other pre-assessment measure to stimulate their thinking about the course and what they hope to get out of it.
- **Step 1: Brainstorm learning objectives/outcomes as a class.** Generally occurring on the first day of class, brainstorming may involve small-group to whole-class discussion, written comments or one-on-one conferences with the course instructor. Variety is important here. As Chua (2015) explains, “Not everyone’s voice is equally comfortable in every space” (para. 6).
- **Step 2: Converge on learning outcomes via some collaborative process.** At this point, students’ ideas must be categorized and prioritized, and some may be voted out. Professional standards or mandated course learning objectives may provide a framework within which student-generated objectives are integrated, or students’ objectives may be added to a required list. From the beginning, the course instructor should make it clear that he or she has final authority over all aspects of the course, even though student input

is highly valued (Chua, 2015; Yazid et al., 2013). Harris (2010) explains that it is the course instructor's responsibility to "judiciously tailor the process not only to student wishes and participative ability but also to such circumstances as course or institutional objectives" (p. 24).

- **Step 3: Repeat steps #1 and #2 for assessments.** Next, it is time for students to consider how they will demonstrate their newfound knowledge and skills. If your course is not guided by mandated content objectives, Fallahi (2011) suggests aligning assessments with Fink's (2003) taxonomy of significant learning: Foundational Knowledge, Application, Integration, Human Dimension, Caring, and Learning How to Learn. For example, in her undergraduate life development course, Fallahi assesses Foundational Knowledge using multiple choice questions, Application and Integration through case studies, Human Dimension through reflective writings and Caring through a Likert scale self-assessment.
- **Step 4: Repeat steps #1 and #2 for pedagogy.** Once the class has agreed on the course assessments, in-class and outside-of-class activities should be intentionally designed to equip students for successfully completing the assessments (Chua, 2015). For example, in re-designing her life development course, Fallahi (2011) organized a variety of class activities such as lecture, assigned readings, discussion-based debates and reflection papers around key conceptual questions such as "how might we provide a stimulating environment for our children?"
- **Step 5: Reflect on the process.** Near the end of the course, if not periodically throughout, it is important for students to reflect on the quality of their learning experiences, the degree to which they are achieving their learning objectives and how they can apply their newfound knowledge and skills. Ideally, the reflection process will involve introspective, written reflection and some form of sharing with the class. Larissa Pahomov, an English and journalism teacher in Philadelphia, explains, "To make students comfortable with this practice, the classroom has to become a place where each student is recognized as being on an individual path of improvement – and, an important point, no student has reached the end of the path, because *there is no end*" (MindShift, 2014, para. 11). Because leading the process of negotiated curriculum is a learning experience in and of itself, course instructors should take time to reflect as well.

"Start Small" Options

Upon first reading, moving to a negotiated curriculum may seem overwhelming. The key is to start small. If you're not ready to dive in, Edwards (2011) suggests that course instructors begin by simply "making space" for negotiated curriculum.

One option is planning your course as usual, but leaving a few areas open for discussion. On the first day of class, you can review the tentative course schedule and then engage students in

discussion of which readings should be required, options for demonstrating their knowledge and skills (e.g., tests? papers? models or demonstrations? etc.), when assignments should be due or how course points should be distributed.

Another “start small” option is negotiating curriculum on just one or two assignments or assessments. For example, if your course requires two non-negotiable assignments, allow students to determine the what, how, when and where of a third assignment. This may be a simple choice of two options; for example, students can either write a research paper or engage in four hours of community service. Or, in regard to assessments, students can choose to take a multiple choice test or an essay test.

If you feel ready, you can offer students even more choice by making the third assignment open-ended, within carefully pre-established parameters. For example, students must design and implement a project that includes data collection, analysis and interpretation using one of the analytical approaches taught in class. Within those parameters, students are free to select any topic, sample, research setting, etc. If you give the assignment early in the semester with a due date much later, students will also have more choice in terms of when and where to complete the project. For example, a student may choose to collect data during an already-scheduled weekend mission trip, increasing the project’s personal relevance significantly. For such open-ended assignments, you may wish to structure students’ planning with a customized individual learning contract that you meet with each student to discuss and approve before the project is started. Rossman (2015) provides one example.

If all of this seems like too much, simply dip your toes in with a group activity that engages students in open-ended, collaborative problem solving and decision making that relates to your course content but has nothing to do with your course requirements. For example, assign each of four groups a different perspective from which to analyze a common issue, arrive at recommendations and later share and discuss with the entire class. Although such a one-time class activity is not an example of negotiated curriculum, it will prepare students – and you – for sharing opposing ideas, thinking outside the box, making decisions and defending choices. Alber (2012) provides a helpful overview for building students’ collaborative skills during class time, skills that will help you and your students successfully negotiate the what, how, when and where of your course!

Resources

Alber, R. (2012, December 31). *Deeper learning: A collaborative classroom is key*. [Web log message.] Retrieved from <http://www.edutopia.org/blog/deeper-learning-collaboration-key-rebecca-alber>

- Chua, M. (2015, May 31). *Protocol draft: Codesigning classes with my (future) students*. [Web log message.] Retrieved from <http://blog.melchua.com/2015/05/31/protocol-draft-codesigning-classes-with-my-future-students/>
- Edwards, F. (2011). Teaching and learning together: Making space for curriculum negotiation in higher education. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 16(3), 143-156. Retrieved from <http://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/handle/10289/6121>
- Fallahi, C. (2011). Using Fink's taxonomy in course design. *Association for Psychological Science Observer*, 24(7). Retrieved from <http://www.psychologicalscience.org/index.php/publications/observer/2011/september-11/using-finks-taxonomy-in-course-design.html>
- Fink, L. D. (2003). *A self-directed guide to designing courses for significant learning*. Retrieved from <http://www.designlearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/Self-Directed-Guide..2.pdf>
- Harris, H. (2010). Curriculum negotiation at NHK: Meeting the needs and demands of adult learners. *The Language Teacher*, 34(6), 22-26. Retrieved from www.jalt-publications.org/files/pdf-article/art3.pdf
- MindShift. (2014, December 3). *What meaningful reflection on student work can do for learning*. Teaching Strategies. [Web log message.] Retrieved from <http://ww2.kqed.org/mindshift/2014/12/03/what-meaningful-reflection-on-student-work-can-do-for-learning/>
- Rossman, M. (2015). *Creating a personal learning contract*. Sophia Learning, LLC. Retrieved from <http://www.sophia.org/tutorials/creating-a-personal-learning-contract>
- Yazid, N. H. M., Musa, M. N., Ghaffar, N. S. A., Noor, N. S. F. M., Azamri, N. M., & Majid, F. A. (2013). Exploring postgraduate students' perceptions of negotiated curriculum. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 123, 182-188. Retrieved from <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042814014517>

Additional Resources

- Cook-Sather, A., Bovill, C, & Felten, P. (2014). *Engaging students as partners in learning and teaching: A guide for faculty*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Healey, M., Flint, A., & Harrington, K. (2014). Engagement through partnership: Students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education. *The Higher Education Academy: Inspiring Teaching, Transforming Learning*. Retrieved from [https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Engagement through partnership.pdf](https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Engagement%20through%20partnership.pdf)

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Using a Notebook to Organize and Develop Course Materials

Faculty often store course materials on their computer, but that isn't the only method available. Here is an option that I have found useful: I create a notebook (using a three-ring binder) for each class, which holds all the handouts, assignments, evaluation forms and other course materials.

Rationale for Using Notebooks to Organize Course Materials

1. Handouts can be easily found and quickly copied

I teach English, but I learned about this technique from a colleague in Occupational Therapy. She noticed that I spent a lot of time updating handouts, printing them out and then photocopying them. At that time, I organized all my handouts in Word, but I sometimes had trouble identifying the exact version of the handout I wanted, especially if I was in a rush before class. She suggested that I print my handouts out and keep them organized in a notebook instead. Ever since then, I have created notebooks for each course and I organize the materials either by topic or by week, depending on the course. It's easy to find the handouts I need for the next class and I can get them ready in advance, instead of rushing around at the last minute.

2. As a course develops, handouts can be organized and reorganized

I have taught some courses only a few times, while others I have taught for many years. I find notebooks helpful for organizing a course I'm teaching for the first time, as well as reorganizing it when I teach it more regularly. Initially, I put handouts and other materials into the notebook chronologically. Later, I may divide the materials into specific weeks or sub-sections of the course, or into types of handouts (syllabi, quizzes, writing assignments, evaluation forms, etc.). By using post-it notes as dividers and sheet protectors to hold the various papers, I can easily move materials around in the binder to help me organize handouts and assignments in the most logical way for each course.

3. Handouts can remain relevant, even when course content changes

When all my handouts were stored on the computer, the temptation was to update them every semester if course content changed. Over time, I gradually realized that was largely unnecessary. For most of the courses I teach regularly, I don't need to continually update handouts if I just rewrite them to be more general and less specific. In my Introduction to Film class, for example, the weekly discussion topics are fairly constant, even when the films change. Why should I rewrite the handout every semester, when the focus remains the same? After many years of updating, I finally realized that a simple change from "How does **Hitchcock** use editing to build suspense in *Rear Window*" to "How does **the director** use editing to build suspense in **this film**?" allows me to keep using the same handout over and over. For other courses, the assignments may stay the same but the deadlines change. I have learned to pencil in the specifics on handouts which require such minor changes.

What You Need to Get Started:

- Three-ring binder
- Sheet protectors
- Dividers (optional) or Post-its (Easy to move and change)

How to Organize Handouts:

- First time, put the handouts in as you write them (chronological order)
- Next time, sort them somehow (by week or by type of handout)
- Over time, if you have obsolete handouts, file them away (or archive them)

How to Develop Reusable Handouts:

- If a handout changes over time, keep only the latest version in the notebook
- If you have multiple sections, make generalized handouts you can use in all of them
- Keep dates and specifics to a minimum (pencil in before copying, if needed)
- If specific details keep changing, leave them vague (film of the week, this assignment, etc.)

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Adding RSS Feed to Your Online Course Using Pinterest

RSS stands for “Rich Site Summary.” It is a method for pushing dynamic web content to whomever wants it. This allows you to create a collection of content based on alerts or subscriptions. You can use a feed reader and subscribe to different websites’ content. The feed reader will show you stories, articles and other content from those sites that you are subscribed to without you having to check each website every day.

Why would you want to use these in your courses? Many instructors like to share news articles and other content pertinent to the course topic, or they want to create a “library” of resources for students in their Blackboard (or other learning management system) courses. So, how do you get from wanting to share articles to a rotating feed in Blackboard? (Note, we have only tested this in Blackboard, but it may work in other LMSes, too.)

