

# 2016-2017 Teaching Issues Writing Consortium

## Teaching Tips

### Contributions by:

Azusa Pacific University	Metropolitan State University	Seneca College
Boise State University	MGH Institute of Health Professions	Texas A&M University – Commerce
Bradley University	Mississippi University for Women	University of Notre Dame
Brigham Young University	Molloy College	University of South Carolina School of Medicine Greenville
Clemson University	Morehead State University	University of the Rockies
Community College of Rhode Island	New York Institute of Technology	University of the Sciences
Eastern Kentucky University	North Carolina Wesleyan College	University of West Florida
Elon University	North Central College	Wake Forest University
Lehman College	Oakland University	Western Kentucky University
McHenry County College	Robert Morris University	York College of Pennsylvania
	Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology	



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## Starting Strong by Building Community, Social Presence, and Swift Trust

There are certain practices to employ in classes – whether they be in person, blended, or online – that can set the tone for the entire term and may even have an effect on retention and student success if you can implement them starting the first week of class: building a learning community, building instructional social presence, and building “swift trust.”

When considering the importance of building a community of learners in an online course, Sadera, Robertson, Song, and Midon (2009) found “a strong correlation between learner interaction and engagement, sense of community, and success in online learning” (p. 282). Boston et al. (2009) found that when students feel more a part of a learning community, they are retained at higher rates.

But what makes or helps to build a “learning community”? Vesely, Bloom, and Sherlock (2007) shared common elements of community in online learning that are cited often in the literature that included a sense of shared purpose, establishment and enforcement of rules/policies regarding community behavior, interaction among members, and a level of trust, respect and support among community members. To facilitate community building, instructors should model the expected behaviors and interactions, encourage students, facilitate sharing and participating, and respond to student concerns in aid of creating an open environment (Vesely, Bloom, & Sherlock).

Studies have also found a strong relationship between better retention and success and an instructor’s social presence in a course, especially online classes. Social presence can be defined as how much students feel like their instructors (or others) are “with them” in a class. Ley and Gannon-Cook (2014) shared some practices that can increase an instructor’s social presence, such as timely responses to emails and the tone of those emails, how instructors participate and/or give feedback in discussions, and giving timely feedback on submitted work. York and Richardson (2012), found that in online classes, hearing an instructor’s voice via audio or video helped to reduce the “perceived distance” of online courses and that students notice and appreciate when each and every student’s introduction is responded to. All of these things bolster that sense that someone is out there.

In addition to building a learning community and social presence within a course, Meyerson et al. (1996) introduced “swift trust” as a concept found within temporary groups or teams, and this can be applied to classes. “Swift trust” entails someone being willing to “suspend doubt” about whether others who are not known to them can be depended upon to help with a task at hand and will be beneficial. Additionally, the person(s) given this “swift trust” will generally be quite responsive. Swift trust applies to both the instructor **and** other learners.

With these three things in mind – building community, building social presence, and building swift trust – what do you do the first week or two in your classes to cultivate them? Ice breakers,

small group activities, quick “getting to know you” conferences or Skype appointments with students – all are little things that can give students the reassurance that they are not alone, they are part of a community of learners, and that their instructor does care about their success in the course.

### **Resources**

- Boston, W., Diaz, S.R., Gibson, A., Ice, P., Richardson, J., & Swan, K. (2009). An Exploration of the Relationship Between Indicators of the Community of Inquiry Framework and Retention in Online Programs. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 13(3), 67-83.
- Ley, K. & Gannon-Cook, R. (2014). Learner-valued interactions: Research into practice. *Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, 15(1), 23-32. Retrieved from [http://www.aect.org/pdf/proceedings13/2013/13\\_16.pdf](http://www.aect.org/pdf/proceedings13/2013/13_16.pdf)
- Meyerson, D., Weick, K. E., & Kramer, R. M. (1996). Swift trust and temporary systems. In R. M. Kramer and T. R. Tyler (Eds.) *Trust in organizations*. Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA. 166-195.
- Sadera, W. A., Robertson, J., Song, L., & Midon, M. N. (2009). The Role of Community in Online Learning Success. *Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, 5(2), 277-284. Retrieved from [http://jolt.merlot.org/vol5no2/sadera\\_0609.pdf](http://jolt.merlot.org/vol5no2/sadera_0609.pdf)
- Vesely, P., Bloom, L., & Sherlock, J. (2007). Key elements of building online community: Comparing faculty and student perceptions. *Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, 3(3). Available online at <http://jolt.merlot.org/vol3no3/vesely.htm>
- York, C.S. & Richardson, J.C. (2012). Interpersonal interaction in online learning: Experienced online instructors’ perceptions of influencing factors. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 16(4), 83—98. Retrieved from [http://sloanconsortium.org/publications/jaln\\_main](http://sloanconsortium.org/publications/jaln_main)

### **Submitted by:**

Wren Mills, Ph.D.  
Distance Learning Training Coordinator  
Western Kentucky University  
[www.wku.edu/dfaculty](http://www.wku.edu/dfaculty)

## **The ADA Syllabus Statement: Moving Beyond the Boilerplate**

It's the first day of class, and if you are a faculty member like me, you are in the middle of that often-repeated ritual of explaining the syllabus. While your students shift in their seats, trying to resist the urge to text, check Instagram, or whatever furtive phone activities they might want to perform, you diligently and carefully explain the course requirements, the course policies, the schedule, etc. And at some point, you will get to the section on disability accommodations. Many colleges and universities have boilerplate passages that faculty use: the college affirms its commitment to complying with the Americans with Disability Act (ADA), and students are directed to an office of disability services, which will help coordinate "reasonable accommodations" for "documented disabilities." And many statements also stress that it is the student's responsibility to provide faculty with accommodations forms and information. All of this is well and good. But I want to argue here for going off script and engaging in a more historically-contextualized class discussion of disability accommodations. It will benefit you and it will benefit your students. Here's how and why.

In 1990, disability rights activists gathered at the National Mall in Washington, DC, slipped out of their wheelchairs, dropped their crutches, and dragged themselves up the 83 steps of the U.S. Capitol building. The "Capital Crawl" demonstration was designed to illustrate – both literally and figuratively – the barriers that people with disabilities confront and to push for better access to political and public spheres. The subsequent ADA legislation is one of the major civil rights achievements of our time, and this rich history of disability activism has a direct connection to the accommodations we make in higher education. Talking about the ADA as a civil rights issue in your classroom – and it can be as simple as briefly mentioning this history – shifts the discussion of accommodations in important ways for students.

First, it puts disability in a larger social and political context, and secondly, it shifts attention away from individual students. This is significant because there are elements of the process of accessing disability services that are potentially stigmatizing for students with disabilities. For example, it is common for a student with a disability to be required to approach every faculty in each class every semester to discuss accommodations and to pass along paperwork. It is of course good for students to be responsible and to take charge of their learning. But at the same time, the process of having to continually ask for services, to self-identify as disabled, can be tedious at best. To be disabled is to occupy a stigmatized identity category, as the language of the ADA itself acknowledges. Some students, and in particular incoming freshmen who used disability services in high school, might want to leave that identity behind.

But as faculty, that's exactly what you don't want. You want your students to learn. You don't want a student to struggle unnecessarily, especially when a simple accommodation like a distraction-free test environment or a recording device for lectures would have made the difference between success and failure. You want to create the conditions in which

accommodations are viewed not as inconveniences but as integral parts of an inclusive classroom, an environment where our diverse bodies and minds are valued for their differences. This benefits you, and all of your students. And it reflects the true spirit behind the Americans with Disabilities Act, which is much more than legal filler on a syllabus.

## Resources

NYIT Office of Accessibility Services. Retrieved from

[http://www.nyit.edu/health\\_and\\_wellness/disability/](http://www.nyit.edu/health_and_wellness/disability/)

Funckes, C., et al. Syllabus Statement. *Refocus: Viewing the Work of Disability Services Differently*.

Retrieved from <http://www.projectshift-refocus.org/syllabus.htm>

Nielsen, K. E. (2013). *A Disability History of the United States*. Boston: Beacon P.

Mayerson, A. (1992). The History of the Americans with Disabilities Act: A Movement Perspective.

*Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund*. Retrieved from

<http://dredf.org/news/publications/the-history-of-the-ada/>

## Contributor:

Elizabeth J. Donaldson

Associate Professor

Department of English

New York Institute of Technology

## Submitted by:

Francine Glazer

Associate Provost for Educational Innovation | Director, Center for Teaching and Learning

New York Institute of Technology

[fglazer@nyit.edu](mailto:fglazer@nyit.edu)

## Depth vs. Breadth

As you plan your courses, think of the curriculum to be learned as a rectangle – with the horizontal sides = breadth and the vertical sides = depth. In this image, the area of the rectangle basically remains constant regardless of how you construct the rectangle. Which do you need for your course, greater breadth or greater depth? You cannot have it both ways. Mathematically inclined folks will remind us that the maximum area of a rectangle with the smallest parameter is a square. Perhaps you also need to make your curriculum more of a square than a very narrow, but long rectangle.

### Resources

Biggs, J. (1999). Teaching for Quality Learning at University: What the student does. SHRE and Open Press.

### Submitted by:

Phyllis Blumberg, Ph. D.

Assistant Provost, Director of the Teaching and Learning Center

University of the Sciences

[p.blumbe@uscience.edu](mailto:p.blumbe@uscience.edu)

## Why is this Course Included in the Curriculum?

“If the learning that students are asked to undertake seems to have no purpose or connection to their own interests and concerns, they’ll probably resist it” (Brookfield, 2015, p. 221).

Goal – To have students think about the course content and learning outcomes, and identify how the course contributes to their academic development and future career.

Description – I send an email to all students enrolled in my course (psychosocial nursing) two weeks before the semester begins. I ask them to post on the Learning Management System (LMS) Discussion Board their response to the following question: *Why is a psychosocial nursing course included in the BSN curriculum?* After students post their response, they can view others’ responses. Postings are limited to no more than 200 words and are to be submitted prior to the first class session.

Students are told that the posts will be projected for several minutes at the onset of the first class. The responses serve as catalysts to speak about the course content, learning outcomes, assignments, and their relevance to nursing practice.

I have included this assignment for five semesters and find that it sets the tone for encouraging students to **Think About Content**. This tip can be modified to a paper and pen in-class or homework assignment. Students can also revisit the posts at the end of the semester and make additional comments. It can be used in any face-to-face, hybrid or online course.

### Resources

Brookfield, S. (2015). *The skillful teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

### Submitted by:

Anne Tumbarello, Ed.D., RN, NPP  
Director, Faculty Professional Center  
Associate Professor, Division of Nursing  
Molloy College  
[atumbarello@molloy.edu](mailto:atumbarello@molloy.edu)

## Linking Assignments to Learning Outcomes

Adapted from [Scaffolding Student Learning Tips for Getting Started](#) (Faculty Focus)

Take some time to evaluate how you've designed the learning experiences in your courses. Reflect on whether (or not) the assignments/assessments for the course are clearly linked to the learning outcomes of the course.

*While completing this exercise, you may discover that either you have an assignment that is no longer relevant or you are missing something that might even be a more meaningful gauge of student learning.*

- Write a brief description of each major assignment/assessment. The description must include the learning outcomes you intend to evaluate using the assignment/assessment.
- List the skills and knowledge the students need to have and know in order to be successful in the assignment/assessment. If there is anything on the list that the students will not learn about in the course, is this a pre-requisite for the course?
- Is successfully completing the assignment/assessment a **reasonable expectation** for the students? Will you cover or expose the students to what they need to know to be successful on the assessments?
- Look at the **scope of the course** to determine if there are any **mini assignments** or learning experiences that can be purposefully introduced throughout the schedule of sessions in a way that offers learners time to learn and practice the knowledge and skills they need to have to be successful in the major assignments.
- Create a visual **curriculum map or outline** showing how each major assignment/assessment is related and linked to the teaching and learning strategies and activities as well as to the outcomes of the course.
- Is there a rationale for the assignment included in the description of the assignment? Is the relevance of the assignment/assessment clearly explained?

### Resources

Hogan, K., & Pressley, M. (Eds.). (1997). *Scaffolding student learning: Instructional approaches and issues*. Louiseville, Quebec: Brookline Books.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes* (J. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman, Eds. & Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

### Submitted by:

Valerie Lopes, Ph.D.

Director, Teaching & Learning

Seneca College

Toronto, Ontario

[senecacollege.ca/teaching](http://senecacollege.ca/teaching)

## Send an Introduction to Your Students

Months before meeting our students, faculty are planning for them – so why not send students a message before the semester starts and let them know? You could even make a quick video or prompt your students to read the syllabus before the first class so you can do something more substantive when you meet them face-to-face.

### Why make a video?

Your students will be interested in hearing your voice and seeing you before they meet you in person. Even though creating an introduction video requires more time than writing an email, it is well worth the investment.

### What information to include?

The following information could be included in your course introductory video or email message:

- A welcome to the institution (if they are new students) and to your course
- An introduction of yourself and your enthusiasm for the topic you are teaching
- The course goals and the importance of this course, including how or why this course is relevant to them
- How/why the course design will help your students achieve the course goals
- Expectations for student participation, perhaps starting with downloading the syllabus and/or posting an introduction about themselves in a forum
- When and where you will meet the first time

**Tip:** If you are new to making videos, create a transcript or an outline of your talking points. [Take a look at this sample video \(mine\) for ideas.](#) You will notice that it's *not* perfect, but it does the job. (Next time I make a video, it will be better – and the time after that, even better. *You cannot get stuck on making a perfect video* – or you will not make any videos.) Notice that students are prompted to:

- download the syllabus and make notes of their questions to bring to our first class
- take a quick quiz about the syllabus (Just 2 questions: “Could you download the syllabus and read it?” and “What questions do you have?”)
- introduce themselves in a discussion forum

By checking on their responses to these prompts, I'll know that my students can:

- get into our LMS

- download a document
- take a quiz
- post on a message board

If we suddenly need to cancel classes, I'll know for sure that my students can connect with me and each other through the LMS and can be prompted to continue their coursework from a distance.

