

Teaching Tips

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

Centre for Excellence in Teaching
and Learning, UWI Mona



March 2013

Volume 5 Number 5

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.

Getting Students to do the Assigned Readings



There are many complaints from lecturers indicating that students do not do the assigned readings. In fact, in some cases even PowerPoint slides or notes made available to students by way of the UWI Mona Learning Management System, OurVLE, are not read. The cry is that many students come to classes unprepared to participate fully in class discussions.

The use of quizzes to check reading is one practice that has been used with mixed results. It might still be employed by some faculty members especially with the availability of online quizzes. The use of the quiz to find out about the completion of assigned readings is however problematic at times. The introduction of the quiz might also be a gateway for the entry of quiz stress into the course. For some persons, the quiz does not provide an opportunity to get the students engaged in a robust and lively discussion of the subject matter content covered in the assigned reading and hence its benefits in this regard are seen as minimal.

Approaches to getting the readings done

There are many approaches that might be used to get the reading done. Some of these include designing the course so that students have to do readings to pass, setting assignments requiring that readings are done in depth and not merely superficially and structuring the assignments in ways that call for students to do the readings in order to get passing grades.

It might be necessary to establish a learning contract at the beginning of the semester and ensure that students read assigned material before class. In this learning contract you should get students to commit to doing reading as a part of their commitment to strive to engage in deep learning and do well in the course.

Guided Tours

March (2013) in an article in *The Teaching Professor*, provided an approach called “guided tours” that might be used in university and college classroom to encourage students to do assigned readings. This approach requires that the classroom teacher compiles a collection of readings based on a theme or a topic being studied. These collections are then distributed to students. The readings in each collection might be centrally linked to the topic but it could also present opposing perspectives on the same issue or any such arrangement. Students are then asked to form their own reading groups. In assigning tasks, students are given the responsibility of taking a set of readings and determining how each piece will be read and by whom. They are not required to individually do all the readings but in each group, each person would do one of the readings or a particular section of a reading. Each group is given a set of questions that require them to apply the information in the readings to answer the question properly. After they have discussed the readings in their groups, they are expected to brief the large class about the contents of their readings. Once all the groups have shared, the information is used to reinforce aspects of the content, do further elaborations etc.



Coffman Strategies to get students doing the reading



Coffman (2009) in *The Teaching Professor*, offered nine strategies that are recommended to assist in getting students to do assigned readings. The strategies are summarized below:

Textbook Review



Spend some time at the beginning of the semester looking at your major textbooks and tell students why they should read them. Let them hear from you why the readings from the textbook or books you have selected are important and how they will impact their studies and lives. Give them tips on how to read the text, perhaps what might be highlighted, the use of advance organizers, structured overviews and incorporating notes in pencil in the margin to advance their learning.

Using supplemental material connected with the text



Help your students to locate supplemental material connected with the text for instance, websites, online study guides, an audio version of the text or parts of the text. You might also be able to help them locate other online resources. Ensure that they can use those resources to support their learning.

Vocabulary extension



Explain to your students the importance of knowing the specialized vocabulary associated with the subject matter content to be covered in your course. Identify some of this specialized vocabulary and indicate how they might become more familiar with the words and concepts. You might want to suggest to them the use of flash-cards etc to get going with vocabulary work.

Identifying key ideas



Provide your students with tips about active reading.

These tips might include important strategies such as making notes in the margins, underlining/highlighting important ideas and concepts, making linkages, talking back to the text, using post-it notes and rewriting important concepts for reinforcement.

Questions



Your students can prepare questions on the reading and write their answers to these before coming to class. In fact, this might be incorporated into a worksheet. Encourage your students to always approach the text with questions.

Use the textbook in class



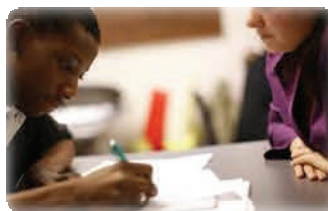
Ask students to take the textbook to class and use it from time to time. You might want to call attention to a graphic or a paragraph that underscores a point being made in a lesson you are teaching. It might be necessary to use the book to encourage more participation. This might be accomplished by asking for explanations of some of the assigned reading.

Empower students to ask meaningful Questions about the text



The Students you teach can be taught to ask specialized questions about the material that they are reading. The use of the five “w’s” and one “h”. So they must ask questions beginning with “who, what, why, where, when and how.”

Before the exam



Prepare your students for the exam by explaining how it will be structured and the type of questions that will be seen on the paper. Further, let them know about the percentage of questions that will come from the textbook and offer past paper questions or sample questions. You might want to explore with the students, the different types of questions for instance, the literal, the inferential and the application question.

Developing reading skills of students who might be failing tests or demonstrate need

Create opportunities for the use of your office hours to help undergraduates students to develop reasonable reading and processing skills. This might be done by inviting students who did poorly on quizzes, tests or assignments to spend some time with you in your office. At this point you will try to determine the level of the development of their reading and processing skills. Provide tips for those who might have problems or refer them to the relevant university authorities.

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which features our monthly *Teaching Tips*,
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