Teaching Messages Collection 2019-2020

44 Teaching Tips from 37 Institutions

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3 Tips for a More Inclusive Syllabus

When creating a syllabus, it is important to make sure that course goals and expectations are clear. However the syllabus can also be a place to get students excited to learn and to signal that your course is an inclusive environment. The following tips provide three simple ways to create a more inclusive syllabus and start your course off more positively from day one.

Start with a welcoming Message

Why is this course interesting? What skills can students hope to gain? How does this course relate to their everyday lives? The answer to these questions can spark students' interest and prepares them to explore the content of your course. Before jumping into the technicalities of grades and policies, create a welcome message or expand your course description to include reasons that students should look forward to engaging with course content, and you as the instructor. For students who may be new to college or nervous about your course, this can help to alleviate some concerns before the course even begins

Bonus tip: consider what aspects of your course or field that *you* found the most interesting, this can be a great place to draw inspiration for communicating its value to students.

Use student-centered language

Instead of writing course goals as if they were simply for the professor or the course catalogue, write them for the students. Statements such as “at the end of this course *you* will be able to” can communicate the importance of the student in the learning process. It also implies an expectation of engagement, and speaks to each person in the class directly as opposed to referring to everyone in the course under the general category of “student”.

Bonus tip: When writing your syllabus, imagine that you are speaking directly to one student and describing what their journey through the course will look like.

Create an inclusive teaching statement

Also known as a diversity and inclusion statement or a respect for diversity statement, an inclusive teaching statement signals explicitly that your course is inclusive of all students. An inclusive teaching statement should express the course climate you strive to create and invite students to be active participants. Many statements also encourage students to reach out to the faculty member if they have any concerns about the class and invite suggestions students may have to make the class better. See a few examples here.

Bonus tip: Students with disabilities pay close attention to how the disability statement is presented. If you are using a standard disability statement, consider expanding this to include language that lets students know that your goal is to support them.

Remember, a syllabus can be more than a contract! Instead, consider how it can be an important tool to communicate the value of inclusion, diversity and student success and add a positive start to your semester.

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Are Your Lesson-level Learning Objectives S.M.A.R.T.?

There are many ways in which in-class instructional time can seem overwhelming, especially to first time teachers. During my first TA experience I remember opening up a word document with the intention of writing up an agenda for the first week's discussion. I kept staring at the document like it was a vast open prairie, or an empty stage in a sold-out theatre. The time and space I had seemed expansive, full of possibilities and opportunities, but also shapeless and unstructured. In that moment, I found myself wondering: how am I supposed to fill every moment of face-to-face instructional time with meaningful, interesting, and valuable content, and how am I supposed to know after the fact if I've succeeded in this goal? In this post, I'll argue that you can go a long way towards answering these questions for yourself by carefully crafting S.M.A.R.T. learning objectives, and by using these objectives to design and implement daily assessments.

First off, a learning objective is a brief, descriptive statement of one thing that a student will take away from a day's lesson. They are typically determined by (and fit into) the broader "learning goals" that you set in your syllabus at the beginning of the semester, but are more specific, concrete, and active. Examples include: "By the end of class, each student will be able to distinguish between examples of substances and accidents, and to give an intuitive definition of each." You might have just one learning objective for a class period, or, if you have more time or if the objectives are less ambitious, you may break it down into two, three, or even more. (For more helpful information on learning objectives, and the difference between a learning objective and a course goal, see this helpful handout. For a taxonomy of different *kinds* of learning objectives, and how to incorporate these into your course prep see this handout on class prep from the Kaneb Center.)

S.M.A.R.T. is an acronym often associated with productive goal-setting in general, and I forget where I even first came across it (see here, here, and here). The acronym stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results-focused, and Time-bound, and I find these criteria immensely helpful in crafting good learning objectives. I won't go through detailed descriptions for each criteria (for such descriptions see the links above), but to get an intuitive sense, consider the following two objectives:

1. By the end of class students will be able to analyze philosophical texts well.
2. By the end of class, students will be able to isolate Singer's "Obligatory Giving" argument and distinguish its major premises, and give one reason why they agree or disagree with each premise.

Objective 2 is clearly better along each of our five dimensions.

S.M.A.R.T. objectives can help structure in-class time in at least two ways. First, they can help you determine what information you need to present and what sorts of activities you need to have your students engage in, and what to prioritize in the distribution of class time for any given meeting. If objective 2 was one of your objectives, for instance, you'd need to make sure to leave time for the students to read and mark-up a paragraph of text (3-5 minutes), share their thoughts with a neighbor (2-4 minutes), and collaborate on reconstructing the argument as a group (5-8 minutes). If you have three or four other objectives for that day, you might think about simplifying the task, or about giving them a little more help along the way.

The second way S.M.A.R.T. objectives can help you structure in-class time is in a more global, semester-level sense. S.M.A.R.T. objectives — if crafted well — naturally give rise to concrete assessment mechanisms (they are, after all, Measurable, Results-focused, and Time-bound). To expand upon our example: you could ask your students to write down the premises and conclusion of Singer's argument on a half-sheet of paper and turn it in. If pressed for time, you could cold call on three students and ask each to offer a premise and a brief reason to agree or disagree with it. If the objective and content are crucial to the course as a whole, and directly related to your overall learning goals, you might hand out a worksheet at the end of class, or have students take an online quiz to ensure that they've attained proficiency. This feedback is an invaluable resource in helping you to determine where to spend valuable future class time.

As college instructors, we get precious little face-to-face instructional time with our students, so it's important that we structure the time we have effectively. S.M.A.R.T. learning objectives can help us to do that, and in a way that isn't overwhelming or overly time consuming. Moreover, I've found that pairing my objectives with daily assessment mechanisms, and even using the process of designing such mechanisms to clarify and evaluate these objectives, allows me to foster a more "communicative" classroom experience; i.e. one in which I'm getting feedback from the students that I can use to create future objective-based learning goals that are responsive to their needs.

Links and citations:

"Goals vs Objectives." *University of Iowa Information Technology Services, Office of Teaching, Learning, and Technology*. N.p., n.d. Web. 9 Dec. 2017. https://teach.its.uiowa.edu/sites/teach.its.uiowa.edu/files/docs/docs/Goals_vs_Objectives_ed.pdf

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Image source: http://habitica.wikia.com/wiki/SMART_Goal_Setting

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Growth Mindset as a Key to Student Motivation

Growth mindset is the belief that an individual can "grow" their intelligence and skills, through sustained effort. Students with a “fixed” mindset believe that they are born with a certain amount of intelligence and that it cannot be increased, despite their efforts. It’s easy to see how a student with a fixed mindset would be more inclined to give up when struggling with a topic in school. By contrast, students with a growth mindset are more inclined to embrace challenges, knowing that sustained effort is an opportunity to develop mastery over a subject.

Numerous studies have shown that students’ beliefs about intelligence can have dramatic consequences for how they experience school and how they respond to setbacks and challenges. The effects are especially pronounced among at-risk students; teaching them about growth mindset yields dramatic improvements in retention, graduation rate, GPA, and other success indicators (Claro et al., 2016; Paunesku et al., 2015; Yeager et al., 2014; Yeager et al., 2016).

One way faculty can help students develop a growth mindset is by empowering them to develop — or to realize they already have — effective strategies for learning. The **Strategy Box,** developed by the National Mentoring Partnership, is a deceptively simple activity that can help students identify strategies they have used previously to learn new skills, and see which ones might be applicable to a new challenge.

Here’s how it works:

1) On a blank sheet of paper, draw a 2 x 2 box, leaving plenty of space to write.

2) In the first three squares, write down a challenging situation that you may have struggled with initially, but ultimately navigated successfully. Then note down the most important strategies, steps, or beliefs you used that were particularly effective.

3) In the fourth square, write down a current challenge. Go back to the first three squares and review the strategies. Add the strategies that you think might be effective in the new situation to the fourth box.

Resources

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Two Strategies that Promote a Growth Mindset

Direct instruction on effective study strategies and concrete feedback about the quality of learning

The consequences of fixed or growth mindsets (Dweck, 2006) have been a powerful influence on thinking about teaching and learning. Dweck found that successful students have a growth mindset and advocates using teaching strategies that promote a growth mindset.

Individuals with a growth mindset believe that expertise emerges from practice. Students with a growth mindset perceive difficult tasks as opportunities to stretch and learn new skills. They try tasks that challenge their current level of skill and accept the risk of making mistakes as an opportunity to learn. Constructive feedback from mistakes helps them improve.

In contrast, students who believe talent is an innate characteristic have a fixed mindset and avoid challenging tasks. Students with a fixed mindset fear that mistakes made on a difficult task expose their lack of talent. They believe that mistakes expose their weaknesses and reveal that they are overreaching or studying the wrong discipline. Students who believe performance depends entirely on talent prefer tasks for which they are confident they will excel. When learning gets difficult or they make mistakes, they tend to give up.

Dweck notes that many teachers and students falsely claim to have a growth mindset (Gross-Loh, 2016). Because a growth mindset is the socially correct attitude to espouse, people believe they ought to subscribe to a growth mindset. However, their behavior suggests that they believe performance is really determined by fixed talent. Instructors with a false growth mindset place too much emphasis on rewarding effort and too little emphasis on providing specific guidance on effective strategies for completing challenging tasks. They may fail to provide diagnostic feedback about errors to guide future efforts. Dweck argues that teachers who subscribe to a "false growth mindset" offer empty praise for effort as a sort of consolation prize, given to students they believe lack the talent required to perform well on a task. They fail to provide the constructive feedback students require to correct errors and improve learning. Empty praise for effort without constructive feedback perpetuates the notion of talent and promotes a fixed mindset.

What actions will nurture a genuine growth mindset?

The hallmark of a genuine belief in a growth mindset is students who seek challenging tasks that stretch their skill. They risk making mistakes to obtain beneficial feedback from difficult learning experiences. Their persistence and effort are rewarded with personal growth and development of expertise. Thus, although effort and persistence are necessary, they are not sufficient to achieve benefits for learning. Students need more.

Complex learning seldom occurs in one trial or through a single insight. Expertise, particularly expertise with cognitive skills (critical thinking, professional writing, problem-solving) develops when practice is repeated over time. Persistence is important and must be encouraged. But persistence is effective only when combined with practice guided by formative feedback from a skilled expert.

Instructors who want to encourage a growth mindset and develop expert skill in their students need to offer more than praise for effort or simply give "lip service" (empty endorsement) to adopting a "growth mindset." They must offer specific, concrete, constructive feedback to guide future efforts and correct errors.

- Teach students about ***specific study strategies*** that are known to be *effective.* Don't simply encourage students to persist, try harder, or study longer. Too many students believe (erroneously) that spending more time studying (exerting more effort) will improve their learning. They waste time re-reading, highlighting, and engaging in mechanical rote repetition study tasks that produce little benefit for long-term retention. Instead, advise students to change the way they study and adopt strategies known to produce good long-term retention. Dunlosky et al. (2013) identified six strategies that have been shown to produce superior long-term retention, based on substantial laboratory evidence. Sumeracki and Weinstein (2017) created a one-page, open access infographic that describes these six strategies. Instructors can distribute this infographic to their

students as a course handout, discuss it in class, and refer to it again when advising a student who is struggling in class. The infographic describes the following strategies: retrieval practice (using self-tests), elaborative interaction with course content (posing and answering "why" and "how" questions), practice distributed over multiple sessions, interleaving practice on different topics, frame abstract content in terms of concrete examples instead of memorizing textbook definitions, and use multiple methods (visual, verbal) to represent and encode information.

- Provide ***specific formative feedback*** about the nature of errors in performance. Describe concrete actions students must take to correct errors and produce more skilled performance. Students need more detailed feedback than simple identification of errors (what they did wrong). They also need to know what they *should* do. Describe new strategies students should use and the actions they should take to correct errors and meet expectations for skilled performance.