### **Resources**

"Best Practices: Creating Video Course Trailers" Duke University,

<https://trinity.duke.edu/communications/best-practices-creating-video-course-trailers>

"Tips for Creating Instructional Videos" Purdue University Instructional Development Center Blog,

<https://www.purdue.edu/learning/blog/?p=6696>

### **Submitted by:**

Cynthia Crimmins, Director  
Center for Teaching & Learning  
Teagle Assessment Scholar  
York College of Pennsylvania  
(717) 815-1216

## Understanding Students

“Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.” — Benjamin Franklin

### Connecting with Your Students

While it is easy to focus on your students as consumers of your content, making a connection with your students can foster classroom engagement by increasing rapport and reinforcing course content.

At the base level, you can understand your students by exploring their generational context. Take time to understand the Millennial generation by exploring current music, television shows, video games, social media apps, and technology. For example, many students enjoy watching *The Big Bang Theory*. I try to incorporate relevant clips into our first-year seminar, not only to reinforce the lesson, but to demonstrate that I can connect with their interests. Or, if something funny happens during class I might say, “There’s your next Yik Yak post!”

Next, you can understand your students as a specific population. Your institutional research or assessment office will have data related to your specific students. For example, based on data for our institution, I know students did not have to spend much time studying in high school to be successful. In the first-year seminar, I ask them whether they studied much in high school (even though I already know the answer). Now that I have connected with their background, I can proceed to explain that college will be very different and that they must learn new skills in order to succeed.

Finally, you can understand your students as unique individuals. Each student has a story of how he/she arrived at your institution, in addition to personal interests and hobbies, involvement in organizations, and aspirations for the future. As a direct approach, one of my favorite activities for the first day of class is to play Two Truths and a Lie. As an indirect approach, I ascertain more about my students through their homework assignments. For example, when students track their time, I can see what their interests are outside of the classroom. (Note: be sure to exercise caution when sharing personal information.)

### Resources

Bart, M. (2011). The five R’s of engaging millennial students. *Faculty Focus*. Retrieved from <http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-and-learning/the-five-rs-of-engaging-millennial-students/>

DeVaney, S. A. (2015). Understanding the millennial generation. *Journal of Financial Service Professionals*, 69(6), 11-14.

wikiHow. *How to play two truths, one lie*. Retrieved from <http://www.wikihow.com/Play-Two-Truths,-One-Lie>

**Submitted by:**

Sarah A. Forbes, Ph.D. | Director of Data Management and Reporting  
Institutional Research, Planning and Assessment

Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology

5500 Wabash Avenue | Terre Haute, IN 47803

Phone: 812.877.8839 | Fax: 812.877.8931

[forbes@rose-hulman.edu](mailto:forbes@rose-hulman.edu)

[www.rose-hulman.edu/irpa](http://www.rose-hulman.edu/irpa)

# Checklist for Service Learning Projects

“In doing we learn.” — George Herbert, Poet

Academic service learning can be a win-win for both students and community partners when careful attention is paid to details before the term begins. Key questions to answer include:

## Community Partner Expectations and Role

- What is the desired outcome?
  - What products and/or services will the students provide?
  - When and how will the students deliver their products and/or services?
- What does the partner need to provide to support project success?
- What role will the partner play in evaluating student work?

## Faculty Expectations and Role

- How will the partner’s desired outcome align with the course’s learning objectives?
- How can the professor work with the partner and students to support project success?

## Realistic Timeline

- What are key deadlines in the research, planning and implementation phases of the project?
- When and how will the students, their instructor and community partner representatives celebrate project completion?

## Resources

Academic Discipline. Sample Service Learning Projects. Retrieved from

<http://www.eastfieldcollege.edu/Assets/ServiceLearning/ServiceLearningIdeasbyDiscipline.pdf>

Campus Compact. Sample Service Learning Syllabi. Retrieved from <http://compact.org/resource-type/syllabi/>

## Submitted by:

Janet Rice McCoy, Ph.D.

Associate Professor

Director, Center for Leadership and Professional Development

Morehead State University

[j.mccoy@moreheadstate.edu](mailto:j.mccoy@moreheadstate.edu)

## **Why should Students take Your Course? How do Courses in Your Major Contribute to Common Learning Goals?**

Do students ever ask, *Why am I required to take this course?* If you teach a required course, you have an easy answer, *You can't earn a major in xxx without it.* However, this answer invites a second question, *Why is this course required for this major?*

Departments have good reasons for why students must take specific courses. The program's curriculum map describes which required courses contribute to the learning outcomes intended for all students who complete the major. Most curriculum maps identify two or more courses that contribute to specific student learning outcomes. For example, a program might have the following learning outcome: *Students can locate and analyze evidence from appropriate sources to create arguments and make decisions about theories and models in the discipline.* This learning outcome describes a complex skill. Students will not master this skill in a single course. Instructors design the curriculum to provide students with opportunities to practice and develop these skills in several courses. How are these courses related?

### **The intentional curriculum**

Like a good story, a coherent academic curriculum has a beginning, a middle, and an end. The collected content of required courses reflects the underlying organization of disciplinary knowledge. Ideally, students connect the ideas and skills they encounter in their major courses. Students should develop an organized, coherent system of knowledge and related skills in thinking and communication by the time they complete their course work.

Have a conversation with colleagues who teach different courses in your program that support common program-level learning goals. How do the courses students complete early in the program prepare them to meet expectations in your course? How does your course prepare students for tasks they will encounter in courses they take after your course?

Discuss the instruction and assignments assigned in these courses. How do these assignments guide student progress toward mastery of a student learning outcome? Collaborate with colleagues and coordinate the assignments you create so that each instructor can build on prior learning and prepare students as they develop their expertise.

### **Make curriculum goals and relations between courses explicit for students**

Too often, students "clean house" at the end of a course. They submit their final exam and begin discarding information they believe they will never use again. When you tell students about assignments and learning outcomes for your course, be explicit about how your course connects to other courses students will take. Talk about the skills students learned in prior courses that you expect them to use in your course. Remind students that future instructors will expect their students to use the skills they developed in your class to complete work in the next class.

When we make the connections between courses explicit, we help students become more intentional learners. Students will be more likely to retain skills across courses and recognize how to apply their skills to real-world problems if they develop connections between knowledge and skills they acquire in multiple classes.

**Submitted by:**

Claudia J. Stanny, Ph.D., Director  
Center for University Teaching, Learning, and Assessment  
University of West Florida  
Pensacola, FL  
(850) 473-7435  
[cstanny@uwf.edu](mailto:cstanny@uwf.edu)  
<http://uwf.edu/offices/cutla/>

## ARTS: An Essential Metacognitive Strategy

With higher education so strongly embracing metacognitive strategies as a method of aiding student success, we'd like to offer a strategy that instructors can use on the first-day of class to help their students learn more deeply and persist to graduation. The first day of class is often either wasted or used to go over basic course information, but selling students on the importance of the ARTS strategy might prove the most valuable piece of instruction during the entire semester.

**Attend class.** Whether you believe that half of life or 80% of it is merely showing up, you can't deny the research that student attendance directly correlates with deeper learning. A butt in a seat is more effective than having others take notes. The instructor can facilitate this guideline by always taking attendance, or, better yet, giving a reading quiz/reflection at the beginning of each class.

**Read the material.** Studies show that college students read on a sixth-grade level, rarely read entire assignments, and when they do read, they are easily distracted, almost never comprehending the entire page. They do not understand critical reading. The instructor can help them by explaining how to find theses in pages and by not overwhelming them with a ridiculous amount of reading for its own sake (in a World Lit class, we average 12 pages of reading per class).

**Take notes.** Like reading, students have no idea how to take notes. They need to be using indentation and subordination that are of outlining rather than simply trying to take down everything said. The instructor can aid them by 1) being organized and 2) providing a sample page of notes for a class.

**Study the material.** Once again, neither high school nor college students know how to study; in fact, the average college senior will spend only five hours per week doing so. The instructor can teach students to retrieve. Show them what flashcards (both on paper and the electronic version) are. Explain interleaving. Caution them about the uselessness of simply rereading and cramming.

**A(ttending)R(eading)T(aking notes)S(tudying)** is a simple, yet effective strategy get the most out of your class.

### Submitted by:

Charlie Sweet

Hal Blythe

Rusty Carpenter

Eastern Kentucky University

## Warm-Ups

“I got to get on the good foot  
Got to do it on the good foot  
Do it with the good foot”

—“Get on the Good Foot,” written by Fred Wesley, James Brown, Joe Mims;  
performed by James Brown

How can you get off on a good foot at the beginning of each class period? How can you wake up your students and get them ready to get down to the business of learning?

One very effective teaching tip that I have used for years is what I call “warm-ups.” Warm-ups are like pre-exercise stretches, but for the mind (and the attention span).

Usually on the second day of class, I inform my students that at the beginning of each class period throughout the semester, we will devote the first 5-7 minutes to a warm-up. Warm-ups consist of something to challenge the mind, engage the students, and begin class periods in a fun way. Sometimes warm-ups relate to something we’ve been discussing in class, sometimes they do not. Some of my favorite warm-ups are games in which I compete against the class, who acts as a team. Games that work well for warm-ups include Twenty Questions and Hangman. Usually, the students are the guessers, but sometimes I take on that role and try to figure out what my students are thinking. Sometimes, the students and I work together as a team in playing against web versions of these games:

- <http://www.20q.net/>
- <http://www.hangman.no/>
- <http://www.hangman-online.com/>

The online game Sporcle also works well, and users are continually adding new games:

<http://www.sporcle.com/>

Online word games are also great. There are many located at

<http://www.wuzzlesandpuzzles.com/>

Riddles also work nicely, as do short (usually humorous) YouTube clips. These are just a few suggestions. Anything that is brief, interactive, and involves solving a puzzle or having a laugh would probably work as a warm-up. In fact, as the semester progresses, I often have students email me with suggestions for warm-ups.

I am amazed at how actively students engage in these kinds of warm-ups, and it does seem to make a difference in motivation levels. For 90 minute classes, I sometimes save the warm-ups as a mid-class refresher. To me, five minutes of class time is a small price to pay for my students’ attention.

**Submitted by:**

Fred Sanborn, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Psychology

Director, Teaching & Learning Center

North Carolina Wesleyan College

## Class Openers

“Beatrice Pym died because she missed the last bus to Ipswich.” It’s a great opener, one of my favorite first lines in literature (from Daniel Silva’s *The Unlikely Spy*).

We know that first impressions matter. It’s also likely that students will enter our classrooms distracted by everything from their latest text messages to difficulties in finding a parking space on campus. Classroom openings matter; they “offer us a rich opportunity to capture the attention of students and prepare them for learning” (James Lang).

The *Chronicle of Higher Education* recently published James Lang’s brief but helpful article titled “[Small Changes in Teaching: The First Five Minutes](#).” The essay offers practical strategies for focusing students’ attention at the start of class. The suggested class-opening activities are easy to implement and can significantly increase student engagement and retention of key concepts. From reactivating previous learning to using short, low-stakes writing assignments, there’s something here for everyone. Here are excerpts from the article:

- *Open with questions that frame discussion.* For example, write four or five questions on the board or show them on a slide. The class proceeds as normal, but at the end returns to the questions for application and discussion.
- *Ask students to identify key concepts learned in the last class.* Request that students remind you of key points from the previous class meeting. This not only gives students practice at retrieving knowledge, but works as a natural transition for new learning.
- *Activate students’ prior learning.* You might start by introducing a new concept and asking students what they already know about it, what they’ve learned in other classes, or what they’ve heard in the media.
- *Use writing as a tool for learning.* Ask students to write their responses to any of the above prompts. Limit writing time to three-to-five minutes and use responses to begin discussion.

### Submitted by:

Dr. Connie Ruzich

University Professor of English and Coordinator of Innovative Teaching

Robert Morris University

6001 University Blvd

Moon Twp, PA 15108

[ruzich@rmu.edu](mailto:ruzich@rmu.edu)

## Using the Design Thinking Approach for Campus Problem Solving

Most of us have been on a committee, a task force, or even a professional learning community in order to solve some campus problem, and as a methodology, we used analytical thinking, brainstorming, and even facilitation. Another approach that has been around since the late 1960s and risen to popularity because of Stanford's d.school (design school) usage is design thinking. Design thinking is a process that focuses on the needs, desires, and values of the group being helped.

According to Herbert Simon, author of *The Sciences of the Artificial*, the design thinking process utilizes seven stages: define the problem, research the problem, ideate some potential solutions, prototype some possible solutions, choose a prototype, implement the prototype, and learn from the results. This cycle may be thought of as a loop because design thinking encourages risk and potential failure. Tim Brown, CEO and president of IDEO (an innovation and design firm), believes that design thinking proceeds through three phases:

- Inspiration (researching the problem)
- Ideation (generating, developing and testing ideas)
- Implementation

What is new about design thinking? First, it begins with a study of the human needs (e.g., the ideal college classroom), and second, it moves beyond theory into actual implementation through the development of a prototype (e.g., a new classroom putting into practice the mentor from the middle paradigm that abuts the center for teaching and learning).