1. Add articles to Pinterest

- a. Create a [Pinterest account](#) or sign into your Pinterest account.
- b. Create a new board for just these articles! Give the board a title that reflects the name of the topic or theme that your articles will surround. If you are unfamiliar with how to add a board in Pinterest, review [the Add, Edit or Delete a Board tutorial](#).
- c. Pin your articles. If you are unfamiliar with how to pin in Pinterest, review [the Add, Edit or Delete a Pin tutorial](#).

2. Create your Pinterest Board’s RSS Feed

- a. To get the RSS Feed URL for your Pinterest board with the articles, all you need to do is look at your board’s URL and add .rss at the end. For example, my Pinterest board’s URL is <https://www.pinterest.com/hannah0913/articles/>. My Pinterest board’s RSS Feed URL is <https://www.pinterest.com/hannah0913/articles.rss>.
- b. Copy the RSS Feed URL – you will need this later!

3. Create the Feed Widget

- a. Go to [FeedWind](#) to create your ticker widget.
- b. Paste your RSS Feed URL into the “Feed URL” field and select “Add Feed.” A preview of your widget will appear to the right. Feel free to change the options under “General” to suit your needs.
- c. Scroll down the page and copy the code found under “Add this code to your webpage to display the widget.”

4. Embed the Feed Widget in Blackboard

- a. Create an item in your Blackboard course.
- b. Open the text editor and select “HTML” from the third line of the text editor.
- c. Paste the code for your Feed Widget within the HTML code view area and click “Update.”
- d. Click “Submit” to save the widget.

- e. Once you have embedded the widget, you cannot edit this item without the code breaking. If you need to make changes, you will need to copy the widget code and make a new item.
- f. The widget will update within Blackboard (at a slight delay) whenever you pin new articles within Pinterest!

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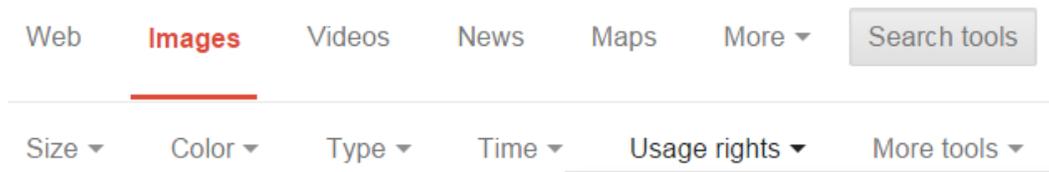
Finding Resources for Your Courses

Do you want to add images and music to your courses/presentations?

Here is a collection of trustworthy sites that provide free materials you can use “legitimately.”

Images

- [Google Images](#) – add a “Usage Rights” filter to your image search by clicking on “Search Tools” then select the dropdown menu for “Usage Rights.”



- flickr – [search for pictures in the public domain](#) or [search for pictures with the public domain mark](#)
- [Pics4Learning](#) – free, copyright-friendly images for education
- [The Noun Project](#) – download images in a choice of formats; includes citation information automatically
- [Search the Creative Commons](#) for images, videos and media
 - [Creative Commons Search](#) for images, videos, audio and books

How to cite images



[“Red Panda in a Tree Y A W N I N G!”](#) by [Neil McIntosh](#) is licenced under [CC BY 2.0](#).

In the above example,

“Red Panda in a Tree Y A W N I N G!” is the name of the image and is linked to the original image source – link to the image details, not just to the image download page.

“Neil McIntosh” is the author’s name or username and is linked to his/her website, photostream, channel, etc.

“CC BY 2.0” is the creative commons licence information and is linked to the creative commons webpage summarizing the details of that licence.

The Creative Commons Wiki [explains the best practices for attribution](#) – the above example follows the “ideal” attribution.

foter blog has [an infographic explaining how to attribute creative commons photos](#).

Music

- [jamendo](#) – free songs; search by keywords, genres, instruments and/or moods
- YouTube [Audio Library](#) – music and sound effects
- [SoundCli.ps](#) – sound effects
- [AudioMicro](#) – sound effects

How to cite music

To cite music, [WikiCommons](#) has two suggestions:

1. Include the citation information on a web page

For example:

This video features the song “[Neverending Dream](#)” by [DreamZ](#), licenced under [CC-BY-NC-SA 3.0](#)

2. Include the citation information in the video that uses the music

Here are two examples:

“Science Commons” video by Jesse Dylan, Creative Commons – [see attribution starting at 1:52](#)

“Video Editing and Shot Techniques: Study of jump cuts, match cuts and cutaways” video by New Media Rights – [see attribution starting at 3:21](#)

Others

[Makerbook](#) is a directory of free resources: images, videos, graphics, fonts, audio.

You can use [CloudConvert](#) to convert files – it supports 207 file formats.

Submitted by:

The Teaching and Learning Centre

Seneca College

senecacollege.ca/teaching

Using an RSS Feed to Incorporate Current Events

One way to help students recognize the relevance of a course of study is to incorporate current events into the mix of classroom strategies. You have an advantage if your school has local and/or national newspapers readily available for student use. However, don't be deterred if you don't have newspapers. Most campus Learning Management Systems, such as Blackboard and Moodle, have a built-in feature that allows for an RSS feed. RSS, often referred to as Really Simple Syndication, is a format for receiving regularly changing web content. Many well-respected news organizations syndicate their content and also offer separate feeds for topics such as arts, business, economy, environment, health, science, technology and world news.

You and your students can receive a news feed from such well-known news sources as the BBC, CNN, NPR, Reuters, U.S. News and World Report, the Wall Street Journal and more. In fact, [Science Daily](#) offers more than 400 specific RSS feeds in a variety of topics. The [Centers for Disease Control](#) offers 95 specific RSS feeds.

Although a quick google search for RSS feeds will yield hundreds of results, the following lists a few examples with links you can follow:

[BBC Science and Nature](#)

The latest stories from the Science & Environment section of the BBC News web site.

[BBC Technology News](#)

The latest stories from the Technology section of the BBC News web site.

[CDC South Africa Health News](#)

The latest stories from the Africa section of the BBC News web site.

[CDC Health News](#)

Welcome to the CDC Online Newsroom, a one-stop source for journalists seeking public health information. Global media and the general public can access current and archived press releases, media advisories and press briefing transcripts.

[CNN Political News](#)

CNN.com delivers up-to-the-minute political news.

[NPR All Things Considered](#)

Every weekday *All Things Considered* hosts Robert Siegel, Melissa Block and Audie Cornish present the program's trademark mix of news, interviews, commentaries, reviews and offbeat features.

[NPR Education News](#)

NPR news and commentary on education, schools, colleges and universities, and emerging trends in learning. Listen to audio and subscribe to RSS feeds.

[NPR World News](#)

NPR world news, international art and culture, world business and financial markets, world economy and global trends in health, science and technology. Subscribe to the World Story of the Day podcast and RSS feed.

[Wall Street Journal - US Business News](#)

US Business News

[Reuters World News](#)

Reuters.com presents breaking news, business, financial and investing news.

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Active Reading from Day One

Actively engage the student in applying active reading strategies to understand the text in the course information sheet (CIS). The worksheet that follows presents the instructions in an accessible format that also incorporates the use of two column notes.

Begin by helping the students to construct a purpose for the close reading of the CIS. Your questions can lead them to state something like the following: Plan and organize their responsibilities for the semester to learn in this course and adhere to the stated policies.

Sample instructions you can give the students to follow:

1. For our very first class, we will read, annotate and analyze the CIS for this class. We will work in small groups to complete the steps below. Please annotate, or write on, the CIS document that you have. There is ample room in the margins and on the reverse of each page for notes and questions.
2. It is important to annotate with a purpose. One may, for example, annotate a textbook chapter in order to prepare for a test, or annotate a journal article in order to use some of its ideas in a research paper. What is the purpose of annotating a CIS? In other words, what kind of information do you hope to acquire when you read a CIS? What do you need to remember?
3. Because it is important that you keep your CIS in a safe place, I will not collect this assignment. Rather, I will look at it during class, give you feedback on your annotations and credit you 0-20 points for your first Class Assignment.

Active Reading of the Course Information Sheet	
1. Preview	Read only the headings and bold font. Based on your preview, what sorts of assignments that you will be expected to complete? What are the policies by which you will be expected to abide?
2. Preview	Read everything that is listed, bulleted or included in a table.
3. Ask and Answer Questions about items in lists, bullets and tables	a) What is the purpose of the <i>Course Learning Outcomes</i> ? Write this in the margin above or next to that list.

Active Reading of the Course Information Sheet	
	b) According to the <i>Grading Breakdown</i> , which assignments are the most important? Annotate that section with stars next to the assignments that you think matter the most.
4. Read with purpose	Remember your purpose and read the whole document.
5. Annotate with purpose	<p>a) Number, underline or highlight any information that is important to your purpose. Do not underline or highlight entire lines of text; instead, highlight or underline only key words or phrases.</p> <p>b) Circle any words that are unfamiliar, so that you can look up the definitions later.</p> <p>c) Ask questions. Write at least five questions in the margins.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write at least one question that asks for clarification on a policy or assignment. • Write at least one question that asks for information that is not included in the CIS. • Write at least one question that poses a hypothetical situation in which one of the policies may be tested.
6. Review	Reword at least three of the important ideas that you underlined or highlighted. Write in the margins or on the reverse side of the sheet.

Submitted by:

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Students Sign Up with Google Appointments

Google Appointments is a calendar feature relevant for student-faculty meetings in the office, elsewhere on campus or online. It prevents faculty from waiting in the office for students who *might* drop by, as is the case with office hours, and also gives students a way to set up a specific, limited amount of time to discuss specific content.

Making an Appointment

Set up an event on a Google Calendar, but select the Appointment slots option at the top of the settings window. You can name these appointments something specific to the course, a specific type of activity or just general visiting times. I hold online office hours in the evening, during which I meet with students on WebEx, Moodle's (our learning management system) web conferencing assignment tool. You can add a description, location and directions.

Accessing Appointment Calendar

When you click on your appointment event, there will be a share link you can offer students on Moodle or via email. This link will allow students to see all appointments made on that calendar. When they access this link, they will see your appointments in conjunction with their calendar so that they can easily plan which times work best.

Booking an Appointment

When students click on one of these appointments, they will see the location, description and their name displayed in the "What" category. They can edit the description if you want them to share what they would like to discuss or any questions. Once saved, it will automatically appear on their calendar and yours.

Seeing Booked Appointments

When a student books an appointment, you will receive email notification and it will be displayed on your calendar. Even if you delete the remaining appointment slots, the student's appointment will still appear on your calendar.

I set rules for how far ahead of time students must sign up: I tell them 24 hours, but I will be flexible for up to 12. This allows me to plan ahead, especially since these are times I may not be on campus regularly.