Resources

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SWEET Advice for Student Success

We spend a lot of time thinking about strategies for teaching and learning that can improve student learning. Sometimes, we need to step back and think about the state of the learner. How well can a student make use of the learning activities we design?

Bowen (2012, 2017a & b) suggests we not only remind students, but encourage them to attend to non-cognitive factors that can improve (or interfere with) their ability to learn. Bowen identifies five non-cognitive factors and describes these in a neat mnemonic that makes them easy for students and faculty to recall: SWEET.

- **Sleep**. Modern life (and the allure of screens) promotes sleep deprivation. Small daily doses of sleep deprivation accumulate over time and impair short term memory and attention. Two weeks of chronic sleep deprivation can create cognitive impairments similar to impairments observed in people who have been awake for 48 hours. Moreover, sleep is important for consolidating memories and new skills.
- **Water**. Our brains function better when our body is properly hydrated. Students sometimes try to offset sleep deprivation by consuming caffeinated beverages, which also function as diuretics. They might feel more awake, but they will function better if they ensure that they are properly hydrated.
- **Eat**. Just as hydration is important for brain function, so is nutrition. Thinking (and learning) requires energy and effort. Reduced glucose levels in the brain have been associated with more impulsive behavior and impaired decision-making (Masicampo & Baumeister, 2008).
- **Exercise**. Bowen argues that physical activity can improve cognitive function. A growing body of research illustrates how simple activities like taking a walk can help individuals solve problems and develop new, creative ideas.
- **Time**. Learning requires practice, and practice requires spending time on assigned practice tasks. In addition, many effective learning strategies (the testing effect, spaced repetition) entail multiple episodes of practice distributed over time.

Resources

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Helping Students Stay Focused

Are you feeling tired, worn out, and barely getting by? So are many students, and that is the focus of this teaching tip. I work at a community college that has a very diverse student population, and part of my job is to support student learners. When they come to me for help with learning strategies, I usually start the conversation by asking, "How are you doing?" In my mind, I'm curious about how they are managing notetaking, homework, exams, etc. But, inevitably, one of the most common answers I get is, "I'm so tired." This tells me that their physical need for sleep may not be getting met. I get that; faculty and staff are tired too. While we can't control what happens off campus, we can control what happens while they are with us. My goal is to **give students strategies** to deal with being tired, and **provide suggestions to instructors** so that they can help students focus while they are in class.

One of the first things that instructors can do is **acknowledge that we understand that students have busy lives** and often can't control the amount of time they have to sleep or relax. One way to do this is on the first day of class have a brief discussion about life and responsibilities outside of college. Let the students know that you understand that their lives are busy and that they do the best they can to juggle all of life's demands. In addition to acknowledging their struggle, we can also offer them suggestions that will help them stay awake and attentive in class.

Share with students numerous strategies that they can use to help them stay awake and focused during class time. If we lay them out on the table at the very beginning of the term, students will know that we "get it" and are trying to support them. Some strategies that we can suggest include:

1. **Sit in the front** – This may not be a popular choice, but students who sit front and center are less likely to nod off. Making a conscious decision to be there is a good first start.
2. **Take deep breaths** – It is amazing how just one minute of deep breathing can refresh and focus the mind. Taking slow deep breaths in through the nose and exhaling slowly through the mouth is the secret. Everyone can benefit from this simple technique.
3. **Chew gum** – Just the simple act of chewing gum may enhance alertness and sustained attention. The effects may not last long, so save the gum for the middle of class when the fading often begins.
4. **Bring a water bottle** – Since our brains are made up of mostly water, staying hydrated is very important. Drinking water improves concentration and cognition, maintains memory function, and increases blood flow and oxygen to the brain. When the sluggish feeling starts to hit, take a drink.
5. **Lift arms/feet off the table/floor** – Instead of resting arms on the table and feet on the floor, try raising them 3 inches off of the surface. This muscle tension and activity will keep the brain active.
6. **Write/draw/doodle** – Most students attempt to take notes during lectures, but many struggle to keep up and end up giving up completely. One option for them is to write phrases, draw simple pictures, or doodle. This strategy helps students connect to the concepts which leads to better retention.
7. **Stretch in your seat** – Simply sitting up straight, extending arms and legs, and switching positions is often enough to get blood circulating and to the brain.
8. **Use fidget toys** – We recently held a faculty workshop and provided a basket with fidget toys on each table. The participants were very appreciative and used the squishy balls, pipe cleaners, spinners etc. when they started to lose focus. If faculty need that support, we know students do too! Suggest that students bring their own manipulatives and allow them to use them during class.
9. **Stand up** – Allow students to move to the side or back of the room to stand up if they are feeling sleepy. After all, wouldn't it be better to have a room of standing students than one full of sleeping ones?
10. **Get a little sunlight –** If possible, get a little sunlight before going to class. Because sunlight has an alerting effect on the body, a short walk outside may provide a mental boost.

These suggestions may seem simple, but often students aren't aware of the difference a few little strategies can make. By giving them tools that they can use, we are empowering them to take control of their learning. Once they know that we are empathetic to their situation and want to support them, they will be more comfortable using the suggested strategies. If we see them using the methods, we will know that they are making an attempt and can acknowledge their efforts.

If the class in general is starting to seem lethargic, then maybe it's time for a **whole class activity** that will bring them back. Maybe everyone could stand up and stretch or practice deep breathing together. Students may be reluctant at first, but after they see the benefits and realize they are more focused after using some of these tactics, they will appreciate the opportunity.

Finally, by acknowledging that students have legitimate reasons for being tired and giving them strategies to deal with tiredness, we are building rapport with them. The benefits are two-fold. The students will get more out of class because they are alert and attentive, and *instructors* will get more out of *them*!

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Self-Determination Theory, Motivation, and Your Classroom

If you are interested in learning about ways to increase student motivation, you are not alone. There are a variety of theoretical perspectives that aim to explain motivation, but understanding self-determination theory (SDT) has the potential to transform the way you think about teaching, student motivation, and course preparation. SDT has been effectively applied in educational settings with positive outcomes (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). The core tenets of self-determination theory emphasize a relationship between three "basic needs" (autonomy, relatedness, and competence) and intrinsic (e.g. reading for fun) and extrinsic (e.g. reading to earn a grade) motivators (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Implementation of this framework can ensure conditions that foster motivation—setting the tone for the way teaching can be approached, and allowing the instructor to model the way students can approach their own learning. Such skills can easily surpass the classroom; potentially aiding your students throughout their lives. Below are strategies that will help you incorporate this theory into your teaching:

1. **Support Autonomy.** Performance increases when people believe they are *engaging in self-governed behaviors.* Give students choices: provide students with multiple ways to complete an assignment or solve a problem and allow them to select their preferred method of doing so. Establish a deadline system that is standardized for the course, but flexible in the sense that students are able to have some choice regarding when they create and submit their work (e.g. all assignments are accessible and available to submit at the start of the term). When appropriate, poll students to determine topical preferences the next lecture (e.g. students select one from two themes that meet the same learning objectives for the course). Create parameters that allow students to set their own learning goals.

2. **Encourage Relatedness.** Relatedness coincides with feeling *connected* to others and/or a sense of belonging. Make it a goal to learn your students' names. Facilitate collaborative, active learning assignments that are part of the overall grading system, but considered low-risk for failure may build students' confidence and sense of community (e.g. pairing students to solve a problem or develop responses to questions related to lecture). Send a student a personal email when he/she improves on an exam or on a writing assignment and ask them what strategies they used to improve. Ask students to share how they personally relate to the topics you are teaching. Tell students you value their feedback and ask them for feedback. Help them see the value of your discipline by making the material meaningful. Connect with your colleagues (and meet your own need for relatedness) and ask them how they enhance the competence, relatedness, and autonomy needs of their students. It is extremely productive to engage with colleagues in positive dialogue about how to encourage motivation.

3. **Cultivate Competence.** Competence refers to feeling *effective* in the context of one's social environment. Those who we feel competent, are more willing to take on challenges. Thus, educators could provide students with video resources and/or handouts that cover evidence-based study strategies tailored to the course, note-taking and reading strategies, and goal setting skills. Post the resources to your institution's course management system and your students will have access to them for the duration of the semester. Try standardizing the materials you provide to students. When faculty make it difficult for students to access and utilize basic information (i.e. course requirements, required assignments, etc.), students suffer. Encountering environments that are unreasonably challenging to work within due to a subpar system for organization of materials creates barriers to motivation. Further simplification can be established by using color coding of course documents (e.g. the syllabus and calendar of assignments are supplied on a fluorescent paper) and standard texts within documents (e.g. bolded text for assignments due, underlined text for tests, etc.) for ease of identification.

As you begin to think about your courses and your students' needs within this framework, you may notice that it is possible to address multiple needs through a single strategy/activity. How will you apply this theory to your teaching practice?

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Additional resources

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https://selfdeterminationtheory.org/

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Creating a Meaningful First Day of Class

When I was an undergraduate, the first day of class was frequently predictable: syllabus, expectations, teacher's introduction, a brief lesson, and early release. I tended to be more focused on who else was in the class (Do I know and like someone with whom to sit? If I don't know anyone else, who do I want to befriend?) than on the information being imparted.

Now, when I teach, I try to remember my own experiences and create a more engaging first class. I have students complete a syllabus scavenger hunt for homework (to free up in-person time). We play a 20-minute name game where every person's name gets repeated dozens of times. Students complete a gallery walk where they share their beginner perspective on concepts we'll delve into further in the semester.

By asking students to engage on the first day, I recognize that I am asking them to take risks and trust strangers. I'm conscious that students may be thinking, "Why isn't this professor just handing out the syllabus and telling me about this course? Do I have to interact with these classmates and professor I don't know? What if I mess up or look stupid?". I work to defuse anxiety by acknowledging the discomfort, being vulnerable with them (I participate in the name game and stumble my way through, too), and inviting them to be equal participants in their learning.

I have found value from two articles that illustrate interesting approaches to the first day of class:

- Provocation in the Halls of Academe: Bringing Piaget and Vygotsky into the University Classroom
- First-Day Questions for the Learner-Centered Classroom

And, I'm sure that many of you have effective and clever ways to share your enthusiasm, introduce students to new topics, and begin to build community. Please comment on this post with anecdotes of what has worked well for you! If you're considering trying something new, what shift might you make to your first class session for greater student engagement?

References and additional resources

Fink, D. B. (2014, Fall). Provocation in the halls of academe: Bringing Piaget and Vygotsky into the university classroom. *Thought & Action*, 63-74. Retrieved from https://www.nea.org/assets/docs/HE/Fink1.pdf.

Smith. G. A. (2008, September). First-day questions for the learner-center classroom. *The National Teaching & Learning Forum*, 17(5), 1-4. Retrieved from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/ntlf.10101.

Submitted by:
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Building Classroom Community with "Five New Friends"!

As students enter our classroom for the first time, the questions of how they will fit in and what expectations we will have for them is on their mind. Helping to clarify expectations and structure is one of the foundations to build a strong sense of community with positive group dynamics. With a strong sense of community and attention towards positive group dynamics, we can create an environment that promotes learning, helps people achieve goals, and provides the foundation for collaboration.

This activity helps students meet one another and start building these expectations. "Five New Friends" is a light and fun activity that does require each individual to actively engage, allowing students to do so without taking large risks. It communicates that student thoughts and ideas matter, and that sharing these will be an expectation for the class. It encourages mixing within the group, helping students to build collegiality as they connect with people that they don't already know. They walk away from the first day with five new friends. It facilitates the process of knowing others and being known and can set the foundation of a strong community.

This has been one of my favorite activities to open groups and classes. Students consistently remark on how helpful it was to setting the tone for a positive and productive group learning environment. Please let me know if you have any questions or comments: Jennifer Kafsky, kafskyjl@brevard.edu, Brevard College

"Five New Friends"

Outcomes:
Participants will:

- Meet and learn the names of five new friends.
- Actively listen to their new friends.
- Share information about themselves with their new friends.
- Contribute to the process of building community and energy in the classroom.