### Submitted by:

Charlie Sweet

Hal Blythe

Rusty Carpenter

Eastern Kentucky University

## Improving Our Teaching through Critical Reflection

After teaching class or after reading your students' discussion posts in your online classroom, do you take time to reflect on how things went, how things are going, and how you and your students are experiencing your class?

Brookfield (1995) described a number of strategies to improve teaching through critical reflection.

Here's one I like a lot. It's called "Keeping a Teaching Log." Brookfield maintained that "keeping a log of your private reactions to and interpretations of, the events you think are important in your life as a teacher is one way of helping you realize several things about yourself" (p. 72).

Brookfield suggested that we maintain the log on a regular basis, spending about 15 to 20 minutes a week. Eventually, patterns, common themes, recurring problems, and success strategies might emerge that could inform your practice.

Here's questions to which you might want to respond (pp. 73-74):

1. What was the moment (or moments) this week when I felt most connected, engaged, or affirmed as a teacher—the moment(s) I said to myself, "This is what being a teacher is really all about"?
2. What was moment (or moments) this week when I felt most discouraged, disengaged, or bored as a teacher—the moment(s) I said to myself, "I'm just going through the motions here"?
3. What was the situation that caused me the greatest anxiety or distress – the kind of situation that I kept replaying in my mind as I was dropping off to sleep, or that caused me to say to myself, "I don't want to go through this again for a while"?
4. What was the event that most took me by surprise – an event where I saw or did something that shook me up, caught me off guard, knocked me off my stride, gave me a jolt, or made me unexpectedly happy?
5. Of everything I did this week in my teaching, what would I do differently if I had the chance to do it again?
6. What do I feel proudest of in my teaching activities this week? Why?

**Resources**

Brookfield, S. (1995). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

**Submitted by:**

Lori Schroeder, Ph.D.

Associate Director, Center for Faculty Development

Metropolitan State University

St. Paul, Minnesota

## What Kinds of Questions Promote Meaningful Class Discussions?

Instructors ask students questions. We ask questions on exams and we ask questions in class. The kinds of questions instructors ask influence the quality of class discussion.

Questions asked during class serve four purposes (Blosser, 1975/2000):

- **Managerial questions** organize and guide class activities (*Does everyone have a copy of the handout?*). We use managerial questions to create structure and organize classroom tasks.
- **Rhetorical questions** emphasize a point or reinforce a concept (*We agreed at our last meeting that Smith's theory posed several problems that require further research, correct?*). We use these questions to create transitions and don't expect students to answer these questions.
- **Closed questions** have few options for answers. Usually only one response is a correct answer to the question (*What kind of chemical bond holds this molecule together?*). Closed questions assess current student understanding. We use these questions to determine whether students retained recent content knowledge well enough for us to build on a concept or move on to the next topic.
- **Open questions** elicit a range of relevant responses and do not have a single "correct" response (*Which of the following three businesses would be the best use for a parcel of land on Nine Mile Road and why?*). Students may answer open questions with opinions based on course principles (what defines "best use"), justify their choices with relevant evidence, apply theory to a specific example, or practice complex problem-solving skills used in the discipline. Open questions create conditions for extended discussion.

Although open questions have the greatest potential for stimulating lively class discussion, instructors seldom ask open questions during class. Ewing and Whittington (2007) found that only 13.4% of the questions instructors asked were open questions. Nearly half the questions instructors asked were managerial or rhetorical questions (45%) and 41.6% were closed questions.

Examine the kinds of questions you ask during class. If you want to promote thoughtful discussions during class, spend some time preparing open questions that require higher-level engagement with course concepts.

Lang (2008) suggests scaffolding a class discussion with a series of questions. Begin with a fact-based question to get students comfortable with answering questions. Then introduce students to questions that require students to apply concepts to practical problems that do not have an obvious solution or discuss the merits of alternative interpretations (e.g., competing interpretations of a novel in a literature class, competing diagnoses for a set of symptoms in a health-related class).

Good discussions require time. Give students time to reflect before they respond. Learn to endure at least 3-5 seconds of silence while students gather their thoughts. Some instructors give students a minute to write a response before inviting students to discuss or asking a specific student to answer the question. Blosser (1975/2000) reports that when instructors create a delay for thinking before they ask for the first student response, students engage in richer discussions. More students participate. They are more likely to include supporting evidence when they respond. Students are more likely to ask follow-up questions and engage in speculative thinking about course content.

If course goals emphasize higher-level cognitive skills (problem-solving, application of concepts), construct class discussions that require students to use these skills. Reinforce the value of complex in-class discussions by asking similar questions on exams. Students will value the in-class practice with complex questions if they encounter similar questions on course exams that require problem-solving and application. If course exams ask only fact-based memory retrieval questions, students will lose interest in class discussions that require higher-order skills and demand that their instructor spend more class time telling them the “facts” they need to know for the exam.

## Resources

Blosser, P. E. (1975/2000). *How to ask the right questions*. Washington, D.C.: National Science Teacher Association.

<http://www.nsta.org/docs/201108bookbeathowtoasktherightquestions.pdf>

Ewing, J. C., & Whittington, M. S. (2007). Types and cognitive levels of questions asked by professors during College of Agriculture class sessions. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 48, 91-99. Doi:10.5032/jae.2007.03091

Lang, J. M. (2008). *On course: A week-by-week guide to your first semester of college teaching*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

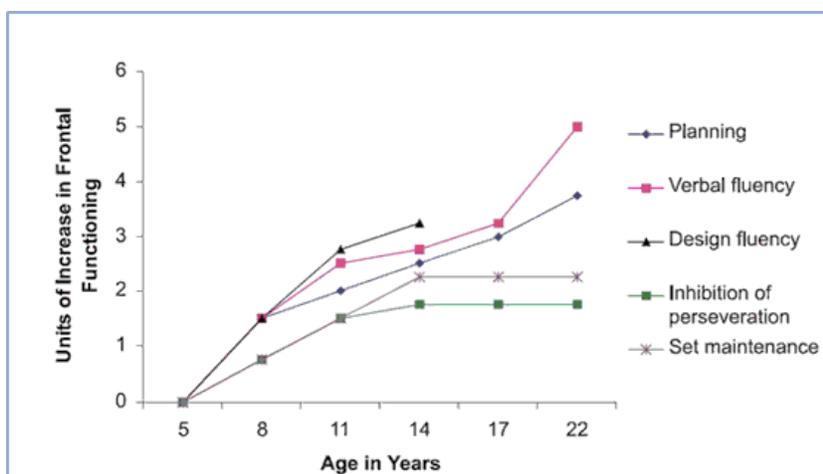
## Submitted by:

Claudia J. Stanny, Ph.D., Director  
Center for University Teaching, Learning, and Assessment  
University of West Florida  
Pensacola, FL  
(850) 473-7435  
[cstanny@uwf.edu](mailto:cstanny@uwf.edu)

## Helping the Brain to Learn

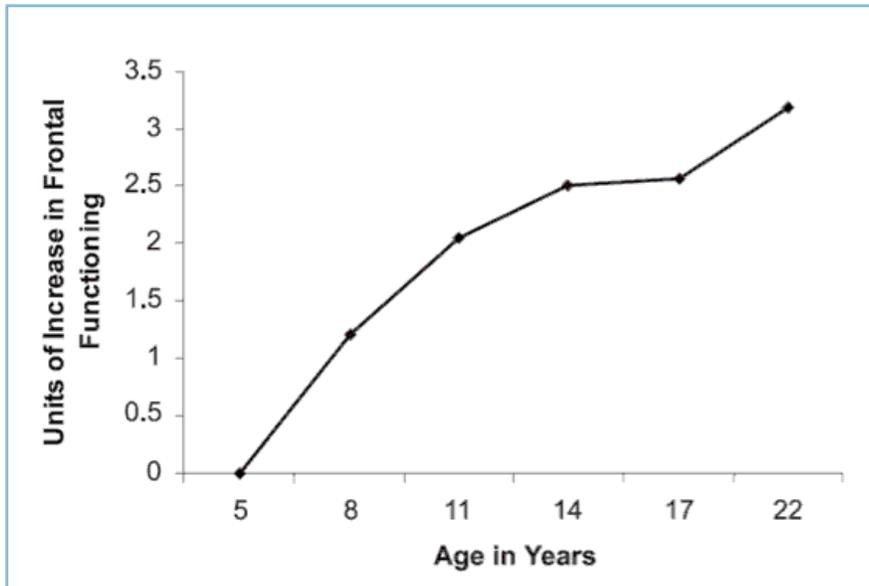
What are some of the things teachers can do to help support the full and healthy maturation of learners' brains? Here are few ideas that can be simply remembered with the acronym **FACES**:

**Learners** enter our classroom mature in some ways, but not so mature in others. These young men and women, usually between the ages of 17-25, have had several years to mature physically. However, entirely invisible from conventional observation, our students' brains are still experiencing some of their most important development during the late adolescent and early adult years. In fact, the area of the brain known as the frontal lobe – which is considered to control the “executive functions” of the brain such as planning, goal setting, self-control, abstract thinking, attention, and the inhibition of emotional impulses – general reaches full physical maturity during the years 17-29 (see Figure 1).



(Figure 1, adapted from Romine & Reynolds (2005), p. 198)

We can easily forget that we are not dealing with fully formed, entirely matured learners. Moreover, once the brain's frontal lobe reaches physical maturity at around the mid-20s, another 10-15 years can pass before a person has fully developed his or her thinking skills. Think of it like this: There are many athletically capable teenage basketball players. However, their physical bodies are still maturing. Add to that, these teenage athletes are still learning to perform in specific ways. Is it appropriate to expect them to perform at an NBA level while still in their teens? Of course not. Instead, we all know that they'll need more years for their bodies to reach their full physiological maturity and *then* even more years for them to hone their performance skills. This also occurs in the human brain. Learners need a significant amount of coaching and practice to make the most of this crucial developmental time period (see Figure 2).



(Figure 2, adapted from Romine & Reynolds (2005), p. 198)

What are some of the things teachers can do to help support the full and healthy maturation of learners' brains? Here are few ideas that can be simply remembered with the acronym **FACES**:

**Focus** students' attention. Brain attention span is about 7-10 minutes. That is to say, the brain will lose focus unless its attention is recaptured every 7-10 minutes. Therefore, when you are lecturing, consider dividing your lecture into equal ten-minute segments. At the end of each segment, use an activity to recapture the learners' attention. For example:

- Summarize what you have said.
- Ask students an intriguing question that leads into the next aspect of the lecture.
- Share a story.
- Do an activity.
- Ask for participation.

**Align** assessment activities contextually with learning activities and materials. Research shows that people learn better when learning is contextualized (Bransford, Brown, Cocking, & Center, 2000). Studies have also shown more than a 15 percent gain in ability when learners are asked to recall instructions in the same context in which they received them (Medina, 2008).

**Concentrate on Critical Thinking Skills.** Like any other skill, thinking gets better with practice. Your course will help students develop more if it emphasizes the acquisition and practice of higher-order thinking skills.

**Encourage Exercise.** The data provides strong evidence that those who get regular exercise, even if it means studying for a bit less time, achieve significantly higher learning gains (Medina, 2008).

**Suggest Sufficient Sleep.** Like research on exercise and learning, the data overwhelmingly demonstrates that those who get regular sleep, even if it means studying for a bit less time, actually achieve significantly higher learning gains (Medina, 2008).

The college years provide significant opportunity for students to reach their intellectual potential. Teachers can help students make the most of this time by teaching them how to better focus their attention, encouraging exercise and regular sleep, implementing appropriate assessment activities in your classes, and convincing students to seize this critical developmental opportunity.

## Resources

- Baars, B. J. & Gage, N.M. (2010). *Cognition, Brain, and Consciousness: Introduction to Cognitive Neuroscience*. Amsterdam: Academic Press.
- Bransford, J., Brown, A., Cocking, R., & Center, E. R. I. (2000). *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School*. (2nd ed.). Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.
- Conklin, H. M., Luciana, M., Hooper, C.J., & Yarger, R.S. (2004). Working Memory Performance in Typically Developing Children and Adolescents: Behavioral Evidence of Protracted Frontal Lobe Development. *Developmental Neuropsychology*, 31(1), 103–128.
- Medina, J. (2008). *Brain Rules: 12 Principles for Surviving and Thriving at Work, Home, and School*. Edmonds, WA: Pear Press.
- Rains, G. D. (2002). *Principles of Human Neuropsychology*. Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Ronnie, C. B. & Reynolds, C.R. (2005). A Model of the Development of Frontal Lobe Functioning: Findings from a Meta-Analysis. *Applied Neuropsychology*, 12(4), 190–201.
- Zillmer, E.A., Spiers, M.V., & Culbertson, W.C. (2008). *Principles of Neuropsychology* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.

## Submitted by:

Taylor Halverson, Ph.D.,  
Brigham Young University  
Center for Teaching and Learning  
<http://ctl.byu.edu/>

## Student Reflection: Focus on Written Feedback

This past academic year, my students have been using self-reflection of the written feedback I provide on completed assignments. Often students do not know how to use the feedback provided, or they only focus on the grade or rubric/criteria list. I wanted them to focus on what is written “in the margins.” My aim is to help them become self-regulated learners through an activity that focuses their attention on the written feedback and its meaning to them. I have adapted a strategy (Learning and Teaching Board, n.d.; Making a feedback action plan, n.d.) and use it with the most significant assignments in my course:

Students receive the form below, their assignment with written feedback, but I hold back the rubric/criteria list used to guide assessment. I take a few minutes (typically this is 10-15 minutes) at the beginning of class for them to read the feedback and respond to the prompts. Students place the feedback sheet in a folder that I collect. Then I hand back the rubric to them. Toward the end of the term, I have them do an analysis of all the forms in their folder in order to see trends and areas in which they have improved.

