

Teaching Tips

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

Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, The UWI Mona



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Special points of interest:

- The **Teaching Tips Newsletter** is a publication of the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) at the UWI, Mona.
- The newsletter is published three times during each semester and once during the summer. It provides tips for improving teaching and learning in higher education and is available online (<http://myspot.mona.uwi.edu/cetl>) as well as in the office of the CETL.
- If you need additional teaching tips on specific classroom practices, please contact us.

Welcome to our academic year 2018 - 2019

The new academic year has just begun and the CETL extends a warm welcome to all new and returning faculty. Of course, we would like to extend a very special welcome to all our new faculty. To all, those new and those returning, we wish for you another year of great fun, laughter and exceptional academic advancement and enrichment. The CETL pledges its support to assist in making your pedagogical experience a meaningful and delightful one - with respect to professional growth and development.

Getting our Students to do Assigned Work.

Throughout the academy there seems to be a cry, students are not doing assigned work. In fact, there have been many instances where faculty teaching both undergraduate and graduate students have reported that a high percentage of students are not even doing the assigned readings. Sadly, many students are content with just passing a course or as we say “scraping through”. This is problematic for conscientious educators. We want our students to do well and shine brilliantly. This is where testing comes in.

There is evidence emerging from research that testing promotes learning. Therefore, one way to get students to do the work is to engage in frequent testing. We know that tests have always held an honored place in the firmament of higher education. They have been tried and proven to help students focus their attention on aspects of course content.

Testing is oftentimes the approach that we use to determine if our students have mastered the course content. However, we rarely think about the power of tests to promote learning.

Brame and Biel (2015) underscored the point that testing provides retrieval practice and in the process students tend to learn course content better. In their work as researchers in the field of cognitive psychology, they have shown that testing leads to increased retention of course content. It is more effective than just studying alone. This was particularly true when testing did not count in the overall computation of the final grade since this was low stakes. But even in situations where testing contributed to course grade, some students seemed to have embraced the retrieval practice that testing afforded them.



Use Test Questions to Enrich Teaching and Learning Sessions

One approach that might be helpful in getting some students to do assigned work is regular testing. Further, students tend to pay attention to test questions so use them frequently and use them well in your classes. Let the students know that you are using past test or examination questions, in fact, indicate that this question was one that occurred on the examination paper two years ago or as the case may be. Call on them to formulate responses to known past paper questions in your classes.

In seeking to get your students to do the work, use test questions to call attention to a significant body of content that needs to be covered. In this way, they will want to consult the course content as contained in the course readings or textbooks. Encourage your students to use test questions to

test encourage your students to use test questions to test themselves in relation to the content supplied for the course. Create opportunities for your students to talk to each other about test questions and the body of content in the syllabus that should be used to respond to these test questions. Once the question is mounted on the board or on whatever device is being used in your classroom, you can have them look in their notes to unearth material that they might have that will help them to answer the question.

You might also want your students to create questions that might come in a test or examination. They should be instructed to look at their notes and create questions that could be used to examine the course content. Testing oneself with questions is an effective approach to develop mastery. It's better than just going over the material another time. In this regard, various testing formats have been shown to enhance learning. The questions might be multiple choice, short answer or other objective or constructed response items. Further, the research of Brame and Biel (2015) showed that feedback was very important. The work also showed that testing enabled and empowered students beyond rote learning or mere memorizing of content. From this body of work, it was noted that the benefits of testing included the ability to transfer knowledge to different domains.

Studying in a sense cues student to focus on key ideas and in that regard, it prepares them in a more forthright manner. More and frequent testing with feedback is another method to get them to do the work and learn the course content.

Give them a test or quiz on a chapter or two of the textbook. You might want to allow them to use their textbooks but carefully decide on the time required to answer each question. As students prepare for the quiz, they become more familiar with the text book. This activity will also bring them face-to-face with some of the course content. Ask them to pay attention

to the material covered in the text for the final examination. Further, this activity begins to show students the kind of management of the text and other course materials that they will need to do well in the examination.

Another approach is to provide summary points during the class. This approach encourages the students to practice retrieving content since it asks students to use their own words to recall key information or key points. These summaries could be written in their note books or shared with colleagues nearby (pair and share) or spoken in class.

The use of pretesting is also being recommended. We can test students' prior knowledge of our courses. This is also an amazing way to prepare some students for learning.

Reviewing course material in class by going back to notes or the text book and readings for a class on a named date is also good and pushing your students to pay attention to the readings and the course activities. They might be asked to underline three or four important points in their notes or in the textbook that they believe they will need for the examination. Go around the classroom and call upon students to share what they have identified and why they identified those concerns. Another way might be to send them to the notes and readings for a particular day and ask them to review it. Ask if there are concerns that they have or clarifications that they might need. Other students should be encouraged to help out students who are having difficulties in understanding aspects of the course content.

Reference

Brame, C. J., & Biel, R. (2015). Test-enhanced learning: The potential for testing to promote greater learning in undergraduate science courses. *Cell Biology Education, Life Sciences Education, 14* (Summer), 1-12.

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