Activity Directions:

1. Guide participants to stand in a circle. As facilitator pick a place in the circle to stand.
2. Facilitator asks each participant to leave their space in the circle and stand face to face with another participant somewhere across from them (preferably someone that they don't already know). (To facilitate the process of finding a partner, the facilitator could ask participants to hold one hand up in the air as they look for a partner, and put their hand down once they area standing across from their partner.) *I often have a TA, so I'll have the TA participate in the large circle if there is an odd number of students. If there is an odd number and you don't have an additional person to add, you could do one group of three each time.*
3. High five partners introduce their names, give each other a high five, and look to the leader for a question. One partner listens as their new friend answers to a designated question, and then shares their own answer. Once complete, the new friends give each other a high five saying their new friend's name and head back to their place in the big circle. (Designate enough time for the questions to be answered. For the example questions below, it is usually just a minute or two.)
4. While in the big circle, the facilitator asks the group to wave to their new high five friend across the circle and say their names out loud, and to give each other an air high five.
5. Repeat steps 2, 3, 4 through a low five friend, fist five friend, elbow five friend, and knee five friends. Each time the new partners introduce names, answer a new question, say their new friend's name and head back to their pace in the circle.

6. At the end, while in the big circle, the facilitator calls out each of the five friends one at a time. Partners step out into the center of the circle to meet their designated friend, give them a "five" and say each other's name, and step back to the full circle.

Example Questions:
The energy and noise in the room tends to build, so It is helpful to write each of the questions on the board, or on a small poster board that you can point to while announcing your questions. Ideas:

- ***High five*** – What was something that made you truly happy this summer?
- ***Low five*** – What is something that you learned this summer?
- ***Fist Five*** – What drew you to come to join this group/class?
- ***Elbow five*** – What are you most excited about for this semester?
- ***Knee five*** – What special skills, traits, perspectives can you share with our group this semester?

Debrief:

- While back in the circle, ask the students to share what they liked about the activity and follow up with the why.

Learning Extension:

- Challenge students to find other students on campus throughout the day and to ask them one or more of the questions. (I did this for a class assignment for new students, and was surprised at the appreciate expressed for the challenge as permission to step outside of their comfort zone and connect with others.)

Variation:
As written above, the aim of the activity is to help the group get to know one another. You could also use this activity to facilitate discussion to introduce preliminary thoughts on a class topic or to share perspectives on a class reading. Change your questions to fit your student learning goals, and allow for extra time if you would like to promote deeper discussions.

Submitted by:
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Experiential Education Division Chair
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Stop Wasting Your Time and Help Student Overcome Their Resistance to Office Hours

Every week instructors set aside time to sit in their office and wait for students to come discuss questions or concerns. If you are like me, you are shocked when students actually show up and want to talk. Why do students resist going to office hours? Why are they afraid to make use of this resource--our time and knowledge--that universities require us to offer? These two quick changes can help make all the difference.

Many students, often first-generation or minority students in particular, don't understand the purpose of office hours. Some find the term "office hours" misleading and interpret it as time when we are working on our own projects. They don't realize that we set aside that time for them. A solution to this is to consider rebranding "office hours" as student or visiting hours, which can send an inviting signal.

Once students realize that office hours are meant for their benefit, provide them with some examples of how to use the time effectively. Let students know that office hours are an ideal opportunity to ask questions about assignments, clarify course content, discuss their future professional or academic goals, etc. Encouraging students to use office hours will increase their chances of succeeding in the course and prevent you from waiting for students who never show.

Submitted by:
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Co-chair of the Diversity & Inclusion in Research & Teaching Organization (DIRECTO)
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Florida State University

*Teaching tip inspiration from Kate Hill, a doctoral candidate in Biological Sciences at Florida State University, a PIE Associate, and DIRECTO co-chair.

Dual Coding

Originating from Allan Paivio's dual coding theory and supported by more contemporary research on learning science in the classroom (Weinstein, et al., 2018) we learn to provide students with "complementary forms of information to enhance learning" (p. 13). In other words, students learn better when we provide both visual and verbal stimuli that pair well to a particular concept. Visuals can help provide clarity and connect to verbal content.

This can be done through using keywords and icons or visuals in our lectures/presentations, and in the learning activities we have students engage in during class and individual study time.

EXAMPLE VIDEO LECTURE USING DUAL CODING: **https://youtu.be/Ry-h2LYL7-g**

How do I get started using Dual Coding?

CUT

Identify portions of content that may not be vital and remove it from your lectures and learning activities. Consider the level of students in which you are teaching, and identify vital and non-vital content. By removing unnecessary content we can reduce the cognitive load on students' working memory.

CHUNK

Identify natural breaking points or thematic concepts that compliment each other and organize content into smaller chunks. Design lectures and learning activities into smaller pieces to ease the cognitive load on students' working memory. This also provides opportunities to insert pauses or learning activities that can help students retain content for retrieval later.

COORDINATE

When designing visuals and slides to accompany lectures, choose a consistent theme for fonts, colors, and alignment. Choose visual indicators or icons that are simple and pair well with keywords. Consider using easy to read fonts with colors that provide plenty of contrast. Not only does this help your slides look more readable, but it again eases the cognitive load on students' working memory.

CLASSROOM APPLICATION

Consider using these types of visuals in your presentations and learning activities:

- Infographics
- Diagrams
- Graphic Organizers/Mindmaps
- Timelines

OTHER RESOURCES

Oliver Caviglioli: https://www.olicav.com/
Learning Scientists: http://www.learningscientists.org/
Weinstein, Y., Madan, C. R., & Sumeracki, M. A. (2018). Teaching the science of learning. *Cognitive Research: Principles and Implications*, *3*(1), 2.

Submitted by:
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Making Thinking Visible with Tug of War

"Making thinking visible benefits the teacher by providing an important assessment tool. At the same time, it helps to advance students' understanding (Richhart, Church, & Morrison, 2011, p. 28)."

Thinking is a largely invisible process. So how do we make our own thoughts clear to our students? And how do we really know what they are thinking so that we can determine what they understand and what our next instructional move should be? Harvard GSE's Project Zero set out to develop a research-based approach to teaching thinking dispositions that would support learners in creating observable representations of their thoughts in ways in which would not only document their ideas, but facilitate further thinking…and thinking routines were born!

Tug of War is a thinking routine that encourages students to consider at a deep level of complexity the various factors that "tug" at either side of a fairness dilemma that may appear black and white on the surface.

To develop a Tug of War, draw a rope (or use a piece of string!) with the midpoint marked.

1. ***Present an issue*** or situation that involves ethical questions, two clear viewpoints, or multiple stakeholders. Label each end of the rope with opposing sides.
   Ex: censorship, bioethics, universal healthcare, a question inspired by a novel
2. ***Consider the tugs***. These are the two sides of the tug of war. Write each on a different sticky note/piece of paper. You may decide to require a minimum number of reasons per side.
   What are the reasons to support this idea?
   What are the reasons to push back against it?
3. ***Place the tugs***. Encourage discussion and debate as students collaborate.
   Consider the strength of each reason.
   Place each on the rope according to its strength- the strongest reasons at the far ends of the rope.
4. ***Discuss***.
   What new ideas emerged by going through this process?
   What changed in or added to your thinking?
   How might you summarize the complexity of this issue for a classmate?

The Tug of War may be completed collaboratively or individually, but should always prompt small and/or whole group discussion in order to engage in shared inquiry.

Interested in learning additional thinking routines? Check out these resources!

- Richhart, R., Church, M, & Morrison, K. (2011). *Making thinking visible: How to promote engagement, understanding, and independence for all learners.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Richhart, R. (2015). *Creating cultures of thinking: The 8 forces we must master to truly transform our schools.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Tishman, S. & Palmer, P. (2005). Visible thinking. *Leadership Compass. 2*(4), 1-3.
- Visible Thinking Project website
- Visible Thinking Project background, Harvard Graduate School of Education's Project Zero
- Follow Ron Richhart on Twitter @RonRitchhart

Submitted by:
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The Episcopal Academy

Promoting Learners' Autonomy

One of the main roles of educators is to provide students with opportunities to get to know themselves better as learners; that is, to become autonomous learners. Learners' autonomy can be defined as the ability to take control of and assess their own learning process.

So, how to promote learners' autonomy in the classroom?

Try to identify an inventory of learning strategies that you consider helpful for students to succeed in your course.

- Give students this list of learning strategies and encourage them to reflect periodically on which ones they use and would like to develop further.
- Ask them to list other strategies that have worked for them.

From the beginning of the semester, take advantage of every opportunity to assess how students perceive their own learning process. For some or all assignments, provide a space for learners to reflect on how they understand the task in the context of the course:

- How did this task help you advance your own learning objectives and the course objectives?
- What can you do to improve your performance on the task?
- How can this task help you improve your understanding of the material in an effective manner?

Allocate some time during the class to discuss as a group your students' responses in order to promote awareness of different learning needs in the classroom community.

Good luck and enjoy the experience!

Submitted by:
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and

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Learning Is Not a Spectator Sport

Synopsis: Students learn better and retain more when they are directly involved in their learning, not just sitting back and being lectured. Usually, they also prefer active learning. Discover ways to help students learn in a more hands-on environment.

> Student learning is less effective when students sit inertly in classes barely listening to teachers, passively viewing PowerPoint presentations, memorizing pre-packaged assignments, and spitting out answers. Learning is not a spectator sport. Student learning is optimized when students are actively involved in their own learning. Students must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experience, and apply it in their own lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves.
>
> [Adapted from Chickering and Gamson, Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education]

As faculty and instructors look ahead to their next semester courses, they may be considering these kinds of questions: How can I create an environment that optimizes learning? What kinds of activities/assignments encourage "deep learning"?

Research points to the use of writing assignments, frequent feedback, team projects, and the use of small-group activities, even in lecture settings, as ways to foster student involvement through active learning. For example, a professor invites students to turn to a partner to compare and contrast the two theories under consideration. In another activity, student pairs analyze a poem or a math problem and then report their conclusions.

Current research indicates these strategies enhance learning. Students are taking responsibility for their own learning, and they are teaching and learning from each other. Besides enhancing learning, these kinds of activities are usually more enjoyable to students; and students learn concepts better and retain them longer if they have been actively engaged in classroom activities. Adoption of these kinds of strategies is taking hold at BYU, too. For example, based on BYU's participation in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE 2003), BYU moved into the 90th percentile nationally for student engagement in "active and collaborative learning" (in comparison with other "doctoral-extensive" institutions). Current NSSE data shows that other colleges and universities across the country are now following suit.

What are some of these "active and collaborative" engagements students are participating in? Here's a "baker's dozen" list of possibilities. [This list is based on materials by Delivee Wright, Karl A. Smith, and Barbara Millis.]

1. Field trips and library or other campus tours
2. Short quizzes or surveys for immediate feedback on students' comprehension of material (perhaps using Audience Response Technology, like iClickers)
3. In-class writing
4. Demonstrations
5. Self-assessment activities or learning logs
6. Lectures interspersed with short, paired, or small-group discussions
7. Brainstorming
8. Case studies
9. Extended discussions based on media presentations (perhaps delivered before class via Blackboard)
10. Small-group or team discussions
11. Role-playing
12. Guided imagery exercises
13. Small-group or team projects/presentations

Though there are so many possibilities for active learning, much of active-learning depends upon collaboration between students. Great teachers make sure to plan and design how students will collaborate and learn together.

Let the learning begin!

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Recovering from a Mistake

As instructors, making mistakes is the one of the best things we can model for students. But what if the mistake you made was saying something offensive? If this happens, there are things you can do to model being a responsible classroom community member.