Because of this process, there is improvement in the quality of student work and my students have commented on the value of actually reading the feedback, considering what it means to their continued learning, and applying feedback guidance on subsequent assignments.

### **[The Form] Considering Information about My Learning from Written Feedback**

Taking the time to analyze written feedback (or at least be more systematic about gaining information from written feedback) gives you clues to:

- A. Determine how you are doing and where you are in relation to course goals/objectives
- B. Clarify what good performance is
- C. Obtain useful information about your learning
- D. Identify weaknesses in your learning so you can do something about these

One of the things we know from research on student learning is that when a student reflects, he/she improves on subsequent assignments and experiences.

Take a moment to read through your Part 1 of the Topic Strand Project. Use the guiding statements to aid you in learning something about your learning. (You will find a blank copy of the rubric for this assignment at the end of this document.)

This will be added to your file folder creating a collection on how you are developing. This will give you the opportunity to separate your *reflections* on this instance of feedback from the actual score on the Part 1 rubric so that you can distance yourself from the first thoughts you got when receiving the feedback, and move toward finding the trends that will enable you to continuously adjust your learning approaches.

**Reflection on Part One – Overview of your topic strand**

<b>Overview of all feedback comments</b>	
Most significant feedback comments:	What this means to me:
<b>Note any recurring trend in the feedback that you see</b>	
Things I can do to build on the positive feedback in my future work:	Things I can do to address the critical feedback in my future work:
Single most important thing for me to <i>keep doing</i> in my future work on the basis of this feedback:	
Single most important thing for me to <i>improve</i> in my future work on the basis of this feedback:	

**Resources**

Learning and Teaching Board. (n.d.). Providing Effective Feedback to Students - Briefing Note. Edinburgh, Scotland: Heriot-Watt University. Retrieved from <http://www1.hw.ac.uk/committees/ltb/resources/feedback-briefing.doc>

Making a feedback action plan. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/studyingeffectively/preparing/feedback/actionplan.aspx>

**Submitted by:**

Rebecca Clemente

Outgoing director, Center Teaching and Learning (transitioning to the Center for the Advancement of Faculty Excellence, Jennifer Keys, director)

Department of Education

North Central College

Naperville, Illinois

## **Help Students Develop Effective Metacognitive Strategies to Improve Learning**

Metacognition refers to our knowledge about how memory and cognitive processes operate and how we use this information to select activities and learning strategies to improve our memory and regulate our learning. However, many students hold false beliefs about which strategies are most effective in helping people learn (Chew, 2015; McCabe, 2011; McGuire, 2014).

Faculty can help students be more successful in their classes if they provide them with relevant information about effective study strategies (Schraw, 1998; Tanner, 2012). We are tempted to offer advice about study strategies during the first week of class. However, students begin the term with high expectations about their ability to excel. Because of this overconfidence, McGuire (2014) and others find that students seldom attend to instructor's suggestions that they adopt study strategies they don't already use.

A great time to suggest better study strategies is after students receive their first compelling feedback about their academic performance. The first graded work in a course is the first concrete feedback students get about the quality of their performance. Students are not motivated to consider alternate study strategies until they have concrete evidence that the strategies they now use will not produce the results they want.

Here are two ways to create a situation that will make students more receptive to your suggestions to study differently.

### **Intervention Model 1:**

#### **Discuss metacognitive strategies with students in class when you give them their scores on the first exam**

The first "wake up" feedback should be based on graded work that is important enough for students to take seriously but not such a large part of the final grade that a student who performs badly is doomed.

Make the first graded work a relatively low stakes assignment (in terms of percentage of final grade – say, 15-20%) so that students can recover from a poor grade.

Students should complete this work early in the course (in the first 3-5 weeks).

The assessment should be as challenging as the high-stakes assessments you will use later in the term.

- Use questions that are similar in content and difficulty to questions students experience on high stakes exams.

- Require students to use cognitive skills they must use for other class assessments. For example, if major exams require students to apply theoretical principles to solve problems, ask them to do this in the first assessment.
- Do not create a first exam that only requires memorization of facts and definitions.
- The first graded work should provide students with accurate feedback about the adequacy of their study strategies.

### **Intervention Model 2:**

#### **Include a reflection question on exams**

Offer a small bonus (e.g., 2 extra points on a 100 point exam) to students who write a complete, detailed, reflective response to a question about their study behavior.

Suggested prompt for an exam reflection question:

Answer the following three questions about your preparation for this exam:

- What grade do you think you earned on this exam? (percent score)
- How much time did you spend preparing for class and this exam? Did you study on more than one day?
- Describe the specific strategies you used to study. Describe the strategies you used to prepare for class as well as for the exam.

#### **Follow-up Feedback (both models)**

On the day you give students grades or other feedback on their first graded work, refer them to resources about effective study skills.

Give them a copy of Sandra McGuire's handout on metacognition. Discuss how students can apply these strategies to their learning for your course. [The handout is available on the CUTLA web site: <http://uwf.edu/offices/cutla/supporting-pages/retention-2014-workshop-oct-13-14/>]

Another option is to ask students to view videos on metacognition (below) to help them better understand how to apply these metacognition strategies.

#### **Sandra McGuire**

##### **Study Smarter: Dr. Sandra McGuire on the Study Cycle**

##### **LSU interview**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIZMBsMZnoI>

#### **Stephen Chew Videos**

##### **How to Get the Most Out of Studying**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RH95h36NChI>

First of 5 videos (about 5 minutes each)

## Resources

- McCabe, J. (2011). Metacognitive awareness of learning strategies in undergraduates. *Memory & Cognition*, 39, 462-476. DOI 10.3758/s13421-010-0035-2
- Schraw, G. (1998). Promoting general metacognitive awareness. *Instructional Science*, 26, 113-125.
- Tanner, K. D. (2012). Promoting student metacognition. *CBE – Life Sciences Education*, 11, 112-120.

## Submitted by:

Claudia J. Stanny, Ph.D., Director  
Center for University Teaching, Learning, and Assessment  
University of West Florida  
Pensacola, FL  
(850) 473-7435  
[cstanny@uwf.edu](mailto:cstanny@uwf.edu)  
<http://uwf.edu/offices/cutla/>

## Exam Reflections: Promoting Metacognition and Self-Regulated Learning

Many new college students earn poor grades in introductory-level and gateway courses despite having strong confidence in their ability to earn high grades. Students often appear dumbfounded when they receive their first low exam score and may attribute their poor performance to a difficult test, instructor, or course subject matter, rather than consider the exam preparation strategies that they utilized. Unfortunately, it is not unusual for students to underestimate the amount of study time required and to engage in less effective study strategies (e.g., cramming) than more effective ones (e.g., distributed practice).

One way to help students become better learners is through self-reflection. Self-reflection promotes students' critical thinking about how they approached a task, what worked and what didn't and why, and how they might approach the task differently in the future. Recently Ambrose and colleagues (2010) and Lovett (2013) provided teachers with a simple and practical tool, referred to as an "Exam Wrapper," for implementing structured self-reflection on exam performance to promote metacognition and self-regulated learning.

Exam wrappers can be easily integrated into the feedback loop that takes place when graded exams are returned to students. Typically just a page or two long (for examples see <https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/design/teach/examwrappers/>), exam wrappers prompt students to think about their exam preparation (What did I do to prepare for this exam?), compare this to their exam performance (How did I perform?), analyze their strengths and weaknesses (What types of questions/problems did I miss and why?), and plan for how to adjust their learning strategies as needed (What can I do differently?). Students complete the exam wrapper in class during the graded exam review. Instructors can also review student responses to get a sense of whether or not students are using effective practices and provide feedback and recommendations. The wrappers are handed back to students prior to the next exam to remind them of their analysis and plans for adapting strategies. A study by Lovett (2013) found that among first-year math and science students, those who had greater exposure to exam wrappers were more likely to adopt effective study strategies.

When I recently incorporated structured exam reflections into my teaching, the vast majority of community college students enrolled in my general psychology classes (n=65) reported benefits (see Table 1). Students' open-ended comments suggested that this activity improved self-awareness and self-regulated learning (see Table 2), benefits that were achieved with minimal use of class time (approximately 10-12 minutes).

Exam reflections promote metacognitive skills such as planning, monitoring, evaluating, and adjusting learning strategies, skills that are transferable beyond your particular classroom. If you want your students to adopt more effective learning strategies, exam reflections offer a simple

way to quickly get your students thinking about how they approach learning and how they may better manage their learning.

**Table 1. Student Perceptions of the Benefits of Exam Reflections**

<i>Statements of Potential Benefits</i>	<i>Percent Agreed</i>
Exam reflections were helpful in getting me to think about how I prepare for exams.	98.5%
I have changed something about the way I prepare for exams based on exam reflections.	73.8%
I have improved my study skills as a result of exam reflections.	73.8%

**Table 2. Sample Comments on Changes Made as a Result of Exam Reflections**

"I stopped cramming and was more aware of my studying."
"I took more time to study."
"I never really used flash cards but I noticed I did better when I used them!"
"I review my textbook notes before and after class and do not "cram" my studying."
"Reading textbook chapters before we discuss them in class."

### Resources

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

Emberly Center for Teaching Excellence & Education Innovation, Carnegie Mellon University. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/design/teach/examwrappers/>

Lovett, M. C. (2013). Make exams worth more than the grade: Using exam wrappers to promote metacognition. In M. Kaplan, N. Silver, D. LaVague-Manty, & D. Meizlish (Eds.), *Using reflection and metacognition to improve student learning: Across the disciplines, across the academy* (pp. 18-52). Sterling, VA: Stylus.

### Submitted by:

Renee N. Saris-Baglana, Ph.D.  
 Assistant Professor, Psychology Department  
 Community College of Rhode Island  
 400 East Avenue  
 Warwick, RI 02886  
[rsarisbaglana@ccri.edu](mailto:rsarisbaglana@ccri.edu)

## Prepare for Snow Days and other Unexpected Class Cancellations

An important component of course planning is preparing for the inevitability of inclement weather or other unexpected closings. You can minimize the impact of lost class time by having a plan for how you will maintain contact with your students and readjust scheduling. To ensure academic continuity, we recommend that you perform the following preparedness activities:

- Be informed of how to get your school's alerts or notifications
- Practice making clear and effective online communications for your students
- Familiarize yourself with communication and online teaching technologies
- Make schedule adjustments, as needed
- When you return to campus, evaluate the impact and reconnect with your students
- Be informed of how to get support

### Preparation Checklist

Before the semester even starts, here are some basics for planning for an unplanned class cancellation:

- Establish a communication plan to notify students of any major change.
- Make your syllabus available digitally to students.
- Post all class documents in your Learning Management System.
- Have remote access to your office computer or materials stored on it.
- Review the planned material and activities and consider what is “must know”, what is “important to know” and what is “nice to know.”
- Evaluate what activities and material require in class time vs. could potentially be accomplished though out of class or online activities.
- Reprioritize the course based on these decisions so that you and your students are able to successfully meet the course goals.
- Update syllabus if needed and post to Learning Management System.
- Notify students of any changes to the syllabus.
- Adjust any deadline or due date in Learning Management System for quizzes, dropboxes, discussions etc. as needed.

### Submitted by:

Tony Sindelar, [asindelar@mghihp.edu](mailto:asindelar@mghihp.edu)

Industrial Design & Technical Support

Victoria L. Wallace, [vwallace@mghihp.edu](mailto:vwallace@mghihp.edu)

MGH Institute of Health Professions

<http://www.mghihp.edu/faculty/faculty-compass/teaching>

## The Great Debate: Pre and Post

### Learning Outcomes:

1. To explore a major issue early on in the course by motivating and engaging students in active learning.
2. To apply critical and higher level thinking using analysis, synthesis and evaluation skills.
3. To develop debate, communication and interpersonal skills.
4. To view issues from diverse perspectives.
5. To integrate and synthesis course knowledge and content into debate arguments with culminating experience at end of semester

### Method:

1. **Debate #1 – Early in Semester.** During first 2 weeks of the course, engage the class in a debate on a controversial or important course issue
  - a. Introduce the topic as a Pro/Con – “Be it resolved that....” (*i.e., In my “Teaching in the Inclusive Classroom,” I chose “Be it resolved that students with special needs should be included in the general education classroom.” This engaging technique can apply to any content or course. I suggest you make a list of potential debate topics and select the most relevant one to the course outcomes.*)
  - b. Divide the class into two groups – one in favor/pro and one against/con. (*I suggest that you do not have them select the side they support, but rather you randomly assign teams – that way, they will be forced to critically think from different perspectives and avoids potential personal conflicts.*)
  - c. They are to discuss in their groups for 5-10 minutes and come up with 3 pro or con arguments. A different person is selected to present each argument.
  - d. When the class comes back together,
    - i. The Pro side makes their first argument.
    - ii. Then anyone on the Con side can give a rebuttal against the first Pro point. Once the rebuttal is given, no one on the Pro side can offer any other arguments or comments.
    - iii. Then the 1<sup>st</sup> Con argument is presented.
    - iv. Followed by a rebuttal from the Pro side.
    - v. This continues until all three Pro and Con arguments are presented.
  - e. The groups then meet again for 5 minutes to create a closing argument per side. The closing statement can summarize what has already been said, can comment on the opposing views or make a new argument. A spokesperson is selected for each team.
  - f. Closing arguments are then made.