Even if not every student uses these hours, they feel a great deal of support knowing that I offer multiple times to possibly meet. And, most of the time, it has not come at any inconvenience to me to offer these hours. As is usually the case, when students do show the initiative to sign up and improve their work with your advice, I am happy to meet with them.

Resources

For visual examples of each of these steps, see this teaching tip at oakland.edu/teachingtips.

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Using Bloom's Taxonomy as a Framework for Student-led Discussions

Bloom's Taxonomy, specifically the cognitive framework, is widely known by educators and quite useful. Sharing it with the students can be powerful as well.

No matter the content of the course I teach, I take time early in the course to explain Bloom's Taxonomy to my students as a way to increase their metacognitive abilities. Throughout the course, I refer to Bloom's Taxonomy regularly, asking students to determine at what level they are working when answering questions or completing assignments.

Once students are familiar with the taxonomy, it can provide a great framework for student-led discussions. Simply provide a visual of Bloom's Taxonomy and then prompt the students to discuss course content using the taxonomy as their guide. Encourage students to begin with questions and comments that focus on knowledge and comprehension levels – often referred to as lower-order thinking skills. Once students determine that the topic has been sufficiently discussed at the foundational level, they can then move to the higher-order thinking levels by questioning and commenting in areas of application, analysis and synthesis.

Students find the use of Bloom's Taxonomy as a discussion framework beneficial because it provides direction without being too prescriptive or restrictive. The discussion flows naturally. I've noticed that the discussions are stronger – more comprehensive and insightful. Students develop better and more diverse questions when referencing Bloom's Taxonomy. A final benefit is that this discussion framework is flexible, which allows it to be used over and over again with ease. When used consistently, students know the expectations and the process, allowing for more time-on-task.

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Encouraging Students to Ask Questions

Do you sometimes struggle with encouraging students to ask questions?

Last semester, I tried an experiment.

I intentionally used two different types of wording to motivate students to ask questions:

Wording 1: “Any questions?”

Wording 2: “What questions do you have?”

I discovered that “What questions do you have?” consistently generated student questions.

“Any questions?” elicited little, if any, student response.

Remember to wait at least 3-10 seconds to allow students to think of a question to ask.

And do let us know if you find “What questions do you have?” to be an effective technique to generate student questions!

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Valuing “Half-Formed” Thoughts in Class Discussions

Students love to participate in good class discussions, and we know that well-run discussions can help students learn from one another and help them practice speaking in front of others. As Joan Retallack and Juliana Spahr explain, “the collaborative making of meaning that is possible in a classroom is at its most productive and enlivening in an intertextual, conversational milieu.” But how do we set up the conditions for a productive, lively discussion? Of course, students need to prepare thoughtfully before coming to class in order to participate. Furthermore, we should set [ground rules](#) for respectful discourse. In this particular teaching tip, however, I want to spotlight the most important technique that I use for getting a good discussion to happen during class: valuing “half-formed” thoughts.

On the first day of class and in my syllabus, I share with my students R. Keith Sawyer’s idea that the “best learning takes place when learners articulate their own unformed and still-developing understanding and continue to articulate it through the process of learning.” I tell them the story of how in contemporary American society, we tend to allow people in power like professors or CEOs to think out-loud, but that those with less power like students and employees rarely get the chance to talk out their ideas. Instead, the latter usually must compose their contribution to a discussion *in toto* before they risk sharing it for fear of judgment or worse. I then explain that our class provides a chance for all of us to practice thinking out-loud and making meaning together.

Most of the time, I can hear a gasp of realization of this truth and a rustle of excitement as they begin to realize that it will be okay for them to try out their ill-formed questions and even half-baked notions in class. I then take it as my job to help students clarify their questions and thinking and, when appropriate, offer a mini-lecture regarding points of fact or get other students to build on one another’s ideas. Admittedly, this strategy produces messy conversations that sometimes don’t have clear conclusions. I warn my students about this and reassure them by saying that solving real problems requires experimentation, false starts, failures and risk. We use class discussions to figure out the subtleties of a problem and try out possible approaches. I say that each of us has chances to practice producing linear, fully-formed arguments in our essay writing. In class, however, we have a precious opportunity to think out-loud together, one that, if practiced now, will serve them well in group settings in the future.

Now, how do I make sure that everyone participates in a discussion? I have many tips for that. And I am sure that you have many more. Another time...

Submitted by:

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Socrative App

While the increasing prevalence of cell phone use by students in the classroom may be a source of frustration for any college professor, it may also be the professor's most helpful teaching tool! So instead of prohibiting cell phone usage in the classroom, why not use it to your advantage? This can be done by using the free Socrative app!

The Socrative app is a real-time student response tool that allows professors to quiz their classes, provide feedback to students, encourage some friendly competition and gain valuable feedback about students' levels of understanding. Professors can create their own multiple choice, true/false or short answer quizzes. In addition, the app provides a downloadable spreadsheet that provides a total quiz score for each student as well as specifics about each quiz question. It also features a game called the Space Race where students race against each other, with the objective of pushing their rocket ship to the end of the screen by correctly answering questions. Finally, the app offers an Exit Ticket feature that students complete at the end of class to allow the professor to assess the effectiveness of the lecture. For more information, check out <http://www.socrative.com/>.

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Extend Conversations Beyond Class with VoiceThread

Sometimes when students are working on group assignments such as presentations, debates or case studies, you may notice that not everyone is participating. Some students are very enthusiastic, while others sit back in their chairs and let their peers do the work. How can you ensure that the work is evenly distributed and that all your students are engaged?

Perhaps your students are engaged in a discussion that is going spectacularly well, and is cut short because the class session ends. Wouldn't it be great to have a way to extend that conversation outside of class?

VoiceThread might provide a solution to these problems. In VoiceThread, every student has a voice, and each student can choose from a range of tools to communicate. Students can login to the course on Blackboard and participate in the discussion, at a time that fits their busy school and work schedules.

What is VoiceThread?

VoiceThread is an asynchronous web-based interactive tool for collaboration and sharing. A VoiceThread can contain images, videos and documents, with or without narration. Viewers can add comments using voice, text, audio file or video.

What does it look like? See these two examples by Michelle Pacansky-Brock: [Photography from Inception to Digital](#) and an [Art 1E: Early 20th Century](#).

Educational technologies vary in their functionality and features. When you choose an educational technology to use in your class, consider the needs of the 21st-century students, their interests and learning styles. Millennials want to be active participants and content creators, rather than passive content recipients.

VoiceThread has three distinctive criteria: it allows students to be active and engaged, collaborate and co-create, and express themselves by various means of communication.

Engagement: VoiceThread allows students to engage with the content of the course, an instructor and peers by actively contributing to the discussion on and about an artifact, a mini-lecture or a presentation. Students can also create a VoiceThread and become creators and critics of other VoiceThreads.

Collaboration: Students can collaborate with their peers and work in groups, creating a VoiceThread (e.g., a presentation or a demonstration). Students can create and edit a VoiceThread in a group and share it with the rest of the class, who can also contribute and comment on their work.

Functionality: VoiceThread is one-of-a-kind technology that supports a discussion that is not primarily text-based. If you are already using a Discussion Board in Blackboard, then you are familiar with text-based discussions. VoiceThread lets you take the conversation outside of the text-based environment and allows your students to be creative. Your students can use over 50 different types of media in a VoiceThread as the basis for a conversation.

Last year, the Educational Technology Committee of the Academic Senate developed a [guide](#) for selecting and evaluating emerging technologies. We used this guide to evaluate VoiceThread – refer to it if you would like a more comprehensive [overview](#) of the tool.

Resources from New York Institute of Technology’s Center for Teaching and Learning

[VoiceThread Overview](#)

[VoiceThread @ NYIT – CTL Help Page with Handouts](#)

[Weekly Teaching Note: Catch Up on Missed Classes with VoiceThread](#)

[Emerging Technology Selection and Evaluation Criteria: VoiceThread](#)

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Using Simple Topics for Applying New Concepts in Workshops

We all know that it helps to use simplified examples to illustrate a new technique, method or concept. So when putting on a workshop for faculty, or if a faculty member wants to try out something new, use a very simple task or idea to apply to the technique or method. In fact, trainers can assign a variety of simple topics to faculty groups in the training activity by choosing topics on slips of paper from a hat (or similar method).

For example, when working with writing objectives and choosing accompanying learning activities, use a simple task such as baking cookies or building a house of cards rather than a specific topic or task from the faculty member's content area. This will remove the added layer of content expert "turf," since the actual content being used in the application is simple common knowledge, and will allow the faculty and trainer to focus purely on the application of the educational concept or method. This allows for better peer critique and discussion, too.

When done in a workshop, it is also fun to see how creative faculty can be in the results they present to the group. I was amazed at how creative faculty can be when teaching peer groups how to change a car tire or build a wooden planter box when practicing application of backwards design for a lesson. This made for a very fun and educational experience to see how much effort and creativity went into the activity while also being able to clearly determine how well faculty were able to apply the concepts when they weren't worrying about teaching their peers something in their own expert domain.

Once the faculty understand the technique or method more clearly, then an actual content area topic or task can be used in the application, but this most likely will be done by the faculty when prepping for the actual use for their instruction and outside of the workshop.

Submitted by:

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Word Association and Song to Introduce a Concept

Use word association to have students

- a) Consider their experience/previous knowledge
- b) Consider interpretations of others
- c) Set up the language/concept of the exercise, unit, assignment

L.O.: At the end of the warm up, students will be able to describe how the use of the song “Lollipop” sets the tone for the setting of the short story/film “Harrison Bergeron.”

Materials: Any internet images of lollipops or real lollipops and a song or other listening clip that relates to the visual.

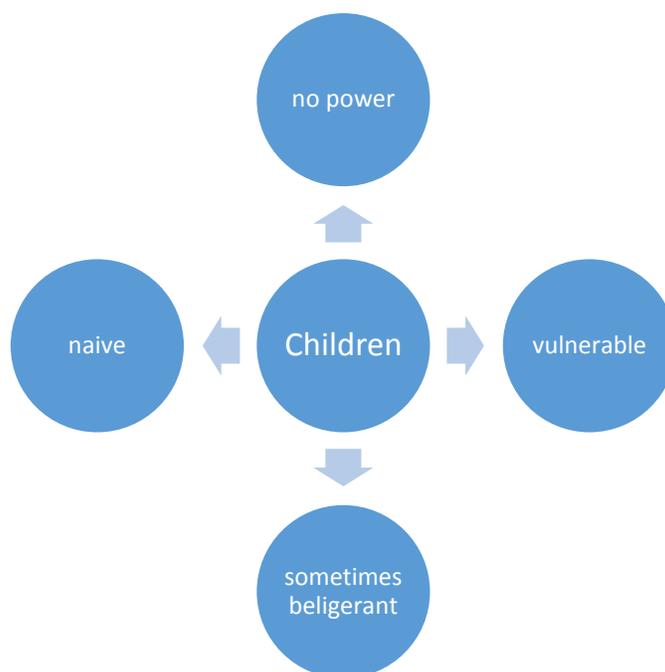
Activity:

Part 1: Show images of lollipops and elicit students’ association. Make a list so everyone can see. Encourage think time for more complex ideas. For example, a first thought might be candy and sweet, but given more time, students should be able to relate it to *children* which can be explored to draw out the theme of the story (or key aspects of the concept).

e.g. candy, sweet, junk food, etc.