Steps:

- Stay calm.
- Own your actions and apologize. (Start with "I'm sorry", and not "I'm sorry, but…")
- If you think a student misunderstood the point you were making, recognize the difference between intent versus impact. Just because you didn't mean to say something offensive doesn't mean it didn't hurt.
- Normalize mistakes. ("This is a really good example of how we are all constantly learning. I have been doing this work for X number of years and I am still always learning and unlearning…")
- Be transparent. If you feel nervous or embarrassed or defensive, try naming it. It is high risk for you, but it can be really valuable learning for a student. ("Wow, I notice that I am really nervous right now.")
- Show gratitude. It takes a lot of courage for a student to give you feedback on the mistake you made. Thank them for holding you accountable.

Submitted by:
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6 Nouns: A Getting to Know You Exercise

In the first week of my online classes I ask the learners to share information about themselves by identifying 6 ***nouns*** that shares a little about themselves. I also share my six!

Here are my 6:

1. Father – I have two “little people” and they are GREAT! They are not “little people,” that is just the name I use for my children

2. Husband – I have been married to my lovely, beautiful and radiant wife for 8021 nights (22 Years). I keep track in nights because I don’t want to take her for granted. It also is more romantic than days…days sound like a prison sentence! J

3. Connector – I enjoy meeting people and connecting them with others that have similar interests or goals

4. Fun – I enjoy laughing and seeing others laugh. I believe in having fun and getting the work done. I juggle (3 balls), make balloon animals and ride a unicycle.

5. Learner – I love to learn. I try to expand my knowledge on a daily basis. I am also a first-generation college graduate.

6. Uomo – “ man” in Italian. I am teaching myself Italian. You will see this in the class so be ready.

I ask the learners to respond to two of their classmates’ posts.

This exercise helps build connections, increase comfort with the LMS and opens communications between and among the professor/facilitator and the learners.

Submitted by:
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How Do You Say Your Name?

Sharing Name Pronunciation with Multimedia Profiles

A new semester means new names, some we struggle to pronounce. It also means new students may not know how to pronounce our names or how to refer to us. Since our own name is important to us and significant to making connections, it is important to value correct expression of names. In the Preferred Name Teaching Tip, I provided strategies for learning and communicating names. Since many learning management systems (LMS) have some enhanced but simple multimedia capabilities, we can start a culture of sharing audio files of name pronunciation. This standard practice may also help students develop good interpersonal exchanges in their lives and careers.

Using an Audio Recording in the LMS Profile

Learning management systems typically have user profiles that we can edit. In general, it is a good practice for students to have something in their profile such as a photo (preferably of themselves, but could be an avatar or other identifier) and brief bio. But if your LMS has a multimedia tool that can add video or audio, have students add a brief audio clip or even provide a video introduction. Then students can reinforce the pronunciation of each other's names and your name. (See the teaching tip above on name preferences.)

If you are working on a device with a microphone or camera, you could record them right in the LMS. Otherwise, use a simple audio recording app and save the file to be uploaded later. If you encounter an issue, your instructional tech can help with the tech aspects.

Create a Culture of Using Names

"I can speak their language, they can't even greet me in mine."

From Binti, by Nnedi Okorafor

Once the information and media are in place, reinforce the importance of knowing and using one another's names. Have students use desk name tags. Use students names when referring to their ideas in class (see Including Student Voices Teaching Tip). If students participate in online discussion forums, have them sign off with the name they go by, and address one another by name when replying to threads.

All of us will struggle with pronunciation for one reason or another, but even the act of struggle is important for valuing those names we have never encountered before.

Resources

An institution-specific version of this teaching tip was originally shared through the CETL Weekly Teaching Tips Series (oakland.edu/teachingtips).

About the Author

This is my profile as it appears in Moodle:

I am a virtual faculty developer at the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, and a doctoral student of educational leadership at OU. My research and scholarly writing focuses on educational technology, online learning, and issues in higher education. I write flash fiction, read science fiction, find my way out of escape rooms, and occasionally trick my two kids into eating healthy food. I am an alumna from OU who has worked in educational publishing and taught in the Department of Writing and Rhetoric.

(kris-tee-nuh mor)

Christina Moore (audio pronunciation)

Pronouns: she/her/hers

Submitted by:
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Professlohr's Teaching Tips: Early Engagement

As we prep to begin a new term, our collective energy comes into focus and we breathe life into our classrooms. Whether a brick-and-mortar building or web-based instruction, there is something truly electric about the buzz of energy a new session generates; a true opportunity to rise from the ashes like the proverbial phoenix and create something anew.

Building community is one of our most essential roles in the early days of the term. The family of learners we knit together in the first week will be a crucial foundation that will support each initiative we undertake in the coming weeks within our classrooms. What can we do to build this collective footprint, ensuring that our students feel genuinely connected and vested from their very first interaction with the learning environment?

Whether on campus or online- genuine, authentic communication matters… *greatly*. While we often have "get to know you" activities or an "intro" discussion forum, we simply cannot ask our students to jump in and share of themselves without also being willing to do this ourselves.

What life circumstances have you lived through, and grown from, the most? I challenge you to share—openly and honestly—with your students. Create raw, candid opportunities for real human engagement right from the start of class. In a world full of surface-level interactions, making way for truth in the human experience is a panacea for creating a group of learners who feel tangibly connected to the learning sphere. In my classes, I give my "Day One Mom Speech". I describe what it was like to be a full-time college student, and parent, while navigating childhood cancer with my young son. I tell my students how tough it was… and what trauma looks like on the other side; what we incur when we harness the instinctual grit we each possess. The boldness of speaking my truth shocks them each and every time—and from the very first day of class, my students truly know who I am and what I am about. This personal sharing not only builds community, it builds *trust*. Trust is an essential, but oft overlooked, tool of instruction. In the classroom, strategic and relevant sharing doesn't make us vulnerable; it makes us empowered educators with the potential to inspire and motivate our team.

What meaningful life experiences do you bring to your classroom this term? I hope you will go forth and share authentically… with purpose… to build lasting connections in the classroom in our relentless drive toward supporting and championing our students.

In solidarity,
Angelica M. Lohr
Manager, CAEX Graduate Writing/Faculty Development
Walden University

Peer Instruction: Prompting Ah-Hah Moments in Any Discipline

"My students were simply approaching the physics as recipes which they were memorizing. It was not a matter of understanding the principles, no, it was a matter of 'Tell me how to do the problems. Give me the recipe.'" –Eric Mazur

Many of us, regardless of our disciplines, recognize Mazur's frustration with students' focus on "recipes." In a funny and bracingly honest video, Eric Mazur discusses how and why he dramatically changed his approach to teaching. Mazur had come to think of himself as a star in Harvard's physics classrooms—his students gave him high evaluations and solved difficult equations on tests. Then one day, he posed a simple, word-based problem that asked students to explain a basic concept. He found the results appalling.

Mazur's response to his students' surprising befuddlement is an approach he calls peer instruction. In explaining his rationale for this kind of teaching, he argues that learning involves two phases—the transfer of knowledge and an opportunity for students to makes sense of that new knowledge, to have "ah-hah moments." Mazur suggests moving some of the basic transfer of knowledge outside the class and allowing peer instruction to create opportunities for ah-hah moments. Here are the steps:

1. Pose a question that requires problem solving or critical thinking.
2. Have students think about the question independently for a minute or two and then use their phones or clickers to respond. (Set the polling system so students don't see the distribution of answers.)
3. Ask students to explain their answer to a neighbor, ideally one who chose a different answer.
4. Repoll. (In Mazur's experience, students often move to correct answers.)
5. Lead a brief discussion of the problem, calling on a few students to explain their thinking, and then reveal the correct answer.

Want to learn more?

"Peer Instruction for Active Learning" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z9orbxoRofI
In a 14-minute video, Mazur explains why he devised peer instruction and how it works.

"Eric Mazur shows Interactive Teaching" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wont2v_LZ1E
This 8-minute video focuses on students' interactions during peer instruction.

"17 of the Best Survey and Poll Creation Tools for Teachers and Educators"
https://www.educatorstechnology.com/2018/02/17-of-best-surveys-and-polls-creation.html
This short article's description of useful polling tools includes three that work quite well for peer instruction: *Socrative, Kahoot!* and *PollEverywhere.*

Submitted by:
Susan Hall
Center for Teaching and Learning
University of the Incarnate Word

Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS)

Visual thinking strategies (VTS) are simple activities designed to build students' observation and communication skills while developing analytical skills that use detail to cultivate thoughtful understanding. Employing VTS in class discussions provides students with opportunities to form conclusions based on evidence rather than assumptions – a foundational principle of critical thinking and a skill employers say they want in our graduates.

VTS begins by giving students 20-30 seconds to look silently at a visual image of some kind. The image is often a work of art, but VTS works with any type of visual: a graph, mathematical equation, medical image, database coding, blueprint, etc. After silent looking, the professor/discussion leader asks the first of three questions: *What's going on in this image?* Phrasing the question in this way (as opposed to the simpler question *What do you see in this image?*) is essential to helping students develop their thinking. The former question elicits analysis-type responses; the later question elicits simple observation-type responses. After each response the professor/discussion leader asks the next important question: *What do you see that makes you say that?* This question requires students to identify and articulate the evidence used in their observations. The third VTS question, *What more can we find?* encourages dialogue based on further careful observation.

I use VTS at the beginning of a class session to help students focus on prior content or prepare them for the content to come. VTS is also a terrific way to refocus students' energy and attention during longer class periods.

Additional information about VTS is available at these sites:

Video demonstration of VTS: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EnyfHTJVzh8

Other VTS resources:

https://vtshome.org/

http://www.castellaniartmuseum.org/assets/Images/Documents-pdfs-applications/All-Lessons-VTS-Resourse.pdf

https://www.science.gov/topicpages/v/visual+thinking+strategies

Submitted by:
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Are Your Students Getting It?

As teachers, I think that might be the most important question we can ask ourselves. You can "cover" as much content as you want, but if your students aren't understanding it, it doesn't matter. In addition to providing you the feedback you need in order to reteach or move forward, formative assessment also provides students the opportunity to learn. Retrieval practice is gaining traction in education and is showing some promising results. One problem - time. Constant quizzing (and therefore feedback) takes time. So how can you get the data you need and help students learn?

Technology! Isn't teaching in the 21st century great? Technology can provide you with opportunities for formative assessment and retrieval practice without adding too much to your already full plate. Here are some of my favorite tech tools for these low stakes, informative assessments:

- Plickers: You probably know about clicker technology. This is a lower tech option. You print cards for your students and download the app, so only the instructor needs technology. Scan the classroom and quickly see what students know or don't know. Pro Tip: Just embed the questions into your PowerPoint so you don't have to switch back and forth to the website.
    - Plickers website: https://plickers.com/
- Quizizz: This is a fun, student-paced review game of multiple choice questions. Students are awarded with a meme based on if they are correct or incorrect. Students are able to review their answers after the quiz. Students need devices but no projector is needed. Pro Tip: You can add your own memes for game. This could be a great get to know you for students at the beginning of the semester - have them send you a meme they create!
    - Quizizz website: https://quizizz.com/
- Quizlet Live: Turn flashcards into a highly collaborative review game! Once you make (or find) a flashcard set on Quizlet, you can use the Live feature which groups students and has them compete together to match the cards to their definitions. Students need devices but no projector is needed. Pro Tip: Assign students chapters to make the flashcard set for you.
    - Quizlet website: https://quizlet.com/

Additional Resources:

Retrieval practice: https://www.retrievalpractice.org/
Additional tech tools: http://bit.ly/formativeHU
Plickers how to: https://www.emergingedtech.com/2014/12/getting-started-using-free-plickers-for-assessment/
Quizizz how to: https://quizizz.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/115000338045-Getting-Started-with-Quizizz
Quizlet Live how to: https://quizlet.com/help/2444125/how-to-use-quizlet-live

Submitted by:
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Puzzle of the Week

Have you noticed that most students enter your class staring at their phones or other devices? Are students reluctant to switch their attention at the start of the class? If so, consider implementing the "Puzzle of the Week."