## Entertaining Opposing Viewpoints

“It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.”

– Aristotle

“Education is the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper or your self-confidence.” – Robert Frost

From Aristotle and Frost’s point of view, are we providing students with an education? Are we giving them the opportunity to discuss issues of disagreement and controversy? Or are we sheltering our students from hearing opinions and the supporting evidence that might make them feel uncomfortable and possibly moderate or change their positions? If we are doing the latter, we are also sheltering them from learning how to articulate and defend their positions with those who may disagree, as well as from examining and questioning their own positions. In other words, we are sheltering them from critical thinking – a particularly dangerous strategy in today’s politically and religiously polarized social environment.

So, rather than give students trigger warnings before a presentation or discussion on a potentially controversial or sensitive topics, give them Aristotle’s and Robert Frost’s quotes and their implications for students’ college education and development as human beings. This approach transcends censorship, speech codes, and First Amendment rights.

Submitted by:

Linda B. Nilson, Ph.D.

Director, Office of Teaching Effectiveness and Innovation

Clemson University

448 Brackett Hall, 321 Calhoun Drive

Clemson, SC 29634 USA

864.656.4542

[nilson@clemson.edu](mailto:nilson@clemson.edu)

[www.clemson.edu/OTEI](http://www.clemson.edu/OTEI)

[www.linkedin.com/in/lindabnilson/](http://www.linkedin.com/in/lindabnilson/)

## Discussing Studying Techniques with Students

When I was teaching chemistry, one of the hardest things to hear from a student was something like this: “I studied so hard and really thought I understood the material, and I still bombed the exam.” This was often followed by a diagnosis: “I just don’t do well on tests.” In my current role as Dean, I hear similar frustrations from students who need my permission to repeat a class they’ve failed (often math.) They’ve worked on the assigned problems, visited the tutoring center regularly, and still struggle.

What can we say to these students? I’ve found that I can often give new hope to students by talking with them about how they study, and how that might be hurting them. I first check to be sure that they are working on the sample problems scattered throughout the chapter. Often they are, but they generally do it with the book open, following the pattern of the worked example. I point out to them that while this may allow them to complete the problem successfully, it does not mean they understand how to do the problem – it just means that they can follow a pattern. Further, it creates a false sense of accomplishment that can lead to that earlier statement (“I thought I understood, and I still bombed...”).

I suggest that it is essential that they work the problem just like they will have to work problems on the quiz or exam – with the book closed, and no reference to notes. In effect, they need to test themselves. At this point, I like to encourage them along this path (which will almost certainly be more challenging to them) by throwing in a bit about the testing effect (in short, that just the act of taking a test can help learning) and on Robert Bjork’s work on “desirable difficulty” (again in short, that struggling with a problem enhances learning).

Next, I encourage them to work the problems at the end of the chapter, but warn that there is a danger here as well – textbooks frequently group like problems together, which amounts to “blocked practice.” Blocked practice is shown to produce less learning than “interleaved practice,” where problems of different sorts are randomly mixed. Here again I warn them that studying this way will seem more difficult, but that this is a “desirable difficulty” that has been shown to produce greater learning gains. Interleaved practice helps students learn to discern between types of problems and to select the correct strategy needed to solve that type of problem. I point out that it is also more like what they will experience on the test, where there’s no bold type announcing what sort of problem is next.

While I haven’t yet collected even anecdotal results on whether students put this advice to use, or if it helps (writing this is prompting me to follow up with the students I’ve talked with!), I do know that many of them acknowledge that they have fallen into these “traps” and leave with renewed enthusiasm for studying with this approach, and a bit of hope that maybe in fact they can learn to test well. That, at least, is a start!

## Resources

For more on the testing effect, and how to make use of it in education:

<http://www.retrievalpractice.org/>

To learn more about Robert Bjork's ideas on "desirable difficulty":

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/all-about-addiction/201105/desirable-difficulties-in-the-classroom>

And for an overview of the work on interleaved practice:

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-interleaving-effect-mixing-it-up-boosts-learning/>

## Submitted by:

Maria A. Taydem, Ph.D.

Interim Dean of Math and Science

McHenry County College

[mtaydem@mchenry.edu](mailto:mtaydem@mchenry.edu)

## Does the Time Students Spend Taking Tests Reduce the Time They can Spend Learning?

How often have you thought about the class time you give up to administer an in-class exam? Have you ever thought, “I don’t have time to schedule four or five exams. I need class time to cover content.”

Is exam-taking activity incompatible with learning? Recent research suggests the answer to this question is “no.” The psychological research on the *testing effect* clearly documents that taking a test can improve learning through direct and indirect mechanisms (Soderstrom & Bjork, 2014). Tests do more than simply assess how much students have learned so far. They also improve students’ learning.

### ***Direct benefits of tests on learning***

Retrieving information from memory is like exercise. The more often you exercise, the stronger you get. Taking a test gives students practice at retrieving course content from memory (Roediger & Karpicke, 2006). Each time a student retrieves a piece of information from memory, retrieval cues grow stronger, and the information becomes easier to remember in the future. The benefits students get when they retrieve information to answer a test question exceed the benefits they get by rereading or engaging in other types of study.

### ***Indirect benefits of tests on learning***

Soderstrom and Bjork (2014) describe four ways that tests indirectly improve learning.

1. Testing improves learning for related but non-tested information. Multiple choice questions improve learning for the concept tested (the correct response). They also improve learning for related concepts because students must retrieve several types of information to answer the question. Students must retrieve information about the correct alternative in a multiple-choice question and determine that the response aligns correctly with information provided in the question stem. Students must also retrieve information about the concepts described in the other alternatives and confirm that rejected responses do not correctly answer the question.
2. Tests can improve how students restudy missed items and how they study new material. Tests help students discover when their approach to thinking about content interferes with their learning. They can try new approaches when they study for a retest or when they study new material. The more tests students encounter, the more they benefit from this indirect effect.
3. Frequent testing keeps students on task and reduces procrastination. Although students might cram before each test, the frequency of tests forces students to distribute their

study (if only as distributed cramming). Psychology researchers have over 60 years of data that document the benefits of distributed practice for learning and long-term retention.

4. Feedback from tests makes students aware of the gaps in their knowledge and understanding. They can use this information to selectively focus future study on concepts they don't fully understand.

Study alone does not provide all the benefits students get from taking a test. *Foresight bias* is a powerful cognitive illusion that leads students to believe they are better prepared for a test at the end of a study session than they really are. Students overestimate future performance on a test at the end of a study session because the studied information is readily available in immediate memory (Soderstrom & Bjork, 2014). A student may feel confident that he will remember something when he has just reviewed his notes or text. This confidence can evaporate when the student tries to retrieve information in the new context created by a test, when the student no longer has access to notes or printed material. A test helps eliminate foresight bias. Armed with an accurate estimate of what they do and do not know, students can make better choices about how to allocate their study time.

## Resources

Roediger, H. L., III, & Karpicke, J. D. (2006). The power of testing memory: Basic research and implications for educational practice. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *1*, 181-210. doi:10.1111/j.1745-6916.2006.00012.x

Soderstrom, N. C., & Bjork, R. A. (2014). Testing facilitates the regulation of subsequent study time. *Journal of Memory and Language*, *73*, 99-115. doi:10.1016/j.jml.2014.03.003

## Submitted by:

Claudia J. Stanny, Ph.D.

Director

Center for University Teaching, Learning, and Assessment

University of West Florida

Pensacola, FL

(850) 473-7435

[cstanny@uwf.edu](mailto:cstanny@uwf.edu)

<http://uwf.edu/offices/cutla/>

## Teach Students to Write Readable Sentences

Do your students struggle to write about technical topics in clear language? The Northwestern University Collaborative Learning and Integrated Mentoring in the Biosciences (CLIMB) initiative created a set of video tutorials on professional writing in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math). Although the video is directed at a STEM audience and uses writing examples drawn from STEM texts, the five principles will improve writing clarity in all disciplines.

The ***Five Principles for Readable Sentences*** video describes strategies authors can use to write clearly about complex technical topics. The video defines each principle and illustrates how the principle can be used to edit writing and improve clarity. The video presents examples of scientific texts that violate each principle, followed by an edited text that shows how clarity improves when writers apply the principle. The video is short enough (less than 15 minutes) to assign as a short tutorial.

### Five principles for clear scientific writing described in the Five Principles video:

- **Given before new.** Begin sentences with information we expect the reader to already know (*given* information) followed by information that is *new*. This strategy reflects a communication principle known as *common ground*, which describes how speakers develop common reference points and use shared knowledge to support meaningful conversations (Clark & Wilkes-Gibbs, 1986; Haviland & Clark, 1974). A sentence should begin with established or old information, which creates a context that helps readers understand the new information. When writing a paragraph, discuss old information before introducing new information. Create clear connections between the new concepts and the old information you discussed.
- **Light to heavy.** Structure sentences to move the reader from light, easy-to-understand information to more difficult or more complex (*heavy*) information. Begin sentences with easy concepts that establish context for understanding the complex concepts you plan to introduce later.
- **Transitions.** Transition words improve the flow of language because they help readers follow the logical structure of your argument. Choose transition words carefully. Transition words serve as signposts for readers. They should clearly indicate how the ideas they connect are related. Transition words may describe sequences, connect causes with effects, or signal presentation of an example, making a comparison, drawing a contrast, reaching a conclusion, or making a summary (*for example* identifies the new information as supporting evidence; *however* implies that the new information will describe a contrast or an exception to the old information).

- **Echo words.** Consistent word use improves readability. Echo words appear repeatedly and always refer to the same thing. Some writing guides suggest that we vary word choice to add interest, but this strategy can backfire in technical writing. Technical writers choose different words to refer to similar but distinct concepts. Their intent is to use a different word for each concept to highlight the differences in meaning. An author who creates variety by using different words for the same concept introduces confusion. The reader must work to figure out if the author introduced a new word to add variety and interest or if the new word describes a new concept. In technical writing, if you intend to refer to the same concept multiple times, be consistent and use the same word each time you write about the concept.
- **Write in the active voice.** Express actions as verbs in sentences using the active voice. When we write sentences in the passive voice, the text is more difficult to understand. The passive voice forces us to turn the verb for an action into a noun (nominalizations). For example, we can use a verb (*introduce*) and write in the active voice (*He introduced a concept in the first class*) or we can turn the verb into a noun (*introduction*) and write the sentence in the passive voice (*Introduction of a concept occurred in the first class*). The second sentence is more difficult to understand and less interesting to read.

## Resources

Clark, H. H., & Wilkes-Gibbs, D. (1986). Referring as a collaborative process. *Cognition*, 22, 1-39.

CLIMB (Collaborative Learning and Integrated Mentoring in the Biosciences). *Five Principles for Readable Sentences* [video] Located on the Written Communication resource page.

Northwestern University. [Accessed at:

<http://www.northwestern.edu/climb/resources/written-communication/5-principles-readable-sentences.html>]

Haviland, S. E., & Clark, H. H. (1974). What's new? Acquiring new information as a process in comprehension. *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior*, 13, 512-521.

## Submitted by:

Claudia J. Stanny, Ph.D., Director

Center for University Teaching, Learning, and Assessment

University of West Florida

Pensacola, FL

(850) 473-7435

[cstanny@uwf.edu](mailto:cstanny@uwf.edu)

<http://uwf.edu/offices/cutla/>

## Student Concept Maps

“If you’re in the presence of a true expert, you will understand everything they say. If you don’t understand what someone is saying, they are not an expert.” – *Nido Qubein*

“Education is learning what you didn’t even know you didn’t know.” – *Daniel J. Boostin*

Concept maps are graphical representations of course material created by students. That is, students are asked to create visual representations of concepts and the relationships among them. Concept maps can be 1) a great way to get students engaged and actively thinking about the content at a deeper level than simple memorization, 2) an opportunity for students to examine the extent of their knowledge and understanding, and 3) a unique assessment technique that allows instructors the opportunity to peer inside students’ minds with regard to how they are organizing and conceptualizing the material.

Concept maps are sometimes generated in class or as homework, by individual students or small groups, as a means of formative feedback (no grade) or as a means of formal summative assessment (for a grade). The potential applications for concept maps are virtually endless, but let’s consider a few examples. In a history class, students might be asked to create a concept map for a major historical event, illustrating how various factors such as laws, economics, cultural movements, etc., related to each other and to the designated event. In a biology class, students might be asked to illustrate how various concepts relate to one another within the biological functioning of a specific organ, organism, plant, or animal. In a psychology course, students might be asked how the components of a theory, such as Freudian psychoanalytic theory, all fit together. And in a literature course, students might be asked to illustrate the various relationships among the characters, circumstances, and themes within a fictional work. How might concept maps be used in your courses?

Here is a brief but useful orientation to using concept maps or mind maps for teaching and learning: <http://pandora.cii.wvu.edu/cii/resources/modules/concept/default.asp>

Constructing concept maps requires just a sheet of paper and something with which to write. However, for those looking for a digital format, here is a very basic and simple-to-use online tool for creating concept maps for presentation: <https://www.text2mindmap.com/>. It is extremely basic, but that also makes it very quick and easy to use (no downloading or registration). For those who would like to create more elaborate concept maps digitally, here is a free open source software download from Tufts University that is quite sophisticated: <https://vue.tufts.edu/index.cfm>

### Submitted by:

Michael Wiederman, Ph.D.