Possible concept checking questions: Who do you usually see with these? Where? Why? How do you feel if you are eating one?

Part 2: Do a concept map, using the key word (in this case, *children*) to expand the analysis.



e.g.

Part 3: Play the first 2 minutes of the [video “Harrison Bergeron.”](#) Students focus on the words, tone of the song and the background visuals.

Evaluation:

In pairs or small groups, students hypothesize what they know so far. (e.g., happy, calm life etc.)

This sets students up for the juxtaposition of the allusion of a happy, calm utopian life with the reality of a dystopia.

This exercise took 15 minutes and was valuable in that I can refer back to the visuals and aural aspects to supplement/compliment the reading.

Submitted by:

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Encourage Your Students to Adopt Successful Behaviors

Most students are hesitant to believe what we tell them about the real world, since we apparently work in some kind of *unreal* world. They are particularly skeptical of our advice about what it takes to be a success in their careers because we don't look very successful to them. We don't make much money or command much respect, and given all the education we had to get to do what we do.... Heck, how would *we* know anything about success?

Fine. Let someone who is successful in the way students view success tell them what being successful really takes. Let them listen to the 3.5-minute TED Talk, "8 Secrets of Success," by Richard St. John, marketer, book author and success analyst. (See [his background](#) or read [his bio](#).) Here is a synopsis of the fast-paced, entertaining talk:

Why do people succeed? Is it because they're smart? Or are they just lucky? Neither. Analyst Richard St. John condenses years of interviews into a short slideshow on the real secrets of success, and here they are: being passionate about the goal, working hard, getting really good at something, focusing, pushing yourself, serving others something of value, having a good idea, and persisting.

Access the [8 Secrets of Success TED Talk](#) video (3:26).

Imagine how successful your students would be in your courses if they started adopting these values and behaviors.

This video fits into any subject matter, from freshman comp through graduate or professional school and contains tips that students may use in their future careers.

Submitted by:

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Five Guidelines for Teaching with Transfer in Mind

“We’ve reviewed this type of problem in class many, many times. Then I change a few details and my students act like they have never seen it before!”

Have you ever found yourself uttering this sentiment? This is a common issue, especially when teaching problem solving or decision-making skills. Being able to apply previously-learned concepts and skills to a new context is called *transfer*. Transfer is one of the most valued aspects of learning; after all, isn’t a main goal of college to prepare students to go out and solve real life problems? Unfortunately, considerable studies have indicated that transfer does not occur automatically and can be difficult to achieve.

In higher education, we often put emphasis on the answers and conclusions of what we teach. Yet when our goal is to teach students to transfer learning – often through problem solving, case studies and lab work – it is actually more valuable to focus on the processes and the structure of the problem, rather than the answers. Below are a few guidelines to help foster transfer in problem solving:

1. Transfer requires significant original learning. Make sure students have enough time to truly learn a concept or skill in the first place, ideally within a realistic context.
2. At the same time, we should also provide students with examples from multiple contexts to help them see that the deeper underlying structures are applicable to other situations.
3. When using multiple examples, spend time comparing and identifying similarities and differences. “What if we changed this one aspect of the problem? What if we completed the steps in a different order? Why are the outcomes of these two case studies so different?”
4. Use your assignments and discussions to focus students’ time on the steps and patterns of a problem. Ask them to “show their work.” Identify common pitfalls and use sample problems that specifically address these pitfalls. Explore incorrect steps and patterns to show why they do not work.
5. Recognize that you may fall into the “expert blind spot” where you simply don’t remember what it’s like to not know how to solve a certain problem. When modeling the process, take sufficient time, more than you think you need, to articulate the decisions and assumptions that underlie each step.

When teaching students to solve problems, if we keep our focus on the process, we can better help students learn how to transfer their learned skills to multiple contexts.

Resources

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Motivation to Do... Come Prepare to Class

As an instructional designer, I am a voracious reader on how people learn and what instructional designers can design INTO their instruction that will increase the chances that learners will not only learn, but also apply what they have learned when provided the opportunity. Of course, this means influencing human behavior, which is a complex and challenging process all teachers face! Recently, I read the book *Design for How People Learn* by Julie Dirksen which got me to thinking again about motivation to learn and motivation to **do**, and the teaching behaviors which can influence motivation of our students. Knowing that there are many factors that influence motivation which we do *not* have control over, it is important to be aware of the ones we *can* control.

Let's use an example of teaching behaviors (things we *can* control) that can motivate students to come prepared to class, a problem I hear often from faculty. Which teaching behaviors might influence this in a positive way (tips adapted from Dirksen book above)?

Design "prepare for class" learning experiences in which students can unlearn old habits (of not coming prepared) and develop new/better ones.

Q1. What to do before releasing them to do class prep, so students are motivated and able to do the work?

...be perceived as one with "what's in it for me?" value (to the students)

- Using stats, a story/case study/testimonial or learning outcomes that they care about, present the learning experience as something *they* will want to do instead of something *you* want them to do.
- When possible, involve the students in planning the tasks so they have input on the types of tasks and effective methods for doing them.
- It is not about controlling the learner or tricking them into compliance. It's about enlightening them about why they might care about it and building buy-in.

...be perceived as compatible with the students' values, prior experiences or current needs

- Invite students to identify how coming prepared to class is incompatible with other competing priorities (work, family, community obligations) or established habits that have "worked" in the past (no prep? teacher reviewed in class, accepted late work, allowed study hall time during class, did not plan class activities that depended on them being prepared).
- Invite students to brainstorm how to make it more compatible with their current priorities, needs, values, such as their goals for this course, the student role-modelling they are providing for their children, challenges in their own lives, etc.
- Invite testimonials from other students/peers about how coming prepared improved their learning, performance in class, learning beyond the course or development of needed skills.

- It is not about you preaching to them about relevance or value, but their own buy-in to why it might be important to themselves.

...be perceived as do-able, even easy or that the students will have plenty of available support and minimal negative consequences for mistakes if it is going to be hard

- Identify the task's similarity to skills or procedures the students already know.
- Invite students to identify critical situations that might come up (triggers in their environment) which could interfere with their ability to successfully prepare for class (e.g., a different immediate consequence is compelling); brainstorm specific "if X, then Y" plans to overcome temptations (e.g., check Facebook or text messaging every few minutes) or environmental issues. Write them down!
- Demonstrate out-of-class preparation support systems/resources and how to use them for immediate help or guidance. (See Q2 below for examples.)
- These strategies serve as training wheels and guard rails while practicing new habits and unlearning old ones, plus they build confidence in students' own abilities to control their student life.

...make positive results visible

- Provide an opportunity to see someone they respect or trust do the task and experience success, such as a testimonial in class or via video clip, a mentor or tutor demonstrating the task or anyone modelling the task. Choosing a person they respect often makes the task more appealing too.
- This approach can boost student confidence and help with visualizing what they are to do.
- Provide opportunities to try it (new behavior or task) out on a limited basis first.
- Offer opportunities to try out a complex task in stages, with informal feedback, guidance and encouragement (from instructor or each other) available after each level (in class).

...praise for effort, more than correctness.

- If their own tryout is not feasible, observe others doing it so they can see a real example or two.
- This helps them get over the getting started hurdle by negotiating any rough edges, questions or issues ahead of time and helps them visualize what is expected.

Q2. What to do during the time the students are doing the work to help with persistence, effort and developing the new habit?

...provide easy-to-find help physically *near* the "prepare for class" assignment for timely access, such as:

- relevant FAQs,
- reference charts of information to consult,
- video tutorials on specific tasks,
- a job aid for procedures,
- a decision tree or flow-chart demonstrating a problem-solving process to use,
- a template that models an expected format,

- a resource for challenging aspects of the assignment (e.g., grammar checker, APA format checker, etc.).

...provide easy-to-use success-checking options such as checklists, rubrics, sample assignments to compare to their work to prior to turning it in.

...remember, most daily assignments are more about recognition and practice than raw recall. Or they are about content exposure prior to working with the concepts in a flipped class situation.

Q3. What to do afterwards to reinforce the new habit?

...provide an immediate consequence if they do it and if they don't. Preparing for some delayed consequence, such as a midterm exam, is not sufficient for most students. That's why it is also difficult to not text while driving, stop smoking, maintain weight loss or save for retirement – the positive consequences are too delayed! A more immediate consequence has much more power; for example, a short online quiz before class, a small group activity when they arrive in which they must be prepared to share the load with their peers, an in-class problem/scenario that depends on class prep to solve.

...review class prep processes if they are similar for each class period. What habits are you building? It is easier to follow old habits than to change. You want them practicing so that they learn positive habits from experience. Without guidance and help, students may practice poorly and develop new, non-productive habits! You want the training wheels and guard rails you provide to support your students until behaviors are automatic! This coaching and encouragement is important.

...invite class members respected by others to share tips or tricks that they find helpful when hitting the wall or slogging through the hard stuff. Effort is everything!

Resources

Dirksen, J. (2012). *Design for how people learn*. Berkeley, CA: New Riders.

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How to Weave Creative Thinking into the Institutional Fabric

When we were researching creative thinking for both our *Introduction to Applied Creative Thinking* (2012) and our *Teaching Applied Creative Thinking* (2013) courses, we ran across an interesting detail. How many courses focused on developing applied creative thinking in universities across the world—in Asia, the Americas and Europe—do you think actually exist? According to Xu et al. (2005), only 39 such courses are on the books, and the bulk of them are isolated in departments and not tied to any specific program, major or minor. Similarly, our research into universities offering minors in creativity back in those dark ages only showed one university even offering a master’s degree in creative thinking.

Given the popularity of insightful books such as Florida’s *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002), McWilliam’s *The Creative Workforce* (2008) and Pink’s *A Whole New Mind* (2005), as well as the IBM report (2010) that said creative thinking was the number-one skill American CEOs wanted from college graduates, we expected more. More courses, more programs, more colleges and universities responding to a need and a desire.

