

Teaching Tips

A Forum for discussion and tips for advancing teaching and learning at Mona

Instructional Development
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Special points of interest:

- The **Teaching Tips Newsletter** is a publication of the Instructional Development Unit (IDU) at the UWI, Mona.
- The Newsletter is published once per month and provides tips for improving teaching and learning in higher education. It is available online (<http://myspot.mona.uwi.edu/idu/>) as well as in the office of the IDU.
- If you have an area that you would like to explore using this medium, do not hesitate to contact us at the IDU.

Motivating Students to Prepare for Class

Many university teachers have bemoaned the fact that students do very little preparation for classes. Reading assignments are given but students fail to read the required material and hence are unable to contribute meaningfully to some class discussions. What can be done about this?

Giving a foretaste of the reading and assign study questions



Give out reading assignments at least two weeks before class. You might want to preview the readings for your students. This should stir their natural curiosity. Further, you can call attention to the relevance of the reading and how it fits into the larger conversations on the theme you are discussing.

You could also ask them to come with specific responses to specific questions or concerns that emanate from the reading. Let them find key points. In fact, when you set study questions, students become more confident learners. Of course, when all of this is tied in with the final examination, then it is likely that your students will even pay more attention to the reading.

Set Preparational Assignment



Questions from the teacher on the reading

You might want to pose some general questions about the reading. Make these non-threatening and hence the questions should be conversational:

- ◆ What item in the reading surprised you?
- ◆ What topics in the chapter can you apply to your own experience?
- ◆ Which sections of the reading do you think we should review?

Students questions on the reading

Students can be asked to write questions that they have about the reading. Indeed, ask them to prepare quiz questions or discussion questions. They might also be asked to select a relevant word, case or concern from the reading and have them discuss it further.

Hold your students accountable with a quiz



Holding a quiz at the commencement of each class might be a good way of ensuring that students study the readings before class. In fact, you can make your quizzes more student friendly if the decision to have one is determined by a flip of a coin at the beginning of class.

Using a Reader's Guide



Dr Tiffany F. Culver (an assistant professor of Psychology at Sul Ross State University, Rio Grande College, Texas, USA) in *Faculty Focus*, November 2011 has come up with a reader's guide to increase reading compliance and metacognitive awareness. This is a step-by-step exercise that students are asked to do when doing their reading assignments. There are three sections that make up this guide and these are: (1) Planning, (2) Reading, and (3) Evaluation.

Planning



The student is asked to do some simple things before actually engaging in the reading. These include skimming the passage, questioning its organization and evaluating the structure of the reading. In this way students are prepared to set reading goals and determine questions that they believe the text should answer for them.

As students prepare to read they are guided by the following questions:

1. What is the title of the chapter?
2. Name three questions you would like to have answered from this chapter?
3. What are the subheadings listed in this chapter?
4. For each subheading listed in question three, write one statement describing what you think the paragraph will discuss (based on the subheading).
5. What are the bold face words in this chapter?
6. Using questions 3 and 4, briefly put together an outline that effectively displays the organizational structure of this passage?
7. Skim each of the paragraphs.

Reading



The next section of the guide calls for the student to actually read the assigned reading. The student is asked to read and underline/highlight key points, make notes of important information, code sections of the text and take stock of information that they do not understand.

Students are also given the following instruction as they read:

8. While reading the chapter, underline any ideas you believe are important.
9. While reading the chapter, write the following symbols next the sentences as you feel they are necessary.

? = I have a question about this

A = I agree with this

D = I disagree with this

! = Interesting or important point

C = Confusing

10. Write down two ideas from the text that you believe your instructor may put on a test.
11. Using the two ideas from question 10, write down any information you knew about these items before reading the passage.
12. Can the information from the chapter be easily associated with the information you knew about these items prior to reading the chapter? Yes or No?
13. While you are reading, write down the number of times you noticed that you experienced a failure in comprehending the material? What did you do about it?

Finish reading the passage.

Evaluation



The reader is also asked to reflect on his or her reading process and to summarize key points. Further, the reader should decide if all questions posed in the planning stage were addressed. The following questions are used to assist the process:

14. Looking back to question 2, were the questions you wanted answered by the chapter answered?
15. Give a brief summary of the chapter you just read.
16. Was summarizing the chapter difficult? Yes or No? Why?
17. Was your summary accurate? Look back at the passage to determine your accuracy.
18. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 = very inaccurate to 10 = very accurate) how would you rate your summary?

Using Dialogue Questions



Dr. J. Eugene Knott of the University of Rhode Island (Kingston, RI, USA) in an article in the January 2001 edition of *The Teaching Professor* shared his experience of using Dialogue Questions in his classes. Each class commenced with a five - to twenty minutes exercise based on assigned readings. In the first place, he would pose an open-ended stimulus question/statement/quotation to his students. Usually, he would ask students to write their opinion.

The question could be about the three most important issues in the reading or to discuss a particular aspect of the reading. After this, students would be asked to exchange papers. Each person would provide his or her peer/partner with a brief written response. This was a brief exercise that usually lasted no more than five minutes. There were times when the Dialogue Question would be used for small group (four persons) discussion. When this was done, each student in the group would provide a one minute written summary and response from each student. This would take about twenty minutes of the class time.

Finally, Dr Knott would collect all the papers and provide feedback on their contents. Each week students would be asked to discuss the Dialogue Question with a different peer. Of course, the whole process promoted different ways of thinking about the issues raised in the readings as well as fostering teamwork. Classes were usually vibrant and lively. Students were engaged and in order for them to participate meaningfully, they had to do the reading. Since the Dialogue Question was done at every class, students grew to appreciate the activity and of course to take it seriously.

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