The puzzle of the week is a fun and slightly challenging problem they can tackle during the passing period between classes. The puzzles have nothing to do with the course content (although, in theory, they could); rather the goal is to draw their attention away from their individual screens. By focusing on the classroom screen, and trying to solve the puzzle, their attention is captured, which also makes it easier to transition into the lecture. As an added bonus, the puzzles also create friendly competition and interaction between the students. The puzzles are projected on a PowerPoint slide, and the correct answer to the puzzle is displayed, once someone has solved it or they run out of guesses.

To keep it interesting, try using a variety of puzzles. These are easily found through Pinterest and Google searches. For example:

- If you started spelling out numbers (one, two, three, and so on), how far would you have to go until you found the letter A? [1]
- Remove 6 matches to make 10.[2]
- Can you divide a cake into 8 pieces with 3 cuts? [3]
- When you need me, you throw me away. But when you're done with me, you bring me back. [4]
- Which of these penny drawings is correct? [5]
- Crack the code – a numeric lock has a 3 digit key (with several hints) [6]

Some puzzles will end up being too easy (e.g., #2); some will be too hard (e.g., #4). It will likely be a trial and error process to determine the right amount of challenge for your students. This strategy is also scalable on a number of levels. You can leverage a puzzle for just the first day of class, before every class, once a week, or any other frequency. You can keep it simple, letting students shout out answers as they solve the puzzles, or you can build in competition with prizes. You can have the students work alone, or they can work in teams.

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[3] http://www.smartestbrain.com/brain-teasers-adults-party-puzzles/cake/#
[4] http://propensityforcuriosity.com/what-am-i-riddles/#answers
[5] http://www.indiana.edu/~p1013447/dictionary/penny.htm
[6] https://9gag.com/gag/amYrE4v?ref=ios.s.others

Submitted by:
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Director of Student Academic Success
Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology

End of class reflection

At the end of a class period, or perhaps at the end of a lesson, have each student reflect out loud on what stood out to them in class and/or what they will continue to think about as they leave class. Depending on the size of the class and the amount of time you have, this can be restricted to a sentence or two, or challenge them to summarize their thoughts into five words only or maybe even one word.

This is a great way for you to assess what stood out most to students, and any content you may want to review next time you meet. This is also a way for students to mentally summarize what they learned in class, and to leave with something to continue to think about. This also gets the students used to speaking aloud in class and can help foster comfort in class discussions.

Submitted by:
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10 Best practices for recording instructional videos:

- Keep videos less than 20 minutes. There is some research to suggest that shorter videos improve long term retention. Shorter videos will also be easier for you to maintain.
- Pair videos with a graded learning activity to ensure the content is processed and successful. Alternatively, consider embedding quiz questions in the video to encourage students to pause and process content more deeply.
- If you are using slides, record so that your face is also included in the video. This will help with engagement. A lot of communication is non-verbal and your facial expressions will help. This will also help students "bond" with you and feel accountable.
- Include a list of learning objectives as an introductory screen/slide.
- Consider using consistent color-coding for slides and annotations.
- If you are using slides, use a template that includes a title box to make it easier for students to find what they need when reviewing.
- Use illustrations with slides to increase retention.
- Enable captions or transcriptions for accessibility and to help students with spelling and vocabulary.
- Look at the camera and smile from time to time to project more warmth and enthusiasm
- Include a wrap-up at the end to help students revisit the major ideas, concepts and themes you've been presenting.

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Submitted by:
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Poll Everywhere

Conducting an informal poll is a great way to get real-time formative assessment feedback. With Poll Everywhere, faculty members can ask a variety of polling questions that students can answer with their smartphones, tables, or personal computers. As students respond to the question, the results tabulate immediately and can be viewable to the entire class. Along with polls, Poll Everywhere also provides features that include but are not limited to allowing students to answer open-ended questions, compete in competitions, and create word-clouds. The program has a free option for those working in higher education and it allows for a seamless integration of questions into a PowerPoint or Google Slides presentation. Click here to see a short testimonial of how a faculty member has integrated Poll Everywhere into her own classroom.

Submitted by:
Scott D'Amico
Faculty Development Specialist
Alamo Colleges District

Using Images from the Web—Without Breaking the Law

"Pictures still speak the most universally understood language." -- Walt Disney

By now, most of us are convinced that images can make our presentations clearer and more engaging. While we sometimes have banks of images from a textbook publisher, often we are left to our own devices. Before we start copying and pasting from *Google*, it's smart to remind ourselves that much of the creative and intellectual work produced since 1924 is protected by copyright. And just because something is posted online doesn't mean it's free for our use. A good way out of this dilemma is to search for items covered under a Creative Commons license.

Creative Commons describes itself as an organization that provides creators of artistic and intellectual work "a simple and standardized way to give the public permission to share and use [their] creative work." Those who choose to share work this way determine any limitations they place on its use by choosing one of the six CC licenses. The most generous license simply requires attribution of the creator while other licenses address issues such as commercial use or remixing.

The Creative Commons website-- https://creativecommons.org/about/ --is a good place to start searching for images to use in teaching. The "Search for CC Images" tab takes users to a collection of 300 million images covered under CC licenses. This newly designed search function also provides easily copied attributions with all the required information, including the type of license. The Creative Commons site also has links to fifteen affiliated platforms—including *flickr* for images and *YouTube* and *vimeo* for video. When using one of the affiliated platforms, it's necessary to limit the search specifically to CC items.

Want to learn more?

What Is Creative Commons? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALrcZFOx6dc&t=4s
Farhad Moshiri provides an in-depth look at Creative Commons and how to use material licensed there.

11 Free Image Resources for Your Next Presentation. https://www.powtoon.com/blog/11-free-image-resources-presentation/
These sources include Powtoon animations, as well as collections of high-resolution images, vintage photos without known copyright restrictions, and a personal favorite, *Pixabay*.

Finding Open Access Images: Government Sites. https://guides.library.upenn.edu/c.php?g=475958&p=3255326
Agencies of the federal government have created immense collections of photographs, requiring only that users attribute the source. This very useful tool from the U. of Pennsylvania makes finding images on a specific topic much easier.

Submitted by:
Farhad Moshiri
Audiovisual Librarian, Mabee Library
University of the Incarnate Word

Incorporate Inclusive Images in you Course Materials

In *Bandwidth Recovery,* Cia Verschelden (2017) describes the tremendous amount of cognitive resources LGBTQ students on our campuses must expend in order to simply navigate their day-to-day experience of vulnerability and exclusion. Every ounce of mental energy spent resisting systems that demoralize or erase a student's sense of self is energy that cannot be spent on learning.

One way we can work to reduce identity threat within our classrooms is to intentionally incorporate gender inclusive images in our course materials such as Power Point slides, syllabi, and handouts.

There are two great free resources you can use to locate images that represent LGBTQ identities.

Broadly's Gender Spectrum Collection includes stock photos of trans and non-binary models. All photos are free to use. I also recommend Lindsay Schrupp's piece in *Vice* which describes how the collection got started.

You can also sign up for Representation Matter's Weekly Stock Image email. Every week the company sends out a few free images to the list. Photos are also available for purchase (web quality photos are fine for teaching and the pricing is reasonable).

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Submitted by:
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Office 365 Apps for Teaching: Newest is Teams

Office 365 Overview and Integration

All the Office 365 apps can be integrated with your course management system (CMS). More information for Moodle may be found at https://docs.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoftteams/platform/moodleinstructions Note you will need to involve your IT team. Of course, you can use Office 365 apps without integration as well. Please note there are many more apps than the ones listed, but these are some of the most useful ones for education.

One Drive—Cloud storage space like Google Docs

Ideas for use in education—

- Upload files to One Drive and then share as links in your CMS.
- Another idea is to post the files, share and collaborate in real-time using One Drive.
- This keeps all files in one space, easily organized, and saves space on your CMS.
- Files are then accessible from any computer or device using mobile apps or a website.

Stream—It is YouTube for your campus

Ideas for use in education--

- Upload and store videos you create in one space and organize them
- Can be shared via link or embed code on any website or in your CMS.
- Saves space on your CMS.
- Files are then accessible from any computer or device using mobile apps or a website.

Forms—Get feedback from students early in the course

Ideas for use in education--

- Allows you to create a survey and get student feedback
- Feedback can be exported to Excel
- Form can be embedded in your course or website

Teams—Hub combining all the apps

Ideas for use in education--

- Allows for synchronous meetings
- Allows one to share files and collaborate
- Allows one to record meetings and have them automatically upload to Stream
- Can add website and apps via tabs for whiteboards and other teaching apps such as FlipGrid
- Students can submit assignments
- Students can review for tests and complete groupwork virtually
- Can be combined with One Note and One Note Classroom

Submitted by:
Dr. Janice Poston, Instructional Developer
Faculty Development Center
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Plickers

"*Knowing the answers will help you in school, but knowing how to question will help you in life.*" Warren Berger, American Journalist

I had been searching for an affordable, functional way to ask questions of my classes as a group for years. I tried the clickers- too expensive and one person can bring multiple clickers. I tried the color-coded cards- good for a general idea about student understanding, but no concrete data and no way to track attendance. I tried the Socrative app (our campus had recently been given iPads and this seemed like a great way to put them to work)- too many people logging in at once made the coverage spotty and missed a lot of responses, as well as getting students to put the phones away after the activity could be a struggle. Then I found the answer: Plickers!

At the beginning of the semester, you upload your roster on the Plickers website and each student (up to 64 total) is assigned a QR code that they can orient one of four ways to answer multiple choice questions. I then scan the room with the app on my iPad, and each student's name shows up above them in green if their answer is correct or red if it is not. The app even shows you a bar graph distribution of the student responses, so you know if people are split between two answers or everyone is mixed up. I can get a quick idea of how well students are understanding the material being covered AND take attendance! The only person who needs to have a device out is me!

Possible uses of this awesome app include:

1. Attendance- no multiple responses from one person with this app
2. Check understanding of new material- if most people are lost, take time to ask/answer questions before moving on
3. Think-Pair-Share Exercises- students find someone with a different answer and explain why they believe their answer is the correct one
4. Reading Quizzes- get an idea of how prepared students are to discuss or use the material from the reading assignment

A few logistical tips I have learned over the years:

- I make a point to print out the cards at the beginning of the semester on heavy card stock.
- Post a pdf of the Plicker cards online, and then if a student loses their card, it is their responsibility to print a new. Until they print a new one, I have students email me to let me know they were in class, but just did not have their Plicker that day.
- I can scan a relatively large room of around 50 students in a about minute. There are different sized cards, so if you are in a larger lecture hall, be sure to use the larger print out options.
- Test the system on the first day with a no-points assigned question to make sure everything is working properly.

Submitted by:
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Moravian College

Creating Student Groups for Exercises

(Quickly and Without Prior Preparation)

In my work at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College I teach a student body is made up of adults. The students are primarily mid-career military officers. The curriculum varies from the mundane to professional studies surrounding the life or death decisions they will called to make in a military career.

When using active learning techniques it is often necessary to divide the officers into small groups to facilitate exercises. This can be a time to deviate from the serious nature of the educational content and allow some lighthearted fun to be a part of their adult education.

Recently I read an article regarding how to separate students into small groups in a classroom. Most of the techniques required a lot of prep work and the use of physical props. I prefer a quicker, more organic way to create groups of students with no required prep work. Adults rapidly get tired of an instructor ordering them to, "Count off one to four and form four groups." Our students usually have an assigned seat so counting off sequentially also results in the same students working together over and over. Below is a good list of ways I have used formed groups that doesn't require you to prepare in advance.