For the past four years, our institution’s catalog has contained our Minor in Applied Creating Thinking, and we’re pretty certain in the nine years since the Xu et al. report that other schools have likewise responded with courses, minors and programs. If that isn’t the case, however, and you are interested in weaving applied creative thinking into your institution’s curricula, how might you go about that task?

One, **consider responding to your accrediting agency.** Our mode of attack early in the twenty-first century came to us when we discovered that our university’s accrediting agency, SACS, was insisting institutions implement a new accreditation piece, the Quality Enhancement Program (QEP), a sort of value-added academic piece. We insinuated our way onto the University’s QEP committee and helped steer the discussion toward creative thinking. As a result, in 2007, the institution declared as its QEP theme that it would “develop [later graduate] informed critical and creative thinkers who communicate effectively.”

Two, since every QEP needs a home, **consider what type of organization will be needed to support the QEP.** Here, ECU launched the Noel Studio for Academic Creativity, the centerpiece of the university community and hub of communication and creative activity. It houses the Minor in Applied Creative Thinking and annually hosts programs for members of the university community.

Three, **utilize professional learning communities.** As soon as our QEP was instituted, the University created QEP Coaches, who helped train the faculty in critical thinking. As creative thinking was being neglected, we started a campus-wide professional learning community (PLC)

with twelve faculty members. This PLC was tasked with researching creative initiatives and suggesting ways to encourage creative thinking across our campus. Because of the unique structure of the PLC, we were able to permeate the campus community (both academic and social) with creative endeavors.

Four, **create a course**. When we taught creative writing, we developed all sorts of courses on the subject, from Teaching Creative Writing to Becoming a Professional Writer. Invention is such an important concept in writing that it would have been a natural, but alas, we never worked on it. For our creative thinking initiative, we decided to lead off with a course introducing the concept and treating the basics of implementation. We named the course *Introduction to Applied Creative Thinking* and even wrote its textbook built on our years of research and application in the field. The success of this initial class has led to the creation of several additional courses designed specifically for the minor, including its capstone course.

Five, **develop extant courses on creativity into a minor**. When we facilitated our PLC, we found various faculty were teaching courses related to creativity. One member was teaching a course in business that we tried to appropriate; another member had a friend teaching a Creative Collaboration course in Psychology; and still another taught the College of Education's Gifted and Talented course.

Six, **tie to extant or developing programs**. Last year, the University found that a significant number of students were not finishing up their degree when they were less than 30 hours from graduation. At the same time, another task force zeroed in on our extended campuses (we have ten regional appendices) that were unable to offer outlying populations enough majors. As a result of these two problems, a Bachelor of General Studies degree was created, but it needed some core courses. Of course we suggested that *Introduction to Applied Creative Thinking* provided skills desired by employers in all fields. We have also tied our introductory course, CRE 101, to a capstone program in the University's College of Justice and Safety.

Where do we go from here? If the minor does well, maybe we need to transform it into a major. Perhaps the creativity initiatives developed on campus should extend to the community or local schools? Or maybe creativity programs will find a home online.

Submitted by:

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Student Learning By Doing

"I hear, and I forget. I see, and I remember. I do, and I understand."
– Chinese Proverb

Active learning encourages students to recall, understand and apply new information. At the end of a lesson, employ an active learning strategy to assess student learning and to promote deeper learning. The following examples of technology-based active learning strategies can be incorporated in most face-to-face, blended and online classes:

1. After learning a new concept, challenge students to depict the concept with the use of a meme, comic or word cloud.
2. Assign students to present on a theory using charts, timelines and/or videos.
3. As an alternative to a traditional report, have students summarize and critique each scholarly article as an infographic.
4. After completing a module, unit or chapter, randomly choose a group of students to write appropriate quiz questions on SurveyMonkey, which will then be disseminated electronically as a low-stakes quiz to the entire class.

Favorite Resources

Chart Generator: [Gliffy](#)

Comic Generators: [Bitstrips](#) and [Pixton](#)

Infographic Generators: [Canva](#), [Piktochart](#), [Easel.ly](#)

Meme Generators: [imgflip](#) and [MemeCenter](#) (advanced)

[10 Tips to Create and Present Pecha Kucha](#) and [Pecha Kucha: Tips, Resources and Examples](#)

Survey Creator: [SurveyMonkey](#)

Timeline Generators: [Dipity](#) and [Timeline JS3](#)

Video Presentation Tool: [Powtoon](#)

Word Cloud Generator: [Wordle](#)

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Teaching with Debate

April 20th, 2015 by [Andre Audette](#), University of Notre Dame

Debates can be an effective and engaging way for students to analyze different concepts and to develop critical thinking and public speaking skills. They are also a useful technique for achieving greater participation in class and for discussing controversial issues in a structured environment. The Kaneb Center recently hosted a workshop on using debates in the classroom; below are some of the highlights from the workshop:

Choosing a Debate Question

To have a fruitful debate, choose an open question with two (or more) sides that can be reasonably supported with academic evidence. A great place to start is with major debates and schools of thought in your discipline or a moral or ethical question involving the subject matter you are teaching. The question should be simple enough for a non-expert to debate, yet complex enough that students will be able to develop multiple arguments to support their side of the issue. Another helpful way to choose a topic is the fact-value-policy framework. Here are some examples:

- **Fact:** *“Genetically modified foods are safe to eat.”* This is a disputed statement that allows students to debate the definition of “safe to eat” and the science behind whether the foods are harmful to humans or not.
- **Value:** *“Preemptive war can be morally justified.”* In this statement, students could draw on different societal values and principles to discuss the morality of war.
- **Policy:** *“Public universities should allow funding for student groups that promote a specific religion.”* Policy debates include questions about whether the policy in question is desirable or effective and whether the policy-enacting agency should be the one to make the policy.

Of course, these three types of debate questions often overlap. Use this flexibility to choose a question that is most relevant to your particular course and to your students.

Setting up the Debate

It is important to keep your learning goals in mind as you decide what type of debate to conduct, what question(s) you will use, what roles the students will have, how they will be assigned to teams and how the debate will be graded. Once you have everything planned, be sure to clearly communicate the information to the students to allow them to fully prepare for the debate. You may also want to provide your students with assigned reading, directions for researching the topic on their own and the debate rules and etiquette guidelines.

Debate Formats

Classroom debating is an extremely flexible teaching method, so there are many different formats you can follow, depending on your own learning goals and objectives for the class. We’ve

outlined several (for individual students, small groups, the full class or online) in our [workshop handout](#) and many more format suggestions are available online.

Most debates begin with a short period of individual or group preparation, which is a great time for the teacher to listen in on the preparations the group is making and offer suggestions or answer questions before the debate starts. It is also helpful to end the debate with a debriefing stage when the arguments made by both teams can be assessed and students can discuss their ideas independent of the side they were assigned to or chose to argue.

The debate also often includes a time for teams to make opening and closing statements, where they have uninterrupted time to develop their arguments. Other potential debate components include a rebuttal, where Team B can respond to the arguments made by Team A, or a cross-examination, when teams can question each other in a more free-flowing style. In debate styles with smaller teams, this could also be a time for students in the audience to question their peers on the evidence they have used to support their arguments.

Give Debate a Try!

Debate can be a fun and useful active learning technique and is a great way for students to develop many important skills. For more information about using debate in the classroom, see the resources below.

Additional Resources

[*Many Sides: Debate Across the Curriculum* by Alfred Snider and Maxwell Schnurer](#)

[*The Debatabase Book: A Must-Have Guide for Successful Debate* by Robert Trapp](#)

[“Debating the Evidence: An International Review of Current Situation and Perceptions” by Rodie Akerman and Ian Neale](#)

[International Debate Education Association](#)

[Createdebate.com](#)

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Mind Maps: an Effective Tool for Teaching

Mind maps and digital mind maps are powerful and flexible tools that can prove to be useful in many contexts, from language learning to more general lecture-style classes. Not to be confused with concept maps, mind maps are radial diagrams used to visualize information, crafted around an image or key word that represents the addressed topic. The ideas or concepts that are related to the central image stem out in branches, from bigger to progressively smaller; they should be colored and, along with words, should also make use of images and symbols. Mind Maps' use of branches promotes both associations and the use of colors, important aspects known to boost learning and recall (Driscoll, 200). The final result should be on a single page, and therefore be concise and graphically captivating.

Mind maps are a visual tool that represents ideas and concepts along with their relations, thus emphasizing concepts' hierarchy and connections. They can be used by both professors and students to brainstorm and scaffold new knowledge and previously acquired notions, to establish connections, to review material and to take notes. Thanks to their popularity, it is now possible to create mind maps online through the use of free applications like [MindMup](#), [Coggle](#) or [Bubbl.us](#). The use of mind maps and digital mind maps has many advantages. It allows the professor to review topics without recurring to "chalk and talk," while giving students leadership of the activity and the chance to establish their own connections and categories. In this way, the professor is also a "facilitator," rather than only an instructor.

Additionally, digital mind mapping allows for the creation of maps with ideas, concepts and definitions neatly written and ordered. The branches of the map can be collapsed and expanded as needed, while keeping everything on a single document. This proves useful, as it offers a view of the whole subject, but also provides the option to review and focus on specific branches and topics of the map. Digital mind maps can include images, clips or web links, and are thus well suited for visual learners.

Additionally, mind maps can be created in class, can be saved for further review at home and can be edited over and over again once back in class. In this way, digital mind maps allow students to review topics together in class, individually at home and then again together in class. The need for synthesis of mind maps makes them an ideal tool for students to review and collaborate together. To further enhance learning cooperation, it is possible to use a hybrid approach, with maps created digitally for the whole class and individually recreated on paper by the students, who can share or even exchange their maps. These maps will be similar in content, but different in their layout and connections, thus giving the students the possibility not only to collaborate, but also to look at the same topic from different perspectives and through different connections

(Budd, 42). This practice boosts interaction, but also learning, recall and recognition in a self-managed active context.

To conclude, mind maps allow the professor to facilitate, motivate and model knowledge for students, while still giving the class leadership of learning. Additionally, they help to move from a professor-centered context to a student-centered learning environment, while covering at least four of the “Seven Principles of Good Teaching Practices” created by Chickering and Gamson, namely: 1) developing reciprocity and cooperation among students; 2) encouraging active learning; 3) giving prompt feedback; 4) respecting diverse talents and ways of learning.

Resources

Budd, John. “Mind maps as classroom exercises.” *Journal of Economic Education* 35 (Winter 2004): 35-49.

Chickering, Arthur, and Zelda Gamson. “Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education.” *AAHE Bulletin* 39 (March 1987): 3-7.

Driscoll, Marcy. *Psychology of learning for instruction*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2000.