Director of Faculty Development

University of South Carolina School of Medicine Greenville

[wiederma@greenvillemed.sc.edu](mailto:wiederma@greenvillemed.sc.edu)

## Maps as Teaching and Productivity Tools

Though I have never considered myself particularly oriented toward visuals, in recent years I have come to appreciate the value of mapping from both a teaching, learning, and productivity perspective. If you haven't explored how mapping might help enhance your work, I would encourage you to take a closer look at concept and mind maps. Both are visual representations of knowledge and ideas.

Concept maps are traditionally more structured and hierarchical in terms of organization, with the most general concept at the top and the more specific concepts at the bottom (Nilson, 2010). The links between the concepts should also be meaningfully labeled. [Here is a sample concept map](#) on concept maps. "[What are Concept Maps?](#)" from the Eberly Center at Carnegie Mellon also gives good instructions on how to create and assess concept maps.

Mind maps are less structured, but generally have the main idea at the center of the image, with themes radiating from this central idea ([mindmapping.com](#), 2016). Mind maps can also include media, such as images or videos, in addition to text. [Here is a sample mind map](#) of guidelines for mind mapping.

Ways you might use concept or mind maps include:

- **As a teaching tool:** consider creating a map as a way to help students understand the structure of the day's topic or even an entire course. On the first day of class, I show students a concept map I have drawn of the course and then use that map to explain the course structure and syllabus.
- **As a learning tool:** have students refine or demonstrate their learning by creating their own maps around a given topic or the course. Note: because students can be uncomfortable with ambiguity (there's no one "right" map), this might require a good amount of coaching and guidance from you. [See how this teacher](#) uses mapping to generate student discussions and assess learning.
- **As an assessment tool:** maps can be a great way for students to demonstrate their learning in the course. Just be sure to give students clear guidelines for developing their maps (and lots of practice creating maps beforehand) and consider creating a rubric.
- **As a course design tool:** if you're designing a new course (or doing a major revision of a current course), consider first creating a map to help you generate your learning outcomes and key content areas.
- **As a writing tool:** Mapping can also be a great way to organize your ideas for a paper.
- **As a notetaking tool:** Recently, mapping and [sketchnoting](#) have become popular methods for taking notes at conferences. I now take notes at conferences this way and have also extended this practice to creating sketchnotes for books while I am reading them.

Maps are wonderful tools for brainstorming, providing a “big picture” overview of ideas, or representing a large amount of information in a small space. They’re great tools to consider adding to your teaching and productivity “toolbox.”

## Resources

Center for Instructional Innovation and Assessment (2008). Classroom assessment technique: Concept maps. Retrieved June 30, 2016 from: <https://youtu.be/Gm1owf0uGFM>.

Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence. (2016). What are concept maps. Retrieved June 30, 2016 from:

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Schrock, K. (2016). *Sketchnoting in the classroom*. Retrieved June 30, 2016 from:

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## Submitted by:

Kristi J. Verbeke, Ph.D.

[verbekj@wfu.edu](mailto:verbekj@wfu.edu)

Director of Educational Development, Teaching and Learning Center

Wake Forest University

[tlc.wfu.edu](http://tlc.wfu.edu)

## Visual Imagery

Although some students, and many instructors, are aware that rote memorization tasks are ineffective learning strategies, few have experience using learning strategies that capitalize on the brain's strengths in processing certain forms of information. There is a large amount of the brain dedicated to visual processing (Zeki, 1993) and visual imagery is more easily remembered than some other forms of information (Paivio, 1969; Posner, Nissen, & Klein, 1976). Thus, one effective learning strategy is the intentional formation of vivid mental images related to the information one is trying to learn. Importantly, visualization can be used for *complex* concepts and reasoning, rather than just for remembering facts (Kosslyn, Behrmann & Jeannerod, 1995).

As an instructor, you can identify a complex concept in your class and develop appropriate visual imagery to represent it. This often takes the form of an analogy, but the emphasis should be on the *visual* features of the analogy so that student can picture it in their minds and return to it easily at a later time. It's particularly helpful if you can connect this visual imagery to prior information you have taught in the class, as it is well known that learning is more likely to occur with scaffolding to connect prior knowledge and experiences to current knowledge and experiences (e.g., McNamara & Kintsch, 1996).

For example, let's say you want to teach your students about the multiple perspectives that exist on any given topic, such as freedom of speech. You can use visualization to explain the concept of "multiple perspectives" by asking students to imagine a minor car accident in rich detail; e.g., There are two damaged cars at an intersection. What was the make or model of each car? Who was sitting in each seat of the car? Who was standing on the sidewalk? What kind of weather was there that day? What kind of street and neighborhood was it?

Once students have a vivid mental image of the scene, you can lead them through the different perspectives that the person in each seat of each car and those outside the car have on the same accident as a way to illustrate the abstract concept that multiple perspectives exist on a particular topic of discussion. For example, what is the perspective of Driver A, Driver B, a child in the backseat of car A, a passenger in the seat of car B, a witness from behind car A, an observer on the sidewalk, a police investigator, an insurance adjuster, an EMT, and so on. The different perspectives of these people represent the multiple perspectives that people may have on any topic. Students are much more likely to remember this concept of multiple perspectives if they have rich visual imagery to represent it. With a bit of reflection and time, instructors can create visual imagery for most complex concepts in their own classes.

### Resources

Kosslyn, S. M., Behrmann, M., & Jeannerod, M. (1995). The cognitive neuroscience of mental imagery. *Neuropsychologia*, 33(11), 1335-1344.

- McNamara, D. S., & Kintsch, W. (1996). Learning from texts: Effects of prior knowledge and text coherence. *Discourse Processes*, 22(3), 247-288.
- Miller, M.D. (2011). What college teachers should know about memory: A perspective from cognitive psychology. *College Teaching*, 59, 117-122.
- Posner, M. I., Nissen, M. J., & Klein, R. M. (1976). Visual dominance: an information-processing account of its origins and significance. *Psychological Review*, 83(2), 157.
- Paivio, A. (1969). Mental imagery in associative learning and memory. *Psychological Review*, 76(3), 241.
- Zeki, S. (1993). *A Vision of the Brain*. Blackwell Scientific Publishers.

**Submitted by:**

Amy Overman & Mary Jo Festle, Associate Directors  
Deandra Little, Director  
Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning  
Elon University  
<http://www.elon.edu/e-web/academics/teaching/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/cateleon/>



## Setting Up a Percentage-Based Grade Book

Many higher education faculty have developed elaborate point systems to assess student work and ultimately to determine final course grades. The problem with points is that they are not always equitable across assignments. For example, each question on a 10-point quiz is high stakes because each question is worth 10% of the total quiz score. On the other hand, a major project worth 500 points leaves ample opportunity for a passing grade unless “chunks” of points are deducted. Points require calculation and interpretation because the base standard varies from assignment to assignment. Percentages, on the other hand, allow you to consistently scale every assignment, from the 10 question quiz to the major project, in a way that students can easily understand: 100%.

Online course management systems such as Blackboard and Sakai make setting up a percentage-based grade book quite easy. In preparation, list your course requirements (everything students will do for a grade). Next, determine the percentage that each assignment will contribute to the total course grade. Obviously, your total should be 100%. Your list might look something like this:

Exams (3)	45%
Interview	15%
Group Project	12.5%
Demonstration	12.5%
Learning Journal	10%
Professionalism (Attendance and Participation)	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

Now you are ready to set up your online grade book. In Blackboard, you will reflect the course requirement percentages by creating categories and “weighting” your various assignments so that some will count more than others in calculating the total course grade. In Sakai, you will simply choose percentages over points. You may wish to divide some assignments further. For example, I list each exam separately at 15% each. You also may wish to nuance the value of some assignments beyond whole numbers. For example, in my course, the learning journal is submitted three times during the semester. Therefore, each time I grade it, students can earn up to 3.33% (for submissions one and two) and 3.34% (for submission three) which totals 10% by the end of the semester. Nuancing beyond whole numbers also works for tests and quizzes administered through your online course management system. For example, each exam in my course is comprised of 60 questions worth .25% each.

Once your percentage-based grade book is set up, your grading system will be equitable because all course requirements will be based on the consistent standard of 100%. Moreover, when your students receive their graded work, they will easily understand 92% as opposed to 460/500.

Neither you nor your students will have to get out your calculators to figure out what 460 points means!

Note: While this teaching tip advocates for a percentage-based grading system, the jury is still out on regarding percentages versus points. For more information about the pros and cons of each approach, please view the following resources.

### **Resources**

EStarkState (2011, February 8). Gradebook preferences: Points vs. percentages. Retrieved from <https://estarkstate.wordpress.com/2011/02/08/gradebook-preferences-points-vs-percentages-angel-7-4/>

Growing Learners (2012, March 29). Total points vs. weighted grades. Retrieved from <https://digitalhumanitiesyes.wordpress.com/2012/03/29/total-points-vs-weighted-grades/>

Weimer, M. (2011, October 19). Grading practices: Liabilities of the points system. *Faculty Focus: Higher Ed Teaching Strategies from Magna Publications*. Retrieved from <http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-professor-blog/grading-practices-liabilities-of-the-points-system/>

### **Submitted by**

Jana Hunzicker, Ed.D.

Associate Professor, Department of Teacher Education

William T. Kemper Fellow for Teaching Excellence, College of Education and Health Sciences

Executive Director, Center for Teaching Excellence and Learning

Bradley University

Peoria, IL

[jhunzicker@fsmail.bradley.edu](mailto:jhunzicker@fsmail.bradley.edu)

## Screencast-O-Matic

Have you ever explained an assignment during class time, but when you asked if anyone had questions no hands went up? Then, hours or days later, you received e-mail messages from students asking for clarification on what to do? Or worse, when students submitted their completed assignments, you discovered that they hadn't followed directions? If so, *Screencast-O-Matic* may be of use to you. *Screencast-O-Matic* is a free online resource that college instructors can use to provide brief recordings of on-screen computer activity with audio. The videos you create to explain assignments and demonstrate skills and concepts can be viewed by students outside of class anytime.

*Screencast-O-Matic* is very easy to use. Go to its homepage (<https://screencast-o-matic.com/home>), then click on "Start Recording." After you give permission for the program to open on your computer, a production interface will appear on your computer screen that allows you to select the section of your screen that you wish to record. When you are ready, click on the red Record button. After a 3-2-1 countdown, the recording will begin. With the free version of *Screencast-O-Matic*, you can record the activities on your computer screen, along with audio, for up to 15 minutes. During recording, a bar at the bottom of your computer screen will keep track of the time elapsed and remaining. You will also see an audio bar rising and falling in response to the volume of your voice. When you are finished, click on the blue "Stop" button, and then click "Done." Immediately, you will be able to view your recording. Then, you will have two options: Redo or Save. You may save your recording as a video file, upload it to *Screencast-O-Matic*, or upload it to YouTube. It's as simple as that!

Recently, I used *Screencast-O-Matic* for the first time while teaching an online interim course. After using it to introduce myself to the class, I created several brief tutorials to guide students as they completed a major course project. As a result of the tutorials, I received fewer questions from students and the final projects were of higher quality than in previous interims. Based on my positive experience with *Screencast-O-Matic*, I offer two tips. First, limit each video to about five minutes. Students will be more likely to view your entire recording if you keep it short. Second, in preparation, create a script that you can read as you are recording each video. The script will ensure that you don't omit important information, and it keeps the video running smoothly from beginning to end. *Screencast-O-Matic* also has a Pro version that allows for additional features, but I think you'll be able to accomplish quite a bit with the free version. I encourage you to give *Screencast-O-Matic* a try!

### Submitted by:

Jana Hunzicker, Ed.D.,

Associate Professor, Department of Teacher Education

William T. Kemper, Fellow for Teaching Excellence, College of Education and Health Sciences  
Executive Director, Center for Teaching Excellence and Learning  
Bradley University  
Peoria, IL  
[jhunzicker@fsmail.bradley.edu](mailto:jhunzicker@fsmail.bradley.edu)

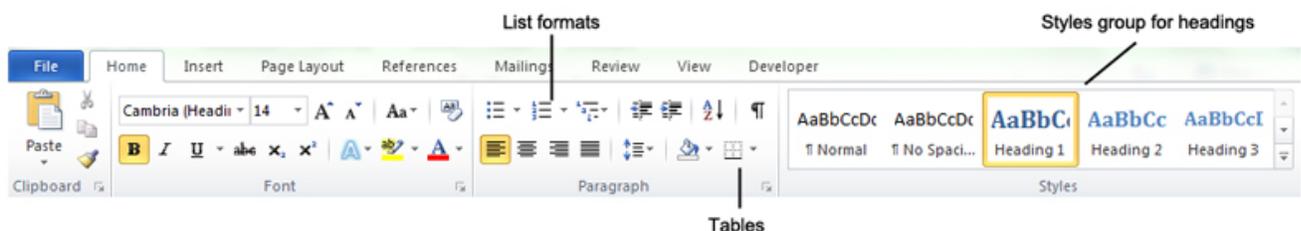
## Creating Accessible Microsoft Word Documents

Accessibility is a hot topic in education. Not only is it our [legal obligation](#) to make our online materials accessible to people with disabilities; it's the right thing to do. Even if you don't teach online, you may wish to share documents electronically, either now or in the future. Creating accessible documents now will save you the trouble of retrofitting materials later.