Breaking the room of students into 2 groups:

1. Ask your students to remember the last time they changed a light bulb and to recall the wattage of the bulb they replaced. Next ask by a show of hands how many replaced a bulb of 20 Watts or less. Keeping their hands up ask how many replaced a bulb of 40 Watts or less, then 60 Watts or less, etc. When half of the hands are in the air divide the students in the "Low Watts" or "Dim Bulb" group and the "High Power" or "Bright Bulb" group.
2. Ask students to think about the fastest speed they have ever driven their current car. Next ask by a show of hands how many drove at least 50 mph. Keeping their hands up ask how many drove at least 50 mph, then 60 mph, etc. When half of the hands are in the air divide the students in the "Low Speed" group and the "High Speed" group. A variant is to have students write down the type of car they drive. Select one student as a judge and have her read the submissions and separate the student's into a "Fast Car" group and a "Slow Car" group.
3. Ask students to think about the last run they did for physical fitness and how many miles they ran. Next ask by a show of hands how many ran at least 1 mile. Keeping their hands up ask how many ran at least 2 miles, then 3 miles, etc. When half of the hands are in the air divide the students in the "Low Mileage" group and the "High Mileage" group.
4. A variant to the mileage run for physical fitness is to ask them to raise their hands based on how many miles they came/drove to arrive at the class today. Separate the students into a "Close" group and a "Distant" group.
5. Ask your students to pair up. Tell them to play "Rocks, Paper, Scissors." Put them into two groups of "Winners" and "Losers" from the game.
6. Ask students about their favorite pet. If it is a dog they are in the "Dog" group, if it is a cat they are in the "Cat" group, if it is neither a dog or a cat then the instructor chooses their group.
7. Pick a subject you plan to discuss in class and ask students to line up based on their belief one way or another regarding the issue. For example use the issue of gun control. Tell your students to line up near one end of the room if they believe the U.S. should have very restrictive gun control laws and remove most guns from the public. Line up on the other end you if don't believe there needs to be restrictive gun control laws. Once people have lined up separate them into the "Believers" and "Unbelievers" groups.

Breaking the room of students into 3 groups:

1. Ask your students to divide up based on their preference for drinking coffee, or tea, or something else (anything other than tea or coffee). Sort the resulting bunches into three groups.
2. Ask students what they ate for breakfast (or if they skipped breakfast then what they wish they had eaten). Ask three of them to what they ate ask the others to fall in on the three different breakfasts by preference.
3. Ask your students to indicate a preference for two entertainment shows or neither. For example do you prefer Star Wars, or Star Trek, or neither. Place them into three groups based on preference.
4. Ask students to line up along a wall based on the U. S. State in which they were born. Split into East, Heartland, and West groups.

Breaking the room of students into groups of other sizes:

1. Ask your students to line up along a wall based on their preference for two opposing things. For example line up based on whether you prefer summer days or winter days, do you prefer making meals or eating meals, do you drink tea or coffee? Once in a line up on the wall, start at one end of the line and break the group into as many small groups as you need.
2. Have your students line up along a wall based on birthdate, or shoe size. Start at one end of the line and break the group into as many random small groups as you need.
3. Use the old schoolyard method for picking teams. If you need 5 groups then pick 5 team leaders and tell them to pick teammates from the remaining students.

Submitted by:
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Small Group Formation Strategies Can Increase Inclusivity

Small groups can be used for myriad purposes, including making a large class seem smaller and fostering student discussions. You can also facilitate the likelihood of students' working with peers they do not know already by using a strategy for random group formation.

With a bit of preparation beforehand, you can form pairs and groups in a few minutes in class. You can promote diversity and inclusion by intentionally partnering students with a variety of their peers, thereby creating situations in which students interact with others that they might not speak to on their own.

Supplies Needed1 Notecard per student (get four colors of cards), computer, printer

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Process

You will use words and colors to sort students into various random groupings.

1. Brainstorm two lists:

A) familiar two-word expressions B) groups of four words that relate to each other

2) Using a large font size (Ex: 36 point), type the two lists separately, in columns. For example:

Buzz	Feed	Donatello	Leonardo	Michelangelo	Raphael
Hip	Hop	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior
Spring	Break	Left Atrium	Left Ventricle	Right Atrium	Right Ventricle

3) Create enough two-word expressions for half the number of students in the class. For example, if there are 36 students in the class, you will need 18 two-word expressions. Feel free to use expressions that suit your personality or that relate to the course content. Try to ensure that there is only one possible match for each half.

4) You will need enough four-word expressions for ¼ of the number of students. So, if there are 36 students, you will need a list of nine expressions.

5) Count out cards equal to the number of students. So, again, if there are 36 students, you need 36 cards.

6) Use even numbers of card colors, for example, nine blue, nine pink, nine green, and nine yellow.

7) Print both lists of expressions.

8) Cut out each individual part of the two-word expressions, and glue or tape each part to a different card. For example, Buzz would go on one card, and Feed would go on a different card.

9) Keep going until all the two-word expressions are attached to cards.

10) Flip the cards over and repeat the process with the expressions with four words.

11) Cut out each individual part of the four-word expressions, and glue or tape each part to a different card. For example, Right Atrium, Right Ventricle, Left Atrium, and Left Ventricle would each go onto separate cards.

12) For durability, you can put clear packing tape on both sides of the cards or laminate them.

13) Now, you have multiple ways to form small groups quickly:

Two-word pairs	Ex: Buzz and Feed work as partners.
Four-word groups	Ex: Donatello, Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Raphael work together.
Different fours	Ex: People with the same color cards work together.
By class halves	Ex: All the people with the first word of a two-word pair work together, and all the people with the second half of the pair work together. Ex: People holding Buzz, Hip, and Spring would be on one team, and people holding Feed, Hop, and Break would be on the other.
Different halves	Ex: Combine two color groups, such as, blue and pink form one team.

Notes

- Using expressions that students will need to talk to each other about can increase their level of interaction with each other, and their interest in the lesson. Another strategy is to use foundational knowledge that students will use in the class, to give them practice at recalling the information.
- It can be helpful to make four stacks of colors and work across as you attach the words. That way, Hip Hop would work as a pair, but they would be in different color groups. This can increase the number of student interactions.
- Depending on campus climate and course content, it may be beneficial not to use white cards, so that no group ever gets referred to as “the white group”.
- These cards can be used over and over as needed, in any class.
- You can make as many cards as you need. Thirty-six was only used as an example.
- There is debate about whether it is better for instructors to create groups or allow students to self-select. There is also a difference of opinion as to whether groups should remain the same throughout the course or change. If you decide to designate the groups at least part of the time, this strategy can get students moving, and interacting with each other in a positive, on-task way. How often you use/change groups is up to you. This strategy may be used once or multiple times.
- Students may enjoy making suggestions for new two- and four-word lists.
- For the best small group outcomes, there is some research to support the advisability of having no more than four persons in a group. However, there may be times when you want large teams. This is a good time to use the class halves strategies.
- Student workers may enjoy making these cards for you to use in your classes.
- If you can come up with enough words, you may want to make more cards than you need. That way you can substitute in some new ones once the students see how the strategy works. Also, you will have enough cards in case you should get a larger class next time.
- It can be beneficial to have different groups for different teaching and learning activities. For example, in a course with lots of writing, students might have a peer editor, a writing group, and a discussion group.

Submitted by:
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Assessments to Build a Better Learning Community

Do you need your students to engage with one another quickly in order to form effective groups for discussion or small class activities? Or perhaps your class requires a long-term group project? Maybe you just want your students to learn more about what makes them tick or even how to be more emotionally intelligent, and those ideas fit in with your course content.

By using two free online assessments that students can complete and bring to class— the Jung Typology and the DISC— and the Compass Points Activity, you can build a better learning community in your classroom that can only serve to benefit your classroom environment and probably make your class one students look forward to more than others.

The Jung Typology Test

http://www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/jtypes2.asp

The Jung typology is very similar to the MBTI, and I always start with this because students are usually familiar with the idea of extroverts and introverts. For each round, I have the students divide into two groups (E/I to start) and give each group a sheet of sticky note flipchart for them to record their ideas about what it means to be them. What can others expect if they have an introvert or extrovert in their group? Next, they hang their ideas on the wall, and we then discuss what that means as a class, with each group presenting its ideas. Last, I have students line up on a spectrum of most extroverted to most introverted, and then we talk about what that means for us as a class and in groups. We do this for each of the measures: N/S, T/F, P/J. This discussion typically takes an hour, more if the students really have a lot to say about how the different varieties might best work together in groups. Discussing this helps them not only to understand themselves better, but also to get to know their classmates. To close the discussion, I ask them to reflect in writing about what they have learned about themselves and about others in class based on this assessment.

The DISC

https://www.tonyrobbins.com/disc/

The DISC assessment is one that few students have encountered before. During class, we divide into the 4 groups and discuss the results and what it means for them to work with others who are like them as well as the other types who are not. We consider what it would mean if, for a group project, all of the Ds were together, all of the Is, etc. Again students come to a realization of why having different types of people can lead to a successful group—or lead to conflict if we don't quite understand what type of people surround us. Like the Jung, I ask for a written reflection for them to process their new insights into themselves and their classmates.

Compass Points Activity

https://ww2.kqed.org/mindshift/2015/06/22/a-simple-exercise-to-strengthen-emotional-intelligence-in-teams/

The Compass Points Activity is one that can help students to develop empathy and emotional intelligence. One of my favorite things about this tool is that you can do a short 20 minute discussion or extend it using directions they provide. Like the debrief on the Jung typology and DISC, this provides a chance for students to get up and move a bit to choose a group that aligns with their primary instincts when given a task to complete, so in a night class or extended period class, this can be a good way to reenergize the room with more than just conversation. We also end this activity with a written reflection.

If you have group projects in your courses, having students complete and reflect on the Jung typology, the DISC, and the Compass Points Activity to get to know themselves and each other a bit and then use results to group them can benefit those group projects. The first "group" assignment I have is for them to share with each other what their results are and use those to assign roles and understand who the "big picture" people are vs. the detail-oriented members.

Of course, these can be used in online classes, too. Discussion boards with pre-posted threads can be created for the conversations to happen, and journals can be used for the debriefs. Another way to do this would be to have the students do the Jung and DISC one week as well as identify which "compass point" they most identify with, and the next week you place students in groups according to their results so that they can have the "like me" discussions without others poking their noses in or maybe trying to join the conversation without having actually completed the assessments.

Students report that learning more about themselves helps them to better work with others just as learning about how others are different from them helps to bring an appreciation of how varying personalities can help to build on strengths and improve weaknesses of each group member. When I have used these with both undergraduate and graduate students, I find that groups seem to settle faster and work better together compared to when I did not. I hope that you have good results, too!

Submitted by:
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Asset Mapping for Effective and Equitable Group Projects

If you feel strongly that your students need to learn how to work in groups, but have been discouraged by past experiences assigning group projects (e.g., "divide and conquer strategies", contentious group dynamics), I'd like to point you to the good work being done by Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI). WPI does extensive group work as part of their Great Problems Seminar. In addition to guiding students on what makes for a good final product, they spend a great deal of time teaching students how to engage in and manage the group process. They have created a very thorough guide detailing their process, which includes:

- Helping students identify their assets, identities, communication, and conflict styles
- Having students create a team asset map (focusing on asset students bring to the group *as well as* those they would like to develop as part of the group project)
- Processing team dynamics, conflict, and bias

I recently participated in a workshop given by Rick Vaz from WPI where he demonstrated the asset mapping aspect of this process. Students identify previous experiences that will help contribute to the group project, but also those that they would like to develop as part of the project. Team members use these maps to determine who will take on what parts of the project based each other's assets and areas of development. This helps to reduce bias and stereotyping on the teams and also results in more equitable and effective teamwork (Pfeifer & Stoddard, 2019).

If you believe in the power of long-term group work, but have struggled with how to manage the group process and dynamics aspects (or have avoided group projects altogether for this reason!), take some time to check out this wonderful resource developed by Pfeifer & Stoddard (2019): Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Tools for Teamwork: Asset Mapping and Team Processing Handbook.