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Reflective Practice: SKAP – Skills, Knowledge, Attitudes, Practice

In *Using Reflection and Metacognition to Improve Student Learning* (ed. Kaplan, Silver, Lavaque-Manty & Meizlish, 2013), **reflection** is defined as “conscious exploration of one’s own experiences.” **Reflective practice** involves reflecting and debriefing on an experience as part of the learning experience. Instruction or experience alone may not lead to true learning; reflective practice is an essential ingredient to deep understanding and increases the probability of application and transfer of learning.

What is “SKAP”?

- **S – Skills** – may include a set of procedures to perform specific tasks, life skills, social skills, study and organizational skills
- **K – Knowledge** – content knowledge, comprehension/understanding of new information/concepts
- **A – Attitudes/Beliefs** – a way of thinking or feeling – more difficult to measure or observe
- **P – Practice/Professional Dispositions** – observable behaviors, set of valued behaviors aligned to specific profession/discipline

Why use Reflective Practice?

- Links theory to practice
- Makes learning authentic, meaningful and relevant
- Personalizes learning
- Engages and empowers students in their own learning

Here are some basic “Reflective Practice” prompts:

- How has this assignment/activity/article/video/class/course
 - Impacted your skills
 - Impacted your knowledge
 - Impacted your attitudes/beliefs
 - Impacted your practice/professional dispositions
- Give an example of how this assignment/article/video/class/course activity has
 - Impacted your skills
 - Impacted your knowledge
 - Impacted your attitudes/beliefs
 - Impacted your practice/professional dispositions
- After experiencing this assignment/activity/article/video/class/course, how has it changed your
 - Skills
 - Knowledge
 - Attitudes/beliefs
 - Practice/professional dispositions

How and when you can apply “reflective practice” in your courses:

- **One Minute papers** – at the end of a class or a unit, have the students write a “one-minute reflective paper” and turn it in as they leave class
- **Journaling** – have students keep a journal throughout the semester with their reflections using the prompts
- **Forums/Discussion Boards** – have students engage in online discussion boards, addressing and responding to others
- **Reflection section in assignments/essays/projects** – at the end of assignments/essays/projects (with grading criteria included), have students reflect on the experience
- **End of Semester Class Forums** – discussion group during last session
- **Mid-semester and Final Course Evaluation** – include open-ended questions
- **Exit Interviews** – at the end of the program, have students respond
- **Program Portfolios** – include a reflective component

Resources

Kaplan, Silver, Lavaque-Manty & Meizlish, (editors). (2013) *Using Reflection and Metacognition to Improve Student Learning*. Sterling Virginia: Stylus

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Quizzing: The Single Best Teaching Tip

If you wanted to reduce *Walden* to its most fundamental and powerful concept, you would probably cite Thoreau's famous advice—"Simplify, simplify, simplify!" If you were to ask us for our single best teaching tip to enshrine in the Pedagogical Hall of Fame, we would have to say, Quiz, Quiz and Quiz again.

In each of our first books for New Forums, *It Works For Me* (1998) and *It Works For Me, Too* (2002), we devoted a section to testing and quizzing. Now, whenever, we observe classes and/or look over faculty syllabi, we always check the quiz policy. In the former book, we offered a simple rationale for the quiz strategy, and among the reasons were the following:

- "Students tend to actually read the material.
- "Students tend to show up for class on time.
- "Students raise their grades by simply reading the material.
- "The quiz provides a good lead-in for either a lecture or discussion of the material.
- "Students grow curious about the answers.
- "Students are provided with a real foundation for intellectual growth" (33).

Sixteen years later, our belief in quizzes is even stronger both because of our experience and the research. We'd like to focus on a book we read recently, *Make It Stick* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2014), that provides additional support for quizzing. Back in 1998 when we discussed "a real foundation for intellectual growth," what we put in our own words is what we consider the goal of higher education, **deep learning**. According to the book's authors, cognitive psychologists offer another reason for quizzing: "if we stop thinking of testing as a dipstick to measure learning—if we think of it as practicing retrieval of learning from memory rather than 'testing,' we open ourselves to another possibility: the use of testing as a tool for learning" (19). The key concept is **retrieval**, which has two major benefits: it "tells you what you know and what you don't know" and "recalling what you have learned causes your brain to reconsolidate the memory, and strengthens its connections to what you already know and makes it easier for you to recall in the future" (20).

What effect does the concept of multi-retrieval have on you as an instructor? Quiz at the beginning of class. By all means, ask questions on the reading for that session, but throw in a question or two from past classes. The spacing between the original exposure to new material and the quiz, "allowing some forgetting to occur between tests . . . [ellipsis ours] leads to stronger long-term retention than when it is massed" (32). One study, the authors report, demonstrated that the "kids scored a full grade level higher on the material that had been quizzed than on the material that had not been quizzed" (35). In short, quizzing promotes deeper learning than cram sessions (even group studying) and rereading (and it reduces test anxiety).

Also, quiz at the end of class as an alternative to reflective writing. No rule exists we know of that prevents double quizzing. If students know the quiz is part of their grade, they will not only show up every day on time but actually stay the whole period, as well as pay closer attention to the session's content. Consider setting up a ratio of dropped quizzes to reward attendance. For instance, if you permit five absences per semester, for each unused absence, allow the student to drop a low quiz score. Then students are really rewarded for attendance.

And lest we forget, go over the quiz answers (yes, you can wait till the next class). According to *Make It Stick*, "giving feedback strengthens retention more than testing alone does and, interestingly, some evidence shows that delaying the feedback briefly produces better long-term learning than immediate feedback" (39). When students begin studying for your exams, your feedback on what it is they did not know will help them, and evidence suggests they will learn more than peers who were not quizzed.

In short, the authors conclude, "the testing effect is real—that the act of retrieving memory changes the memory, making it easier to retrieve again later" (41).

Quiz! Quiz! Quiz!

Submitted by:

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Likes and Dislikes

Like most instructors, I receive course evaluations after a class is complete. However, the time lapse does little to help the dynamics of the class that completed the evaluations. Therefore, I find it useful (for both my students and me) to have some sort of class evaluation midway through the term.

Sometime toward the middle of the semester, I hand out notecards to students in my classes. I then give them a very simple task: on one side of the card, list three (or more) things you like about the class (especially as related to your learning); on the other side of the card, list three (or more) things you dislike/would like to change about the class (especially as related to your learning). Students are asked to not write their names on the cards as their responses are anonymous, which hopefully encourages honesty.

Before the next class period, I take the time to read the responses and compile a list of common themes. I share these themes with the class during the next class period. Sharing the “likes” seems to remind students of the positive things they are taking away from the class. Sharing the “dislikes” gives me an opportunity to actually commit to making changes or explain why I am choosing not to do so.

I think the activity helps me better see my classes through the students’ eyes. I think it also gives the students some perspective from my point of view as well as that of their peers.

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Progress Report Journal

Midterm evaluations bring a host of institutional measures to reach out to under-achieving students, such as grade reports. What might make the most difference to students' success in the course is to enable them to assess their own performance in the class, set goals and provide questions and feedback to the instructor accordingly. I do this through a "Progress Report" online journal assignment. Since I make all grades available on Moodle, our learning management system, students can see their grades, but often they don't check or acknowledge that these grades are available to them (since many professors will not provide these grades automatically).

Therefore, about a third of the way through the semester, students are required to complete a Progress Report journal in which they:

- Report their overall grade in the course.
- Report their attendance record (since attendance is required in my course).
- Reflect on their performance, whether it meets their expectations.
- Provide goals for the rest of the course (often in the form of a GPA).
- Provide feedback and questions for me on the class in general.

Students take anywhere from 50 to 400 words to complete this journal, based on their needs. While we may consider ourselves open to student feedback, students often interpret this as their first opportunity to reflect on the course and ask questions. Some will provide context for their content knowledge and other school responsibilities, which is often very enlightening for me. Students generally express gratitude at the official opportunity to assess their progress in the course (even more so when they are doing poorly) because it is early enough in the semester to make progress. Even with brief feedback on the instructor's part, they see it as the professor reaching out and caring about individual students.

Even in the case of students who are negative and critical, it provides an opportunity for the instructor to show understanding and explain course procedure, more effectively shutting down grumblings and increasing course satisfaction. In some cases, it also provides an opportunity to improve our courses and correct mistakes.

I implement this in a writing-intensive course that is capped at 22 students; in courses with more than 50 students, you may want to offer this as extra credit to control review flow. Even for classes with around 50 students, this activity would not take long for the tremendous benefit it provides to the class dynamic, student success and your end-of-the-semester evaluations. Many student progress reports do not require individual responses if they are happy with their grades and the course in general.

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How to Give Better Feedback

To help learners in any area – mastering science, writing a paper or performing a dance – you need to give feedback that will help them reach their goals. Useful feedback is

- **Formative**
- **Actionable**
- **Clear**
- **Timely**
- **Supportive**

Let's take a look at each characteristic.

Formative. Adjusting our performance depends not only on receiving feedback, but also on having opportunities to use that feedback. The key is allowing learners sufficient time and opportunity to use the feedback to improve their performance and to help them achieve their long-term goals before any summative assessment appears on the scene. Without a chance to improve performance before a final assessment, students tend to disregard feedback and are less likely to apply it elsewhere when the course is over.

Feedback often functions as course corrections on a student's path. As you provide abundant feedback throughout the semester, keeping course learning goals in mind, students are best able to improve their own learning experience and to arrive successfully at the final destination.

Feedback shouldn't be limited to a grade against objectives recently taught; rather, useful feedback aligns with final performance standards students encounter early in a course.

Useful feedback contains concrete examples, at least much of the time. Remember that whatever feedback you share should be presented with long-term learning goals in mind and in a timely manner to allow learners a chance to improve performance.

Actionable. Actionable feedback will help answer the question, "What *specifically* should I do more or less of next time, based on this information?"

Too often feedback is given in haste and lacks concreteness and specificity. Comments such as "Good job!" or "This isn't quite right" or "B+" aren't helpful. Sometimes givers of feedback infer a situation based on their observations and simply offer a judgment, rather than present a sufficiently detailed description of the data.

Suppose you've been invited to offer feedback to a colleague on his or her teaching. A comment such as "Many students were bored in class" is a judgment and tells your colleague little about how to improve class engagement. More useful and less debatable is this: "I noted ongoing inattentive behavior in 15 of 28 students once lecturing began. Specific behaviors included

texting, accessing Facebook and email, and conversing and laughing in low tones. However, after the collaborative group discussion began, I saw such behavior in only one student.”

The latter comment provides feedback the teacher can use to adapt his or her teaching style and address specific issues.