Making all course materials accessible might seem like an overwhelming task, but a few small changes to the way we work can make many of our everyday materials accessible. Most faculty create text documents for our classes, for example, the syllabus, homework assignments, and supplementary material. Making these documents accessible, so that screen readers can read them to students with visual disabilities, is really just a matter of establishing a few good habits. The tools to make a document accessible are built into Microsoft Word and will help you create documents that are easier for all students to navigate and easier for you to modify.

[This excellent video](#), from High Tech Center at Taft College, demonstrates how a screen reader reads an accessible Word document versus an inaccessible one.

Most of the guidelines for making a text document accessible involve using the built-in tools to format structural elements of your document, rather than using formatting that makes something look structural. For example, rather than making something look like a heading by making the font large and bold, use the heading levels in the Styles group on the Home ribbon. If information is a list, use a list structure. If it's tabular, use a table – don't just use the tab key. And when you use these structural elements, you aren't locked into the default appearances. There are a variety of built-in options, and you can also learn to customize the way these elements appear.



[Portland Community College](#) and [Microsoft](#) have both published excellent guidelines for making elements of your document accessible. Review these brief guides to learn how to make your headings, images, lists, links, scientific formulae, tables, color, and forms accessible.

Microsoft Word also has a built-in accessibility checker. Consult Microsoft for the location of the checker in the version of Word that you're using. In Word 2010 and later for Windows, it is located in the File menu. Under Info, choose Check for Issues, and then Check Accessibility. Word will check your document and a pane will appear to the right of your document with warnings and suggestions for improvement.

Time invested learning these habits now will pay dividends down the road. Not only will your students be able to navigate your document by structure (check the “Navigation Pane” box in the View ribbon to see your document’s outline), but you will easily be able to change the formatting of your entire document with a single click. If you’re not teaching an online or technology-enhanced course yet, you will be better prepared for the transition in the future, should you choose to make it. But most importantly, you will have created documents that are significantly easier for people using screen readers to access.

## Resources

University System of Georgia. “Higher Education, the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 508.” Retrieved from [http://www.usg.edu/siteinfo/higher\\_education\\_the\\_americans\\_with\\_disabilities\\_act\\_and\\_section\\_508](http://www.usg.edu/siteinfo/higher_education_the_americans_with_disabilities_act_and_section_508)

Taft College. “Screen Reader User's Experience and MS Word”:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D8XFkGMF0sw>

Portland Community College. “How to make a Word document accessible.” Retrieved from <http://www.pcc.edu/access/word>

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## Submitted by:

Maggie Burke  
Associate Professor, Computer Studies Department  
Distance Education Faculty Coordinator, Academic Affairs  
Community College of Rhode Island  
400 East Avenue  
Warwick, RI 02886  
[mburke1@ccri.edu](mailto:mburke1@ccri.edu)

Marla Wallace  
Professor, Library  
Community College of Rhode Island  
1762 Louisquisset Pike  
Lincoln, RI 02865  
[mwallace@ccri.edu](mailto:mwallace@ccri.edu)

## Hot Moments in the Classroom

### Utilizing a Communication Framework to Cool Down Tension

Despite the feelings of paralysis that take over during hot moments in the classroom, certain practices can be implemented to increase the likelihood of maintaining a supportive climate and positive learning environment. The following is one strategy (of [many offered](#)) meant to be reflected upon, modified, practiced, and utilized so that you can be better equipped to effectively respond to hot moments in the classroom when they arise.

What can you do when a comment has been made or reaction observed that causes heat in the classroom? Regardless of whether you or a student were the source of the comment, it is important to view the challenge as an opportunity for you, and others, to learn. Consider using a communication framework, such as Open The Front Door to Communication (OTFD) to describe what is going on, reduce tension, and offer a positive direction. The OTFD steps (adapted from The Excellence Experience, 2015) include:

Observe:	Concrete, factual observations of the situation
Think:	Thoughts (yours and/or theirs) based on what was observed
Feel:	Emotions using “I statements.”
Desire:	Specific request for a positive desired outcome

*Example:* “I noticed (Observe) the volume of some people’s voice getting raised. I think (Think) there were some strong reactions to what was said and I feel uncomfortable (Feeling) moving forward with the discussion until we explore this. I am hoping someone can share (Desire) what they are thinking/feeling right now so we can unpack this and learn from each other.”

When practiced, the OTFD framework can be a tool that is quickly retrieved out of our mental toolbox to organize our thoughts and describe the situation in a way that cools down the heat. When hot moments ignite in the classroom, doing nothing is a damaging option (Souza, Vizenor, Sherlip, & Raser, in press). Instead, we can engage thoughtfully and purposively in strategies that maintain a climate that is conducive to learning by not adding fuel to the fire (Souza, 2016).

### Resources

Souza, T.J. (2016). Managing Hot Moments in the Classroom: Concrete Strategies for Cooling Down Tension. In *Faculty Focus Special Report: Diversity and Inclusion in the College Classroom*. Magna Publication.

Souza, T., Vizenor, N., Sherlip, D., & Raser, L. (in press) Transforming conflict in the classroom: Best practices for facilitating difficult dialogues and creating an inclusive communication

climate. In P. M. Kellett & T. G. Matyok (Eds.), *Transforming Conflict through Communication: Personal to Working Relationships*.

SuperCamp. The Excellence Experience. Learning Forum SuperCamp. Retrieved from <http://www.supercamp.com/OTFD.aspx>.

Warren, John T. Reflexive Teaching: Toward Critical Autoethnographic Practices Of/in/on Pedagogy. *Cultural Studies Critical Methodologies* 11, no. 2 (2011): 139-44. doi:10.1177/1532708611401332.

**Submitted by:**

Tasha Souza

Associate Director of the Center for Teaching & Learning

Professor of Communication

Boise State University

## Three Steps to Getting Started with Mobile Learning

The dramatic proliferation of mobile devices, especially Apple iPads and Android tablets, on college campuses has not translated to widespread adoption or innovation in teaching and learning. In recent years, mobile device ownership among college students is near ubiquitous. However, most college faculty have yet to embrace mobile devices as relevant and engaging teaching and learning tools. There are legitimate reasons why faculty may be resistant to adopting mobile technology in their teaching. Like anything new or unfamiliar, getting started with mobile learning can seem overwhelming, if not intimidating. This teaching tip provides faculty three practical suggestions for how to get started.

**1) Gain confidence using the mobile device.** To gain proficiency using a mobile device, the first, and arguably the most important step, is to spend time learning how to operate the device. Faculty can learn how to operate their device with confidence by using the user guide provided, watching tutorial videos online, and/or asking a seasoned colleague or an instructional technologist. A faculty is considered proficient when he/she is able to properly setup the device, use the basic functions, download apps, navigate between apps, connect the device to the classroom projector, and manage the device during class.

**2) Integrate mobile learning into curriculum.** As with any technology integration, faculty should start with the student learning outcomes to guide his/her use of mobile technology. Bloom's Taxonomy and the SAMR Model provide good starting points for approaching mobile learning integration. Both models distinguish lower-order skills/integration from higher-order ones, and faculty can determine where he/she wants to begin integrating mobile learning.

**3) Find relevant educational apps.** Once the learning outcomes are identified, there are thousands, if not tens of thousands, of educational apps in the Apple Apps Store or Google Play Store that can help meet those outcomes. Each app store has curated apps collections, organized into different categories. Faculty not sure where to start can explore the educational collections (e.g., Apple's Teacher Starter Kit or Android's Apps for Teachers). Educational apps are available for various disciplines and grade levels. It is recommended that a faculty start with one or two apps and get proficient with them before adding more apps.

### Resources

Apple App Store Educational Apps: <http://www.apple.com/education/apps-books-and-more/>

Google Play Educational Apps: <https://play.google.com/store/apps/category/EDUCATION?hl=en>

Allan Carrington. The Padagogy Wheel V4.0. Accessed from:

<http://designingoutcomes.com/assets/PadWheelV4/wheelonly/assets/player/KeynoteDHTMLPlayer.html#0>

**Submitted by:**

Mike Truong, Ph.D.

Executive Director, Office of Innovative Teaching and Technology

Center for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment

Azusa Pacific University

[mtruong@apu.edu](mailto:mtruong@apu.edu)

<http://www.apu.edu/itt>

## Enhancing Student Engagement with Online Video Content with Zaption

“Learning results from what the student does and thinks and only from what the student does and thinks. The teacher can advance learning only by influencing what the student does to learn.”

— Herbert A. Simon

Study after study has shown that active learning strategies which encourage students to think about, reflect upon, and engage with what they are learning leads to better understanding and long-term retention of course content. You may already do this through discussion, problem-based learning, case studies, or simply by pausing during your lecture to ask questions or to have students write a quick, one-minute reflection or summary paper. But how can you replicate that experience in an online course, particularly when asking students to watch videos in an online, hybrid, or flipped classroom environment? How can you help them to focus when the distractions of the internet are so close to hand? Absentmindedly watching a video is similar to listening to a non-interactive lecture in that it can lead students to “assume a passive, non-thinking, information receiving role. Yet if they are to remember and use the information, they need to be actively engaged in thinking about the content presented.”

One **Free** tool to help you create a more active learning experience for your online students is Zaption ([www.zaption.com](http://www.zaption.com)). Zaption allows you to embed a variety of question types, including multiple choice, short answer, true/false, polls, and more, into a pre-recorded video. It works seamlessly with YouTube, which means that you can use any publicly available video or upload your own content to fit your course needs. Inserting question breaks within the video forces students to pay attention and answer the question before they can move on, which gives them immediate feedback about whether or not they have understood the content or need to go back and review. By inserting reflective prompts before or after important concepts, you can encourage students to make personal connections to your course material and promote deeper learning.

Zaption also provides analytics, which let you see which concepts your students have mastered and where you might need to go deeper or clarify a point, just as you would after checking for understanding in a face-to-face classroom. While the pro version does provide some nice bells and whistles, the free basic version of Zaption is a great tool to help you create more interactive video content which should result in deeper student engagement, understanding, and retention of your course material.

### Resources

Ambrose, S.A. et al. (2010). *How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

McKeachie, W.J. (2006). *McKeachie's Teaching Tips: Strategies, Research, and Theory for College and University Teachers* (12<sup>th</sup> ed.), p.72. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Nilson, L.B. (2010). *Teaching at Its Best: A Research-Based Resource for College Instructors* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

**Submitted by:**

Amber Handy, Ph.D.

Director,

Kossen Center for Teaching & Learning

Mississippi University for Women

[www.muw.edu/ctl](http://www.muw.edu/ctl)

[alhandy@muw.edu](mailto:alhandy@muw.edu)

## Finding Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs)

An important aspect of scholarly teaching is sharing our pedagogical knowledge and experiences with others. Sometimes, we accomplish this informally through discussion with colleagues, campus-based workshops, and local presentations. Other times, we share our teaching ideas, findings, and successes more formally through scholarly presentations at state, national, and international conferences or writing manuscripts for publication in Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) journals.

You may have noticed when submitting a SoTL article for publication that many journals now require a Digital Object Identifier (DOI) for each reference. Until recently, this took a great deal of time since one didn't quite know where to look and not all articles have a DOI. But Crossref has made the process of finding DOIs simple and quick. Here is what you do:

1. Go to [crossref.org](http://crossref.org), complete the simple registration form (e-mail address and organization), and read/agree to the terms and conditions.
2. Next, use the Simple Text Query Form to enter your registered e-mail address along with the references for which you are seeking DOIs. (I like to wait until my manuscript is finished so that I have all of my references completed and formatted. Then, I cut and paste the entire reference list right into the form.)
3. You have the option of including PubMed IDs in your results and listing all possible DOIs per reference. Choose one or both options if you wish.
4. Finally, click Submit.

Within seconds, Crossref will generate the DOIs for the references on your list, displaying them in red text so that you can easily see them. At this point, you can either cut and paste the entire reference list back into your manuscript, or cut and paste each DOI from the Crossref form into your reference list (which allows you to correctly format each reference as you work).

I was thrilled to learn about Crossref's DOI search service and hope you are too. Now, you have one less reason not to write a scholarly article about the wonderful things you are doing in your classroom. So get started on your next SoTL manuscript today!

### Resources

Crossref (n.d.). *Simple text query form*. Retrieved from

<http://www.crossref.org/SimpleTextQuery/>

International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. (2014). *SoTL publications and publishers*. Retrieved from <http://www.issotl.com/issotl15/node/21>

University of Central Florida. (2016). *SoTL journals*. Retrieved from  
<http://www.fctl.ucf.edu/ResearchAndScholarship/SoTL/journals/>

**Submitted by:**

Jana Hunzicker, Ed.D.

Associate Professor, Department of Teacher Education

William T. Kemper, Fellow for Teaching Excellence, College of Education and Health Sciences

Executive Director, Center for Teaching Excellence and Learning

Bradley University

Peoria, IL.

[jhunzicker@fsmail.bradley.edu](mailto:jhunzicker@fsmail.bradley.edu)

## Online Tools that can Improve Student Learning

### Learning Should Be Empowering, Not Limited

"If we are to achieve a richer culture, we must weave one in which each diverse human gift will find a fitting place." — Margaret Meade

Without stepping into the accessibility versus universal design for learning debate, there are many accommodations that may be adopted as sound instructional practices for the benefit of more students than just for students with disabilities. First, given our current and evolving technologies, the rise of open educational resources, and the necessity for compatibility and integration among multiple devices, we simply need to monitor the functionality of our educational technology. Second, as part of brain-based learning, multisensory approaches to teaching engage students and increase their likelihood of connections to and retention of the learning material (Shams & Seitz, 2008).