References

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Submitted by:
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Mistakes are Opportunities to Learn: Mastery Learning

Rationale

Almost forty years ago when I began teaching special education students, we used a model called FIE (Feuerstein's Instructional Enrichment) (1980; 2004) which focused on helping students see their learning mistakes and guiding them through prompts to relearn or correct the concepts and skills. Years later while observing a student teacher in a classroom, I saw the following poster repeated all along the wall of the classroom: "Mistakes are opportunities to learn".

Our goal as professors is to ensure that our students master the content and skills (or learning outcomes). Why is it then that we focus more on the grade and not the mastery of the content? Mastery learning ensures that a student has "mastered" a certain level of success prior to moving on to a next level. Feedback, scaffolding and opportunities to relearn and revise are central to the process (Guskey, 2009).

If a student gets a low grade in an assignment or a test but then demonstrates that they have analyzed where went wrong, how to correct their mistake, relearn the material, revise their work, and master the concepts prior to the end of the semester, shouldn't we acknowledge that with an improved grade? Intensive writing courses frequently use this approach as part of the writing process by having students submit drafts, receive feedback and then revise their work. Graduate students always get feedback on each chapter and revise their work before their dissertation is approved. How can we apply this into other disciplines including STEM courses? Not only will students feel successful because they will earn a higher grade, but we as instructors can feel successful, knowing that by the time the student has completed the course, they have mastered the concepts and skills necessary to move on to the next level.

Suggested Practice

1. **Create a culture** and learning environment that values and rewards students for mastery learning and learning from their mistakes. Post signs such as "Mistakes are opportunities to learn".
2. **Share personal experiences** that highlight times that you as an instructor were not initially successful but that you persisted, analyzed what you did wrong and learned from your mistakes. Have students share similar experiences.
3. Provide assignments and assessments that **allow for feedback, analysis of mistakes and revision**.
4. If you give tests, take them up in class and **review common patterns of mistakes** that students tend to make. Discuss what the mistake was and **how this can be corrected**.
5. In smaller classes, work individually with students to **diagnose how and why mistakes were made** and **guide students on how to correct** the problems.
6. Give students an **opportunity to retake a different test or assignment** that covers the same concepts or skills.

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Supporting Student Learning with Transparent Assignments

Have you ever graded an assignment and found that some students completely missed the mark? While it may be tempting to blame the students, it is also possible that you haven't provided them with enough information to complete the assignment successfully. This may be especially true for first generation students and other underrepresented students who are less likely to have the institutional knowledge of how college works, including hidden assumptions and expectations of faculty. This can be especially problematic when course assignments are designed with assumptions about prior knowledge or hidden expectations built into them.

A study by Winkelmes et al. (2016) found that making assignments more ***transparent*** helped students navigate assignments more successfully and had the additional effect of increasing students' sense of belonging and improving retention rates. This was true for all students, but there was a disproportionate positive effect on underrepresented minorities and first generation college students. Transparent assignments simply make the **purpose**, **task**, and **criteria** for an assignment explicit.

To create more transparent assignments, consider the following questions, which are adapted from resources developed by Mary-Ann Winkelmes:

1. **PURPOSE: Communicate to students what knowledge or skills they will gain from completing the assignment and how they will be valuable to students.**
    a. Knowledge
        i. What knowledge will students gain from completing the assignment?
        ii. How does that knowledge relate to other topics in your course or other courses?
        iii. How will the knowledge be relevant for students in their lives beyond your course or beyond college?
    b. Skills
        i. What skills will students practice while doing the assignment?
        ii. How do those skills relate to other contexts or examples where these skills were important, within your course or beyond?
        iii. How will these skills be valuable to students in their lives beyond your course or beyond college?

2. **TASK: Communicate the steps that students should take to complete the assignment.**
    a. Are all of the steps needed to complete the assignment laid out clearly? If any steps are implied, consider making them more explicit.
    b. What are the common pitfalls that students fall into on this assignment, and how can you help them avoid those?
    c. Are there opportunities for students to get feedback on parts of the assignment before the larger assignment is due?

3. **CRITERIA: Share the rubrics or checklists that you will use to evaluate student work with students before the assignment is due.**
    a. Would a rubric or a checklist be most appropriate for evaluating your assignment?
    b. If you use a rubric on this assignment, is it written at a level that would be clear to a student?
    c. Are there opportunities for students to evaluate their own work or other student work using the rubric or checklist that you have provided?

Additional resources and examples of transparent assignments can be found at https://tilthighered.com/tiltexamplesandresources.

Reference

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How to Design Great Assignments that Assess Key Learning Outcomes

Three qualities of a great assignment

Great assignments help students practice and learn new skills. These assignments also help instructors assess learning (Suskie, 2018). A well-designed assignment presents students with activities and tasks that enable students to practice important learning goals. Great assignments communicate how the assignment requirements promote these goals (and their value) to students. Great assignments also give students unambiguous instructions about what they should do and how the work will be evaluated (Winkelmes, 2013). What are the characteristics of a great assignment?

- ***Assignment has a clear purpose***
  Identify the learning outcomes targeted by the assignment.
  What knowledge will students gain by completing the assignment?
  What skills or competencies will students practice by completing the assignment?
  Describe why the knowledge, skills, or competencies are important.
- ***Assignment instructions describe task components***
  Set expectations for the characteristics of the work students will submit.
  What must students do to complete the assignment?
  How should students complete the tasks for the assignment?
- ***Rubric establishes expectations for high-quality work***
  Describe the grading criteria and include detailed information about work at different levels of quality.
  Provide examples of student work at different levels of quality to create concrete illustrations of the evaluation criteria.
  Provide the rubric with the assignment instructions so students can self-evaluate their work before they submit it.

Steps to creating a great assignment

1. Identify the ***learning goals***. Describe why these goals are important for the course, the academic program, and the long-term goals of students in the course.
2. ***Design activities and requirements for the assignment*** that require students to practice targeted skills or use new content knowledge. Avoid loading in ancillary requirements unrelated to the targeted learning outcomes.
3. ***Create a rubric or assignment checklist*** for the assignment and give this to students when you make the assignment. Identify key components that contribute to the grade (rubric elements). Describe characteristics of high quality work and common errors or problems found in lower quality work. Students can use the rubric to self-evaluate their work or you can create a peer review assignment, in which students provide one another feedback.
4. ***Write guidelines for the assignment*** that explain what students are expected to do and give them instructions that get them working in the right way. Give the assignment a compelling, specific title that captures what students should do. The title *Analysis of recent research on a memory problem* orients student to the intention for the assignment more clearly than does the title *literature review paper.* The assignment guidelines should include the following information:
   - ***Purpose of the assignment***, including what you expect students to learn by completing the assignment and why these skills are important.
   - ***Components required for the assignment***, asking only for components that are evaluated in the grading rubric and relevant to the intended learning outcomes.
   - ***Instructions for completing the assignment.*** Where should students focus their time and energy when completing the assignment? How does the grade on the assignment contribute to the final grade in the class? What scholarly readings, disciplinary techniques, technology, or other resources should students use for the assignment? Can students collaborate on the assignment? What collaborations are permissible and which are forbidden?

- ***Expectations for the completed product*** (editorial style, formatting, type of media to be used).
- ***Deadlines*** or due dates for milestone components and for the final submission.
- ***Guidelines about seeking help with the assignment.*** Describe the help will you provide while students work on the assignment. Are other sources of help available to students? Are some potential sources of help forbidden (e.g., editors, translating services, other students, etc.)? Establish the boundaries for ethical academic behavior early and prevent problems later on.
- ***Evaluation criteria.*** How will you grade the work? Describe the criteria you will use to determine the grade on the project. If possible, provide the rubric you will use to grade the work.

5. ***Consider whether a large, semester-long assignment might be reframed as a series of smaller-scale assignments.*** Milestone assignments help students manage their time, deter procrastination, and provide opportunities for corrective feedback on early assignments, which produces better quality work in the final submission. Milestone assignments serve as effective deterrents to plagiarism. Instructors get samples of student writing early on, which helps identify problematic writing and copying. Students are unlikely to find a series of connected assignments from a paper mill or on the web that will meet assignment requirements and more likely to complete the assignment themselves.

Resources

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Using Course-Level Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) to Structure a Final Portfolio Assignment

This assignment grew out of a recent overhaul of my British Literature II survey course using backwards design to shift emphasis from coverage of material to student learning. It also aims to better engage the increasing number of nonmajors taking the course for General Education credit, students for whom the purpose and value of studying literature is often not self-evident.

In this final portfolio assignment, students first take each of the four Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs), choose one or two artifacts demonstrating their competency, and write a paragraph explaining *how* the artifact shows their achievement of the outcome. The artifacts can come from either graded work (low- or higher-stakes assignments) or from in-class work (small group activity answers, exit tickets, personal course notes). Then, they write longer answers to two additional questions: one "big picture" question that the SLOs were designed to help them answer and another question about their own individual learning.

Student responses were strongly positive across varied majors and skill levels; they reported feeling less stress and more control than with a traditional final exam, presentation, or literary analysis paper. Nobody who followed the instructions earned a poor grade, nobody plagiarized, and nearly everyone successfully connected their individual efforts to our shared goals. They were also relatively easy to grade, since for each item, I only needed to evaluate two criteria.

In addition, the SLO-driven final portfolio:

- Implicitly requires students to review everything they did over the semester---in class and at home--- in light of what they now know and can do and to demonstrate cumulative learning
- Levels the playing field, in terms of majors and nonmajors. The portfolio requires less knowledge of disciplinary conventions than traditional assessments, and working directly with SLOs is familiar to many pre-professional majors.
- Fosters metacognition, a habit of mind that supports learning well beyond a single course.
- Gives students significant choice in how they demonstrate their learning and unique perspective, and thus ownership of the project
- Makes visible both how course activities are connected to each other through the SLOs and how the work of the course is connected to the big picture of college learning

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Culminating Course Projects that Don't Overwhelm

A college student early in the semester:
"This is such a large project. How am I ever going to get it done?"

A course instructor at the end of the semester:
"There are so many projects. How am I ever going to get them all graded?"

College students need opportunities to apply key principles and solve authentic problems related to academic content. Often, this takes the form of a culminating course project near the end of the semester. But when such projects are not carefully planned, both students and instructor can become overwhelmed. Students may procrastinate, submit sloppy work, or plagiarize; instructors may resort to grading holistically ("This one's an A") or avoid assigning major projects altogether.

Course instructors can design culminating course projects that challenge and don't overwhelm by using three instructional strategies:

- **Chunking** involves teaching one manageable section of content and then asking students to immediately apply it by completing a succinct, directly-related task.
- **Frequent feedback** involves guiding in-progress student work by providing specific information that describes how closely the work accomplishes its intended purpose.
- **Opportunities for revision** allow students a chance to tweak, polish, or completely re-do their work based on the in-progress feedback they receive before the final version is due.

I use these strategies to guide junior-year teacher candidates through the semester-long process of designing a five-day instructional unit plan. Beginning the second week of the semester, students complete weekly assignments that progressively "build" their instructional unit. The first assignment requires them to identify a topic, theme, and essential question; the second assignment requires them to describe the students they will be teaching; the third assignment requires them to identify learning standards and write SMART learning objectives for their unit. By Week 5, they are selecting instructional materials. By Week 10, they are writing lesson plans and designing assessments.

Each time a "chunk" of the instructional unit plan is submitted, I review it and assign a holistic score of 1 (fully completed, even if revision is needed), .5 (partially completed), or 0 (significantly incomplete or not submitted). I also offer narrative feedback with specific suggestions for revision. In this way, I am able to provide timely, individualized instruction for each student in addition to the whole class instruction provided during class time; and students can make necessary revisions before moving on to the next assignment.

Near the end of the semester, teacher candidates submit their entire instructional unit plan, which consists of all previously-submitted assignments, revised and polished. Although the final project is 20-25 pages in length, I have already seen each section once, and students have had an opportunity to make revisions based on the feedback I provided. Because the final version of the instructional unit plan is a second draft, it is much easier for me to grade, and students are much more likely to excel!