Clear. While grading papers, performances and other works, ensure that the message you send on all levels is perfectly clear. Pay attention not only to verbal or written feedback, but also to the tone of your voice and the expression on your face. If learners don’t understand your feedback, they won’t know what they need to do in order to improve their performance.

Timely. To reach a destination, a pilot must undertake numerous and usually small course corrections. The sooner a correction is made, the better. The same principle applies as far as effective learning is concerned: The sooner feedback is given, the sooner it can be applied (assuming, of course, that you aren’t hovering over students’ shoulders, critiquing every word as it is written). Feedback is best given after the paper is submitted, the performance complete, the test taken, and so on. Hence, the best feedback is “timely,” not necessarily “immediate.”

Supportive. *How* you say something often matters as much as *what* you say. If you were to apply all the components of providing effective feedback but fail to be empathetic in your delivery, you likely would have as much success of your message getting through as you would shoving an extra-large pizza into a mail slot. When there is empathy, understanding and love, students are more likely to willingly receive the feedback you offer to help them succeed.

Remember: When giving feedback, get the FACTS straight. The best feedback is **F**ormative, **A**ctionable, **C**lear, **T**imely, and **S**upportive.

Resources

Fink, L. D. (2003). *Creating significant learning experiences: An integrated approach to designing college courses*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Wiggins, G. (2012). Seven keys to effective feedback. *Educational Leadership*, 70 (1), 10-16.
Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/sept12/vol70/num01/Seven-Keys-to-Effective-Feedback.aspx>

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How Many Levels of Quality Should We Represent in a Rubric?

Horror vacui. *Aristotle*

Aristotle may or may not be right when he said *nature abhors a vacuum*, but when we create a rubric, academics loathe leaving cells empty.

Problems arise when a rubric contains many quality levels, creating empty cells that demand descriptive language:

- We have difficulty writing unambiguous descriptions of quality for rubrics with 4 or more levels. Rubrics with many levels introduce fine-grain distinctions that we cannot describe clearly. With ambiguous definitions, we have difficulty making consistent decisions.
- Some characteristics of student work are best described and evaluated with 2 or 3 levels (thesis statement included / not included; problem solved accurately / problem solved with minor technical errors / problem not solved).
- Complex rubrics create the risk that reviewers ignore the language used to define levels of quality and instead use unwritten assumptions when they evaluate work. A rubric based on five levels of quality is especially vulnerable; reviewers might adopt a mental shortcut in which 5 represents A-level work, 4 represents B-level work, etc. Other reviewers might rely on the descriptive language to make decisions. If both reviewers are grading the same work, the reviewers will disagree and the first reviewer might use the rubric inconsistently.

Humphry and Heldsinger (2014) reported that reviewers' judgments can be influenced by the structure of the rubric. A typical rubric creates the same number of quality levels for every criterion element in the rubric. When using these rubrics, reviewers tended to make global judgments about student papers and assign similar ratings for each element in the rubric. Thus, if a student scores in the top category on one element, the student is likely to receive scores in the top category on all other elements, even when performance across elements is uneven.

In contrast, reviewers who make decisions based on the element descriptions are more likely to assign different ratings for different elements, revealing patterns of strength and weakness in student performance. A rubric that uses different numbers of quality levels for different criteria focuses reviewer attention on the descriptive language and improves consistency. For example, a rubric might use 5 levels of quality to describe the use of evidence to build and support an argument but use only 3 levels of quality to describe the use of mechanics of language (significant errors that interfere with readability or communication, occasional errors that do not interfere with readability or communication, no errors or minor errors, mostly related to lapses in proofreading). Reviewers who used rubrics with varying numbers of quality for different criteria were more likely to make independent decisions about each criterion (Humphry & Heldsinger, 2014).

Consider the merits of a rubric that (gasp) has some empty cells and uses 4 or 5 levels of quality to evaluate some components of student work and uses 2 or 3 levels of quality to evaluate other components. If the empty cells bother you or your students, fill them with a grey shading to let everyone know you intended them to be blank. Nilson (2014) describes rubrics with only 2 levels in which each element aligns with competency on a specific student learning outcome.

Whether you use the same number of levels for all elements in a rubric or allow these to vary, pay attention to how you combine rubric elements to generate the final grade for the assignment. Make sure that scores on the most important elements contribute most to the final grade. Rubrics that include many elements (even 2 or 3 level elements) for minor details that are easy to evaluate can come to dominate the total score. If you want the content of a literature review paper to determine 30% of the grade, ensure that it contributes 30% of the possible points to the final score. Use multipliers for a rubric element to increase the contribution of critical elements to the final score.

If the rubric generates data for assessment purposes, keep a record of the scores students earn on each element. These individual element scores are critical for identifying areas of strength and weakness in student work. For example, students may earn high scores on an element that evaluates how accurately students describe content of the literature they review, but they may earn lower scores on how well they interpret and apply that content to analysing a problem or building an argument.

Resources

Humphry, S. M., & Heldsinger, S. A. (2014). Common structural design features of rubrics may represent a threat to validity. *Educational Researcher*, 43, 253-263.
doi:10.3102/0013189X14542154

Nilson, L. B. (2014). *Specifications grading*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

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Personalizing Feedback to Students: Eyejot

The basic premise of [Eyejot](#) is that you can easily create a video e-mail to send to individuals or groups of students. It is freely accessible by instructors (free version allows you to create up to five minutes of video) or students (students do not need an Eyejot account in order to receive Eyejot messages). Eyejot can be used to send comments as you grade students' work. It allows for more personalization, especially in fully online classes. Even in a blended course or face-to-face course where students would become familiar with your use of language, sarcasm, humor and mannerisms, communicating via text e-mails can still be "misread" for tone and intent. Eyejot makes it possible to see and hear your tone and body language.

In [Best Practices for Teaching with Emerging Technologies](#) (2012), Pacansky-Brock illustrates a faculty member's use of Eyejot. An English professor uses it to send introductory videos. She uses Eyejot to create video reminders of due dates. Students respond with Eyejot videos when they have issues/questions with assignments. She states, "Students have told me they have felt more engaged in my classes because of the personal connection" (p. 80).

At Kennesaw State University, [the use of Eyejot](#) allows students in blended courses to feel more connected, especially in the weeks when there are no face-to-face class meetings.

While there are not a lot of resources that thoroughly describes the use of Eyejot in education settings, here are some ideas:

1. [Technology Teaching Tools](#)
2. [Video Emails Using Eyejot](#)
3. [A video about Eyejot](#) that describes way students can use Eyejot.
4. If you explore this more, you will see the faculty in language education are very keen on the use of this tool. [The article Using Video Messaging as a Tool to Develop Students' Speaking Ability: A Preliminary Study by Emilie Masson](#) describes a study done related to students using Eyejot to develop video journals as a means of practicing their use of English. This is available through the website academia.edu (free registration to access articles).

One caveat: while some students compare written comments on papers, grades and scores on a rubric, they rarely share with everyone in a class or outside of a class. As an electronic file, this could be forwarded or posted easily – all over, in fact. This has the potential to be misused or cause a FERPA violation. The work around for this would be to embed the video code into Blackboard, Moodle, etc., to individual groups – one for each student that assigns access to only the student and the instructor.

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Weaving Current Events into Student Assignments and Classroom Activities

One way to help students recognize the relevance of a course of study is to incorporate current events into the mix of classroom strategies. Whether your students use actual newspapers or electronic resources, there are dozens of ways to weave current events into student assignments and classroom activities. The New York Times Learning Network posted “50 Ways to Teach with Current Events” on their website last fall and there are hundreds of other suggestions on the web.

The following list includes a few of my favorite news-related assignments and activities:

- Give extra credit for current news articles that directly relate to class content. Invite students to bring in an article, explain why it’s relevant and present a 1-2 minute summary.
- Have students closely examine one news event by comparing the coverage from different news sources. How is the coverage similar and how is it different?
- Given a particular news event, ask students to identify two credible resources and two questionable resources, and justify their selections.
- After discussing a current event, provide event photographs and ask students to develop their own captions and share in class.
- When following one issue for a full semester, ask students to write an opinion piece at the beginning, middle and end of the semester.
- With more complex current event topics, ask students to create a timeline of events.
- Invite students to look at the stories that have made the front page of a local newspaper during the last few days and to talk about why each of those stories made headlines.
- Ask students to choose an article and write about how that issue matters to them, to their family or to their community.
- Ask students to analyze how photographs are used, what they add to the understanding of the article, how they may bias the content of an article and what makes them memorable and/or questionable.
- Ask students to write a letter to the editor about a topic/issue emerging from the course content and discussion.
- Ask students to compare a current event to a historical event of their choosing.
- Help students practice research skills by distributing articles for students to use to practice summarizing, paraphrasing, using quotations, avoiding plagiarism and citing sources.

Resources

Education World: *Twenty-Five Great Ideas for Teaching Current Events*. Retrieved from http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/lesson/lesson072.shtml

The Learning Network: *50 Ways to Teach with Current Events*. Retrieved from <http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/10/07/50-ways-to-teach-current-events/comment-page-1/>

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Scavenger Hunt (Mobile Activity) on Motivational Appeals for Persuasive Speaking

The focus of the Mobile Learning Scavenger Hunt lesson is to work together as a team to discover and capture a variety of objects and/or visuals that include motivational appeals. In my face-to-face class, student teams scour the campus looking for objects/visuals that appeal to needs and values, capture them using a mobile app of their choice, publish, and submit the URL to our class online discussion forum. (Note: this activity can also be modified for a fully online class.) We use the last 20 minutes of class to share and reflect on all the team videos. Some favorite apps have been Animoto, YouTube Capture, Flipagram, Instagram and Vine. We discuss the following: Is the object/visual effective/persuasive to the target audience? What motivational appeal is it an example of? Students are required to provide written feedback in the online discussion forum on at least one team's video before our next class session.

This mobile lesson template can be used to develop other mobile lessons/activities.

Goal

In order to be an effective speaker, it is important to consider the emotional impact on our audience, as well as relate our ideas to their emotions, needs and values. The goal is to find out what is meaningful to our audience so we can relate to them in persuasive speaking.

Work together as a team to discover and capture a variety of objects and/or visuals that include motivational appeals.

Outcome

- Evaluate a variety of different objects and/or visuals that demonstrate motivational appeal; and
- Create a video and/or collage of visuals that demonstrate needs and values.

Materials

- SmartPhone with video or collage app of choice
- Account with app, if needed (Animoto, Vine, Flipagram, etc.)
- Wi-Fi
- Classroom computer with projector to share final video/collage

Instructions

You have 20 minutes to go on a team scavenger hunt, **looking and capturing** objects/visuals around campus that appeal to needs and values. (Think: signage, posters, layout of structures, etc.).