Below is a list of our favorite resources to enhance teaching and learning for all of your students in all classroom modalities. The information provided will give you a general overview of the major considerations to increase student access to learning. The listed tools are multipurpose, have multiple uses, and appeal to diverse student populations and classroom environments.

#### Quality Assurance for Online Courses

Quality Matters (QM) Rubric Standard 8 on Accessibility and Usability

(<https://www.qualitymatters.org/rubric>) is a nationally-recognized program that relies on the QM rubric and faculty peer reviews to improve the course design of fully online, blended, and competency-based courses. Standard 8 identifies criterion that ensures accessibility and usability in your online courses.

The following resources are free in order to be an equalizer and a liberator in the classroom.

#### Information

Job Accommodation Network (JAN) A to Z of Disabilities and Accommodations

(<https://askjan.org/links/atoz.htm>) focuses on employment and workplace solutions for individuals with disabilities. However, their A-to-Z resource materials on disability accommodations are quite detailed and can be applied directly or adapted to various learning environments.

National Center on Disability and Access to Education (NCDAAE) Cheatsheets

(<http://ncdae.org/resources/cheatsheets/>) – If you have ever experienced technology incompatibility issues with different software, apps, and devices, or if you need to make specific accommodations for your students, then you will want to refer to NCDAAE Cheatsheets for Microsoft (Word, PowerPoint, and Excel) software, Adobe (Acrobat and InDesign) software, websites, and YouTube videos to create usable and accessible content.

## Tools

Amara (<https://amara.org/en/>) Amara is an accessible video tool and nonprofit professional organization, which provides support for captions, subtitles, and translations for your instructional videos.

Google for Education (<https://www.google.com/edu/products/productivity-tools/>) is a set of collaborative productivity tools, which includes Classroom, Gmail, Drive, Calendar, Vault, Docs, Sheets, Slides, Sites, and Hangouts. These tools help you create your course content, communicate with your students, teach, manage course activities/assignments, and track student progress.

Jing (<https://www.techsmith.com/jing.html>) is a multimedia communication and collaboration tool. Specifically, Jing is a screen shot (image, audio, and/or video) and online screencast (storage and sharing) tool. Jing is beneficial for visual and auditory learners and for increasing interest and engagement with enhanced course content.

Online OCR (<http://www.onlineocr.net/>) is an optical character recognition software. Some productivity software can easily be converted into PDF files while maintaining their original text and object properties. However, some PDF files are only images. If you need to identify text for the purpose of “copy & paste,” or to use with a screen reader, or if you would like to activate included hyperlinks, then OCRs are useful with translating PDF documents (as images) back to its original texts and objects.

Screen Readers ([ChromeVox](#) for Chrome; [VoiceOver](#) for Apple products; [NVDA](#) for Windows, Firefox, and Microsoft; [ReadSpeaker](#) and [WebAnywhere](#) for web)

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_screen\\_readers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_screen_readers)) – The listed screen readers are helpful for individuals when using the associated software/applications. Screen readers are beneficial to individuals with visual impairments or blindness, visual learners, ESL learners, and others. When scrolling is necessary on a screen, screen readers help those with limited mobility navigate. Screen readers are also helpful when you use small screens, when you are on the go or multi-tasking, and with using multiple devices.

Zamzar (<http://www.zamzar.com/>) is an online file conversion tool, which will allow you to provide multiple file types of the same document to ensure technology compatibility and access to the document.

## Resources

Shams, L. & Seitz, A. R. (2008). Benefits of multisensory learning. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 12(11), 411-417.

**Submitted by:**

Felicity Cruz Grandjean, *Ph.D.*, Faculty Developer

Julie A. McElhany, *Ed.D.*, Director

Texas A&M University-Commerce

Center for Faculty Excellence & Innovation

[www.tamuc.edu/cfei](http://www.tamuc.edu/cfei)

## Online Classrooms

The acronym “**Support**” comes to mind as I reflect upon online teaching strategies:

**Supplement material on syllabus with interesting and informative weekly guidance lesson plans:**

Since the online curriculum is often standardized, online instructors should help students explore new concepts and provide “real world” illustrations to supplement the course content. Additional information to expand upon the content on the syllabus provides students with a more in-depth examination of each topic and enhances the learning process. It is particularly important to include current examples that students can relate to from personal experience, as well as pivotal events unfolding in the media. The inclusion of charts, graphs, diagrams and other pictorial images is another vehicle to grab the attention of students and add an element of fun to the classroom. Online course lesson plans should be written in an informal, conversational style to more closely resemble the dissemination of this material in person.

**Understand challenges of online learning environment for students and instructors:**

Students and instructors may be confronted with challenges pertaining to technological issues or navigation through the virtual/online classroom. Instructors should be prepared to provide prompt guidance and resources to manage such situations and address unexpected glitches. This is imperative for maintaining organization in the classroom and reassuring students that there are viable solutions to these problems. The online classroom structure is unique, so instructors must be aware of necessary adjustments to accommodate this educational format. Students who are new to this form of learning may need extra attention adapting to changes from more traditional models. Consideration for individual learning styles and diversity are other key elements for effective instruction in the online environment. Flexibility is an essential factor to ensure clear presentations of course material and requirements, particularly in the absence of face-to-face communications.

**Provide detailed formative and summative feedback throughout the course:**

Instructors should provide formative assessments with detailed comments throughout the course to monitor student progress. This is extremely helpful for students – it identifies specific areas of improvement, as well as recognizes strengths that have been demonstrated. The inclusion of positive feedback is imperative to encourage students and sustain motivation to succeed. Formative evaluations at the end of the term can be a useful tool for students to apply to future coursework and target skills that need additional attention.

**Promote active engagement and communication in the classroom:**

Maintaining an active presence throughout the term coincides with a greater sense of community among the course participants. Instructors should serve as role models to students in the tone, style, and types of communication in the virtual classroom. Utilizing a professional, but welcoming quality in all communications (announcements, postings, course

expectations, etc.) creates a congenial atmosphere whereby students feel more comfortable exchanging opinions and ideas. By demonstrating enthusiasm, interest and curiosity about the topic at hand, instructors can foster motivation, self-reflection and critical thinking on the part of students.

**Offer support and mentorship to students in coursework and career development:**

In addition to fulfilling teaching responsibilities, instructors serve as mentors to students as they work towards their academic and career goals. This necessitates the establishment of mutual respect, trust and empathy towards students for the duration of the course. In order to offer effective support and guidance, it is essential to be both approachable and available to students. Instructors should also be mindful of the stressors associated with balancing school/work/life demands faced by students as they pursue their coursework.

**Respond to student questions, discussions and feedback in a timely fashion:**

Students appreciate prompt feedback and grading of their discussions and assignments. A quick turnaround time will enable students to make necessary corrections and set clear guidelines for areas of development. This also reinforces the instructors' expectations of students to submit work prior to due dates and reply to other posts according to schedule. Responding to student inquiries within 24 hours is optimal for addressing questions and concerns, along with facilitating a collaborative approach to learning.

**Teach with a focus on continual growth and improvement for lifelong learning:**

One of the central components of a teaching philosophy is to provide a supportive and encouraging environment for learning. This overriding objective is advantageous, in conjunction with high-quality instruction that achieves the intended learning outcomes. Education is a dynamic process for both instructors and students, which contributes to the challenge and excitement of learning. As the educational field continues to evolve, these changes must be reflected in the course content and the synthesis of new information. A passion for teaching propels educators to pass along their knowledge and interest in a variety of disciplines. With this in mind, instructors should strive to inspire curiosity and lifelong learning among students.

**Submitted by:**

Alice E. Schluger, Ph.D.

Faculty, Health & Wellness Psychology

University of the Rockies // Rise Above

[Alice.Schluger@faculty.rockies.edu](mailto:Alice.Schluger@faculty.rockies.edu)

[www.rockies.edu](http://www.rockies.edu)

## Increase Student Engagement with Poll Everywhere

If you are interested in ...:

- Increasing student engagement and classroom interaction;
- Facilitating peer learning and class discussion;
- Assessing student learning efficiently on an ongoing basis;
- Gauging student opinions on sensitive topics while respecting their privacy;
- Identifying students' background information and prior knowledge on a subject; or
- Helping students recognize gaps in their own learning,

then you will want to try Poll Everywhere (<http://polleverywhere.com/>).

Poll Everywhere is a web-based tool that enables you to gather responses from your students in real time, and seamlessly incorporate their responses into your class. If you have your students register their devices in a course group, you can track their participation throughout the semester.

Here are a few ways you might use it:

- **Facilitate live discussions during class.** Ask your students a multiple-choice question. If the votes are split between two choices, ask students to pair off and debate the two alternatives, then have them vote again.
- **“Any questions?”** After a discussion of complex material, ask students to use PE to submit questions. You can hide the responses from view, review them after class, and use ten minutes at the beginning of the next class meeting to address common misconceptions.
- **Review session.** Create a ‘brainstorm’ poll where students can enter the questions they would like reviewed. Students can then vote on which questions they also have, so the most frequent questions will rise to the top of the list. (Yes, you can moderate the questions as they are submitted, so only those that are appropriate are made visible.)
- **See who’s prepared.** If you’ve assigned reading or problem sets to be done as homework, put one or two questions into a poll and have students respond at the beginning of class. If you do this in the spirit of “must be present to win” and start class this way, you may even find that students arrive on time more consistently.
- **Engage students at a distance.** Are you teaching in a distance learning (DL) classroom? Because PE is web-based, students on both sides of the connection can participate. Are you teaching online? Create a poll on the web and give students a one-day window in which they can respond.

## Resources

NYIT. Poll Everywhere. *NYIT Center for Teaching and Learning*. Retrieved from <http://www.nyit.edu/ctl/polleverywhere>

Poll Everywhere. User Guide. Retrieved from <http://www.polleverywhere.com/guide>

Poll Everywhere. Video Guide. Retrieved from [www.polleverywhere.com/videos](http://www.polleverywhere.com/videos)

Citrix Systems, Inc. Poll Everywhere: Getting Started Webinar. Retrieved from [www.poll4.com/webinar](http://www.poll4.com/webinar)

## Submitted by:

Olena Zhadko

Director, Online Education

Lehman College

[ozhadko@lehman.cuny.edu](mailto:ozhadko@lehman.cuny.edu)

## Teaching Higher Levels of Learning at the End of the Semester

### [Notes on Teaching and Learning](#)

Towards the end of the semester, students and instructors alike are often worn out and tempted to take one of two avenues:

1) They may be enticed **to turn on cruise control**, check out mentally, and start winter break a few weeks early. This first option may be particularly attractive when final class sessions are devoted to student presentations. If students are not required to engage their classmates' presentations actively, they may be inclined to listen to each presentation only passively. Make sure all students have something active to *do* while they listen to their classmates' work, such as a presentation evaluation. In the future, also try not to pack all presentations into a few final weeks; if presentations are spread out more evenly across the second half of the semester, each class may include a combination of activities.

2) Students and instructors may be enticed **to shift into high gear**, to overwork and cram as much as possible. This second option lures students who have been slacking and instructors who have fallen behind schedule. Cramming helps no one. Students who slack and then cram may succeed in memorizing facts, but will miss out on higher levels of learning. Instructors who fall behind and then cram content into the last days of class only overwhelm their students. Moreover, they miss the crucial moment afforded by the end of semester when higher levels of learning can happen, like synthesis and application. In the future, leave open days in the semester for catch up in order to save the final class days for review, reflection, and higher levels of learning.

**To promote higher level learning** at the end of the semester, while avoiding both cruise control and shifting into high gear, help students reflect on their learning from the whole semester:

1. Revisit the course's learning goals introduced at the beginning of the semester. Have students take a moment and consider to what degree they have accomplished these learning goals.
2. Ask students to create final exam essays/questions which would measure student comprehension of the course's learning goals.
3. Invite students to synthesize their learning through a creative project (e.g., a diagram, a timeline, a concept map, creative writing, or visual art).
4. Revisit readings and/or assignments from the beginning of the semester so that students can appreciate what and how much they have learned.
5. Ask students to prepare answers to questions such as: What are the most important things that you learned in this course? How will you apply this learning in your life?
6. Have students compose a letter to future students of the course, advising them on what they need to know and how they should best go about learning it.

7. Invite students to reflect on their development as learners, thinkers, and writers. Have students answer questions such as: What did you learn about yourself as a student this semester? Did you learn (or implement) any study strategies this semester that helped you be successful? What would you have done differently if you had to repeat this semester?

## Resources

For those who are interested in this topic, variations of many of the tips offered here today, as well as dozens of other good ideas, can be found on many academic blogs and articles on the web; I encourage you to peruse the following:

Ball State University. *Teaching Tip: Ending a Course.*

Columbia University. *Ending the Semester on a Positive Note.*

Connor, P. *Managing the End of the Semester.*

Eggleston, T. J., Smith, G.E. (2002). *Parting Ways: Ending Your Course.* *Observer* 15 (3).

Walsh, M. *Five Tips for Wrapping Up a Course.*

## Authored by:

Justus Ghormley  
Kaneb Center for Teaching and Learning  
University of Notre Dame

## Submitted by:

Kristi Rudenga  
Kaneb Center for Teaching and Learning  
University of Notre Dame  
[krudenga@nd.edu](mailto:krudenga@nd.edu)