

Teaching Tip Series

Share Effective Learning Techniques with your Students

Given that most of your students have spent close to two decades in educational settings, it might be reasonable to assume that they have developed strong study habits and make efficient use of their study time. Research (e.g., Dunlosky et. al, 2013) reveals, however, that students commonly engage in a number of ineffective study practices, such as highlighting and rereading texts. Below are some suggestions of effective learning techniques that you can share with your students, as well as recommendations for how you can model or incorporate these techniques into your class.

1. **Practice testing:** Even in instances where students effectively learn material, they still may find it difficult to retrieve the learned material when needed (such as on an exam or when delivering a presentation). It can be quite helpful for students to practice retrieving the relevant information by self-testing. You can model this for students by giving them practice questions they can use to test themselves on the concepts they are learning in class. For example, you might consider starting a class session with a low-stakes or ungraded quiz based on the information covered in a previous class, which will help students gain critical practice in retrieving information.
2. **Self-explanation:** Self-explanation helps students understand the “why” that underpins accepted concepts, as well as how new concepts relate to ones which were previously learned. With self-explanation, students explain a concept that they are currently learning and draw connections to previously-learned material, either in writing or to a peer. Please see the below example of how a self-explanation activity can be incorporated into your class.
3. **Spaced study:** Evidence suggests that spacing study sessions out over a period of time leads to improved performance as compared to spending the same amount of time studying information all at once. You can help reinforce important concepts and increase the likelihood that students will retain them by revisiting material from previous classes.
4. **Avoid transcribing:** Sometimes when students take notes they focus on transcribing exactly what the instructor communicates at a surface level, rather than trying to make sense of the information at a deeper level. This is particularly true when using laptops, which allow for much faster note-taking. Encourage your students to focus on the main points of the transmitted material rather than trying to capture the content verbatim. Another useful strategy is to provide students with the slides ahead of time, so that their effort in class is directed towards analyzing and evaluating the material rather than attempting to capture what was said word for word.

References

- Dunlosky, J., Rawson, K. A., Marsh, E. J., Nathan, M. J., & Willingham, D. T. (2013). Improving Students' Learning With Effective Learning Techniques: Promising Directions from Cognitive and Educational Psychology. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 14 (1), 4-58.
- Lang, J. (2018, January 31). Want Good Grades? Ditch that Highlighter [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://www.jamesmlang.com/2018/01/want-good-grades-ditch-that-highlighter.html>

Self-explanation activity

The questions below will help you conceptualize the concepts we have just learned. Please answer them to the best of your ability, and share your responses with a peer. Please note that you may be asked communicate your ideas with the class.

1. To the best of your ability, please describe the concept that was just covered in class.
2. What do you know about this topic today that you didn't know previously?
3. How does the material we discussed in class today relate to material we have covered in previous classes?
4. Are there any aspects of the concept that you are having difficulty explaining? Which elements are these, and why do you find them difficult to explain?