Resources

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Wise Feedback: Using Constructive Feedback to Motivate Learners

How many of us have thought about giving useful feedback to our students and fallen short? Moreover, how many times have we given what we thought was extensive feedback, and seen no improvements in student performance? Or that some students were utilizing our feedback while others did not? How can we provide constructive feedback which will be useful to all learners in that it serves to both instruct as well as motivate students? One way might be to provide "wise feedback."

What is wise feedback?

Wise feedback is targeted feedback which conveys high expectations, the instructor's genuine belief that those expectations can be achieved by the student, and provides concrete information to help the student meet the expectations. Here, "wise" does not necessarily mean smarter or better. Instead, wise feedback refers to psychological interventions which are attuned to how people make sense of themselves, others, and social situations which may affect their learning.

How do I provide wise feedback?

"*I am giving you these comments because I have very high expectations and I know that you can reach them*." or "*The expectations in this course are high and I know you can do great work. The feedback here is designed to help you get there.*" Using this framing when providing feedback to your students helps to build trust, signal belonging, and combine high standards with the assurance that people can reach them. Obviously, simple assurances and trust in the abilities of others are in themselves not sufficient to guarantee success. It is therefore essential to also include constructive criticism, clear pathways/specific directions, and guidance on how students can achieve success.

Who can benefit from wise feedback?

While all students can benefit from wise feedback, studies have shown that students from cultures which have traditionally suffered from race-based stigma, seem to get additional benefits from wise feedback (Cohen, Steele, & Ross, 1999; Yeager et al, 2014).

Communicating high expectations and providing students with the support to meet them is crucial. Students can thrive when they are challenged. But they need to understand the expectations, know how to meet them, and feel that the instructor believes in their capabilities.

References

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Targeted Peer Feedback

Peer evaluation can improve student writing and help students understand grading criteria. The scaffolding described below gives students direction and control in the evaluation process. This guidance encourages them to buy into the revision process.

Preparing for Peer Review

Before the peer review session, ask your students to submit answers to the following questions about their work.

- How can my proofreading partner help me with my paper?
- Which issues do I wish to consult my proofreading partner about?
- Which would I prefer to consult my professor about?

Choose the top 3 "issues" from among the responses, and share them in class. Briefly discuss each issue and strategies for revision. Invite students to find a peer-review partner aligned with their needs. (Assist with finding a partner as needed, or be available for the student without a partner.)

Facilitating Peer Review

Provide several guiding questions to all students. Direct reviewers to offer feedback on their peer's identified needs first. Lasell College Professor Halliday Piel uses the questions below for an argument paper in her writing-intensive history course on Modern Japan:

- What is my partner's paper about, based on the introduction? (i.e. What is the thesis question?)
- Which paragraphs (on what pages) best support the thesis?
- Which paragraphs (on what pages) do not seem to relate to the thesis?
- Should the thesis be revised? If so, why?
- Are more supporting examples needed?
- Does the conclusion wrap up nicely?
- Is there a bibliography, and is it formatted in a consisted manner?

To increase accountability, consider directing students to submit a copy of their work to you for a pass/fail grade. If the work is done on a shared document, this is easier. If it is done on paper, you can take photographs of the work using a mobile device.

Summary

Anxiety can keep a student from buying in to the peer evaluation process. Start by asking students to identify specific areas for peer and faculty attention. This gives them a measure of control, reducing the anxiety associated with peer judgement. It also encourages them to reflect on their learning, and communicates the value and intent of peer evaluation. Including pointed guiding questions can help students determine how well the paper meets the objectives of the assignment and lend structure to their feedback.

Submitted by:
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What Are They Really Saying? A Quick Strategy for Peer Feedback

Structured peer feedback activities are a great addition to most writing assignments. I find that students gain confidence in their work by having others read it and provide commentary prior to turning it in. Peer feedback can help a writer identify problems in their own writing; they can see firsthand what it is like to assess a writing critically, rather than just relying on the instructor to find all the mistakes. And honestly, student writing generated with peers in mind stands a better chance of being more engaging than papers written solely for my eyes. Because students will often focus on grammatical improvements unless explicitly directed to focus on other aspects of the writing process, I love giving them specific activities. Some peed back strategies require more time/effort, but this one is quick and easy!

Students should come prepared with a draft of their essay and I ask them to get into pairs. Then ask them to write the following:

2. In one sentence, their main position or thesis.
3. A list of their opinions included within the paper
4. Any possible counter-arguments to their opinions

Then ask students to put that first sheet (with the three sections just listed) away and switch and read their partner's paper. Then ask the students to write down, for their partner's paper, the same thing they write down for their own:

1. The thesis
2. The opinions included within the paper
3. Counter-opinions

Ask students to bring out the original sheets from their self-analysis and then compare the differences between what they thought was in their paper and what an outside reader thought was inherent in their text.

Hopefully, some students will realize that their opinions were not well supported or that they did not express that which they thought as well as possible. Ask the class for some examples/highlights from partner discussion. This exercise also will reveal the different ways in which people read texts and think about them.

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Using Text Expansion Tools to Enrich Feedback

Feedback is essential to student learning and one place faculty consistently spend a great deal of time is in typing up comments on written work. Brian Wilson, an instructional design technology specialist at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln who also teaches English online, makes use of text-expansion software to enrich the feedback he gives to students in a time-efficient way.

When he finds himself explaining the same thing to more than one student or frequently referring students to specific resources, he adds this content to his "comment library" in PhraseExpress, a text-expanding software package for Windows. The next time he wants to give this feedback to a student or refer them to a resource, he can do it with a single keystroke instead of retyping the whole thing.

This saves him a great deal of time and provides his students with richer and more useful feedback. For more information, please view the short video he made about this topic: https://teaching.unl.edu/using-text-expansion-tools-enrich-feedback-0/ or feel free to contact him at bwilson7@unl.edu.

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Grading! (Efficiently AND Effectively!)

We all get to that point in the semester – you know, the point where the assignments keep coming in and the time that we've blocked to grade said assignments keeps getting whittled down by other obligations (like sleeping and occasionally eating). I often find myself asking why I didn't opt for a mid semester exam and final exam that the learning management system would grade for me instead of assigning multiple papers that require intensive grading. But then I remember that I want to measure students abilities to actually apply the knowledge, not just memorize facts and I resign myself to blocking out more grading time!

Walvoord and Anderson [1] identify the multiple roles that grades serve:

- as an **evaluation** of student work;
- as a **means of communicating** to students about their performance and potential for further success;
- as a method of **feedback on learning**, clarifying for students what they understand, what they don't understand, and where they can improve
- as a **source of motivation** to students for continued learning and improvement

One of the primary purposes of grading is to provide feedback. This link: 10 tips for efficient and effective grading from Magna Publications Faculty Focus has some great suggestions for how to grade assignments efficiently while effectively providing feedback to students. Here's a summary of a few but check out the others too!

#1: "one and done": provide detailed comments on an error (especially grammar or quality of writing errors) and how to correct it only once. Then, when the error appears in the rest of the paper, circle it and perhaps note "see previous" instead of correcting it throughout the entire paper. This will save you time and has the added benefit of requiring the student to identify what needs to be fixed, instead of just inserting your corrections in future assignments.

#7: "conscious use of comments": use comments only when there is still something a student can do to improve their grade on a future assignment. I would add, only comment when the comment can help students improve in your class and/or in a future course and/or in professional practice. I generally give less feedback on the final assignment of the semester but I do think it's important to use comments (even on the final assignments) to help them connect the learning to another course where they might be asked to demonstrate a similar concept.

#9: "less is more": a significant number of critiques on papers can intimidate some students and cause them to be less motivated to make improvements because they feel overwhelmed at the sheer number of things they need to address. It can be helpful to target your comments to a few key areas for improvement at a time. Again, thinking about the point in the semester can help you determine what feedback is necessary. I often chant "content, format, grammar" to myself when I'm grading so I remember what the order I want to focus on.

Here are some great tips from Vanderbilt University's Center for Teaching for how to give enough feedback that it is helpful to students but not so much that you're spending every minute of your day on grading.

- Create a rubric, or grading scale – this has several benefits: it ensures that grading criteria is objective and makes the criteria transparent to students. Plus, it can save a lot of grading time!
- Use your comments to teach rather than to justify your grade, focusing on what you'd most like students to address in future work.
- Link your comments and feedback to the goals for an assignment.
- Comment primarily on patterns — representative strengths and weaknesses.
- Avoid over-commenting or "picking apart" students' work. This not only helps you to grade more efficiently, it also avoids overwhelming the students. It enables them to focus more effectively on the areas of their work that most need improvement.

- Consider asking students to turn in a cover page with their own evaluation of their work's strongest and weakest points as well as their thoughts on how they could improve the work. Your comments can be better tailored to each student's concerns about the work.
- Use the words "see me" instead of writing lengthy explanations. It can be much more efficient to explain some issues face to face.

I encourage you to review how long it takes for you to return assignments to students and what feedback you're providing on the assignments when you do return them. If you discover that you're either taking too long to get the assignments back to students or you're not providing them with adequate feedback, ask yourself and your TA or co-instructor (and perhaps your students) these questions (from Berkeley's GSI teaching and resource center):

- ? Can you change the grading criteria to streamline the process?
- ? Is it necessary to grade every problem on an assignment? Occasionally, instructors in the problem-based disciplines decide to grade a random subset of problems on an assignment.
- ? Are comments (instead of a grade) sufficient on rough drafts?
- ? Can you use a simpler rubric (e.g. pass/not pass instead of a five-point scale)?
- ? Can you have the students grade each other's' quizzes in class? Or maybe you could use a retrieval practice strategy instead of a graded quiz to assess for learning.

Happy teaching (and grading)!

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[1]*Source: Walvoord, B. & V. Anderson (2010). Effective Grading: A Tool for Learning and Assessment - 2nd Ed. San Francisco : Jossey-Bass.*

Why You Should Read *A More Beautiful Question*

"Questions challenge authority and disrupt established structures, processes, and systems, forcing people to have to at least think about doing something differently." – Warren Berger, *A More Beautiful Question*

Have we lost our way as educators? That's one question asked by author Warren Berger in his book *A More Beautiful Question*. To be precise, he doesn't ask this specific question, yet the book seems to ask this question repeatedly. In varied contexts, Berger explores how people asking beautiful questions have found new personal and professional paths, new solutions to wicked problems, and new opportunities for creating impact in the world, despite questioning being largely discouraged in educational settings.

Berger centers the book on stories of people asking questions, often a series of questions that build upon each other. These question aren't unconventional or paradigm-shifting on their own, but they do have the effect of prompting new thinking patterns in the questioner. One compelling story in the book features the innovative educator Deborah Meier and her reform of who gets to ask questions in the classroom. In Meier's model of education, all students participated in inquiry. Although she focused on primary education, the application to higher education is obvious. One might ask: Are college classrooms welcoming of questioning – not just clarifying questions (which Berger doesn't even consider), but deep and probing questions about assumptions, implications, parameters, causation, and more?

The book hints that encouraging students to ask beautiful questions is likely more valuable to their education than teaching them another equation or analytical technique. So what's a "beautiful question"? Beautiful questions lead from Why? to What If? to How? They cause a change in perspective. They are ambitious. They can be acted on to cause something to happen. They are a "catalyst to bring about change". The Right Question Institute has taking this simple questioning approach to a new level with the Question Formulation Technique.

Educators might even attempt to answer the questions themselves. For example, one question is "Why isn't water reaching the people who need it?" easily translates to "Why isn't [key resource in academia] reaching the people who need it?" The question "What is your sentence?" (about identifying one's personal mission) is a beautiful question that all educators should answer.

"You don't learn unless you question." – Warren Berger, *A More Beautiful Question*

Resources

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