Include:

- **Needs** – think Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs
- **Values** – think general values (culture, family, social), core values, authority values, peripheral values

Steps

Step One: Scour the campus looking for objects/visuals of any type that demonstrate appeals to needs and values (***must include at least one example for need, one for value***);

Step Two: Use a mobile app, such as Vine, YouTube Capture, Animoto, PicStich, PhotoGrid to create a video or photo collage of no more than 1 minute; upload to YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Animoto or any site where you can share with the class.

Step Three: Think about the purpose and the target audience of your visuals. Answer these two questions in your video:

1. What **values** are appealed to in the object/visual? Identify the values.
2. What **needs** are appealed to in the object/visual? Identify the needs.

Step Four: Upload your video/collage URL to the *Share Your Scavenger Hunt Video Here* forum on Moodle immediately following the scavenger hunt.

Step Five: Reflection/Share Out – Is the object/visual effective/persuasive to the target audience? What motivational appeal is it an example of?

Assessment

Use the Scavenger Hunt Rubric valued at total of 10 points.

Scavenger Hunt Rubric

	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Below Expectations	Points
Contribution to Group (3 points)	Team accepted responsibilities for constructing the hunt and collaborating on the video	Team accepted some responsibility for constructing the hunt and some collaboration on the video	Team made little contribution to constructing the hunt and/or collaborating on the video	
Needs and Values (4 points)	Team included at least two examples of each: needs and values	Team included at least one example of each: needs and values	Team did not include at least one examples of each: needs and values	
Final Hunt Results (Video) (3 points)	Video demonstrates an appeal to needs and values by answering all four questions.	Video demonstrates an appeal to needs and values by answering most questions	Video demonstrates an appeal to needs and values by answering few questions	

Sample Video/Collage

- See Sample Vine on Moodle
- See Sample Animoto on Moodle

Deadline

April 21, 5:00 pm

Feedback

Students will receive classmates’ feedback during class share out; instructor feedback will be posted in Moodle GradeBook

Impacts

After two years of providing this learning opportunity, students have experienced significant improvement in appealing to the audience needs/values in their persuasive speeches. Additional benefits include: building community, collaboration and learning new technologies.

Technology Considerations

Instructors will create a sample video/collage to demonstrate the final product – **Vine, Animoto, YouTube**, etc.

Challenges

- Variety of devices and apps
- Students may spend a lot of time just picking the app
- Access to Wi-Fi could be intermittent in some areas
- Need accounts created that could potentially take time
- Time logging into accounts on classroom computer (to share video/collage)

Solutions

- Ask students if they have a smartphone in class prior to activity
- Assign team leaders to choose an app before next class session
- If students are not using campus Wi-Fi, be sure to let them know that apps may require data usage on their plan
- Have student leaders create an account (if needed) before the Lesson

See more information on my blog: [Mobile Learning Scavenger Hunt](#)

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Using SAMR to Guide Teaching with Technology

Faculty interested in being more reflective and effective with their technology use need to look no further than the SAMR model. It stands for Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, Redefinition. Developed by Ruben Puentedura, an educational technologist, the SAMR model guides faculty in their design, implementation and evaluation of technology use in their classes. Faculty can use SAMR to reflect upon how they are integrating technology: is it an act of Substitution? Augmentation? Modification? Or Redefinition?

Substitution – Technology acts as a direct tool substitute, with no functional change. This is the most inconsequential use of technology, since its role is optional. In other words, a substitutive use of technology involves doing the same thing as you would without the technology. An example would be composing an essay using Microsoft Word, as opposed to handwriting with paper and pencil.

Augmentation – Technology acts as a direct tool substitute, with functional improvement. While a slight improvement from substitution, an augmentative approach to technology offers some benefits because it leverages the features afforded by the technology. An example would be using Microsoft Word to compose an essay and employing the footnote, spell-check, word count and other built-in features.

Modification – Technology allows for significant task redesign. This approach to technology moves from enhancement to transformation. An example would be adding videos, sounds, images and hyperlinks within a Microsoft Word document, fundamentally changing a static text into a multimedia document.

Redefinition – Technology allows for the creation of new tasks, previously inconceivable. This ultimate use of technology results in a new product and process that was not possible before. An example would be using Google Docs, as opposed to Microsoft Word, for collaborative writing projects, whereby multiple users can work on one document synchronously or asynchronously — a process that is not possible without technology.

Resources

[Ruben R. Puentedura's Blog](#)

[Introduction to the SAMR Model video](#) (4:22)

[Kathy Schrock's Guide to SAMR Model](#)

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Becoming a Writer

Many academics do not think of themselves as writers. Instead, they think of themselves as teachers, thinkers, scholars, researchers or artists who must write. This mindset creates obstacles to writing. Tietze (2014) argues that when writing becomes part of your identity, you make it a priority and create opportunities to write during your regular activities, just as you make room for other critical activities (sleeping, eating, spending time with your family, exercising).

If we reflect on how academics spend their time every day, writing emerges as an integral part of academic life. How much time do you spend writing emails, lecture notes, exam questions, comments on student papers and other day-to-day academic tasks? Writing is intrinsic to academic life. The type of writing that we parcel out as unique and separate from “real” academic life is the writing that is most useful for formal professional scholarship: peer-reviewed publications, conference submissions, grant proposals, chapters and books. When we isolate writing for publication as a unique activity that is fundamentally different from our other writing, we underestimate the role of writing as part of our professional identity and sabotage our commitment to writing publishable work.

Jenkins (2015) offers good advice for integrating writing into a regular schedule. Like Tietze, Jenkins argues that the first step to becoming a productive writer requires making a commitment to write: Decide that you *are* a writer and that writing is something you need to do to meet your personal goals (not imposed goals), not something you would like to do when the stars align properly.

The stars never align properly. Life never opens up a grand vista of leisure to enable completing long-postponed plans. Worse, mundane tasks have the uncanny knack of filling up the available time. If you have all afternoon to perfect your lecture and no other pressing priorities, you will use the full afternoon for this task. Jenkins suggests scheduling time for these routine tasks to prevent them from taking all your time. Although your PowerPoint might be more perfect if you spent another hour searching for better images, you might better spend some of that time on the important task of writing. Similarly, you should schedule times to write (and honor that schedule the way you would honor your class schedule or a committee meeting).

Consider the value of everyday writing for your more formal, scholarly work. You might write an email to a collaborator or editor to discuss the structure of an article or chapter. Treat this writing as pre-writing. It may contain the seeds of an outline or a paragraph that sorts out the main issues of a thorny topic. Notes recorded during a planning meeting may evolve into a first draft of a research methods section. Carry a notebook or iPad to record writing ideas or draft short summaries of concepts that might be the basis for new scholarly work or contribute to existing work. Some people keep a reading journal and record new and useful ideas from scholarly

reading. Others keep more general journals and record notes and to-do lists associated with day-to-day activities (meetings, conversations and phone calls, as well as formal reading). My notebooks contain highlighted comments about suggestions for teaching tips that surface during conversations and meetings with faculty.

Resources

Jenkins, R. (January 12, 2015). *Writing with a heavy teaching load*. Blog post in The Chronicle of Higher Education. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/Writing-With-a-Heavy-Teaching/151155>

Tietze, C. (July 3, 2014). *Make writing a part of your identify*. Blog post. Retrieved from <http://christiantietze.de/posts/2014/07/identity-schedule-serious-writing/>

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More than Just the Last Day of Class

Near the end of the semester, as I was reading posts to a listserv about college teaching, a faculty member asked for suggestions on structuring her last day of class. She was seeking ways to honor her students' hard work over the course of the semester as well as to celebrate her students' learning accomplishments. The first suggestion she received was simply one word: pizza.

I am sure the faculty member was disappointed with this response. She recognized that the last day of class should be more than just the last day of class. At the same time, however, she sensed that simply celebrating would forego an important opportunity to pull everything together and send students forward inspired and equipped by their semester-long learning experience.

To create a last day of class experience that honors and empowers students, the culminating task or activity should incorporate the following five elements:

1. **Synthesis** – students combine the major course concepts to create something new or use their understanding in a new way.
2. **Reflection** – students think about their learning experiences and outcomes over the course of the semester and explore or articulate new insights.
3. **Connection** – students make connections between the major course concepts and their own lives, other courses or disciplines and/or the world in general.
4. **Application** – students articulate specific ways they can put what they have learned during the semester into practice.
5. **Celebration** – students experience a sense of accomplishment, feelings of comradery and hope for the future.

In addition, be sure to make your last day task or activity highly interactive. Create energy and enthusiasm by encouraging students to speak honestly, build upon one another's ideas and think creatively. The experience can be intellectually challenging, but it also should be fun!

Bleicher (2011) describes a comprehensive last day of class activity that incorporates all five elements into an in-depth, interactive, last day of class course critique. Macpherson (2007) offers various 20- to 40-minute cooperative learning activities such as writing a legacy letter (p. 183) and exchanging success tips (p. 184) that can be incorporated into the last day of class. Faculty at University of California, Berkeley offer 16 even simpler last day suggestions... and it should be noted that the last one mentions pizza. 😊

These are just a few of many possibilities. I encourage you to begin thinking now about how you can structure this semester's last day of class to make it more than just the last day of class.

Resources

Bleicher, E. (2011). The last class: Critical thinking, reflection, course effectiveness, and student engagement. *Honors in Practice – Online Archive. Paper 130*. Lincoln, NE: Digital Commons@University of Nebraska – Lincoln. Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1129&context=nchchip>

Center for Teaching and Learning (n.d.) The last day of class. *Center for Teaching and Learning. University of California, Berkeley*. Retrieved from <https://teaching.berkeley.edu/last-day-class>

Macpherson, A. (2007). Group activities to end a course. *Cooperative learning group activities for college courses: A guide for instructors*. Retrieved from http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/prod/groups/ohr/@pub/@ohr/documents/asset/ohr_89185.pdf

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Favorite Quote: “Teachers open the door but you must walk through it yourself.”

---Proverb, Chinese

This quote above sums up my teaching philosophy in that instructors provide the foundation for learning and mentorship, but students must take the initiative to realize their unique potential. This also coincides with Bloom’s Taxonomy, as knowledge and comprehension expand to analysis, evaluation and synthesis of concepts and ideas. By providing a welcoming, collaborative atmosphere and establishing rapport, the goal is to have students feel more comfortable going out of their comfort zone to reach the next step of the ladder.

Teaching Tip 1: Challenge students to use critical thinking and engage in self-reflection by posing thought-provoking questions.

Teaching Tip 2: Serve as a role model by demonstrating enthusiasm for the subject matter to foster interest and motivation.

Teaching Tip 3: Develop creative lesson plans that complement the syllabus, but also provide new information and resources to explore.

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Faculty

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