

CETL Lunch on Getting/Teaching Students to Read September 20, 2007

Compilation of Strategies Contributed by Clark Faculty

From Liza Grandia (IDCE):

What seems to be working well for me so far in Intro to Anthropology is that I have made 4 **random reading quizzes a significant part of their participation grade**. I was really pleasantly surprised how well the students did last week; they are truly keeping up.

From Laurie Ross (IDCE):

In my grad. Seminar (16-20 students) I use **e-journals (electronic journals)**. **Students must post 600 word essays on the reading each week to the discussion board on the black board**. I teach on Monday, these journals are due on Sunday by noon. They are scored on a 4 point system, up to 2 points for comprehension and up to 2 points for analysis and application. I review the papers before class and hand them back at the start of class, so students can refer to their points in the discussion.

These account for about 1/3 of their grade—they are a lot of work for the students, and a lot of work for me to evaluate... but I find them to be so useful on so many levels. They do insure that students read before class in a deep way...they come to class already having wrestled with the ideas. Also, because I have a rubric, they can see where they fall short—I generally see great improvement very quickly in writing and ability to work with difficult material. Also, I encourage students to read and comment on each other's papers.

From Evan Wilson (grad student) re Laurie Ross' e-journals (above):

As a fifth-year student, the most effective strategy to encourage my own reading has been in Laurie Ross' graduate Community-Development and Planning Theory course. Laurie expected all students to read the required weeks' reading and post an analytical reflection before the class meeting. The reflections were posted on Blackboard for viewing by students and Professor. Professor Ross then commented on the reflections and returned them to students in class. Comments provided on students' reflections helped guide students to look more closely at readings or consider alternate ideas. Students were allowed to skip 2 weeks without writing a reflection. These reflections were a core part of our grade. I found that it helped make me accountable for finishing the readings, pushed me to look critically at the readings and generally increased the level of discussion in class.

From Lene Jensen (Psychology):

I have pasted in the section on weekly questions about the readings for my capstone course below. It helps to get students to read.

Weekly Questions:

Each week, students must bring to class five discussion questions pertaining to the readings for the week (approx. 1½ pages of double-spaced typed text). Students will want to demonstrate in their questions that they have completed all the readings for the week, and that they have thought carefully about the readings. Each question must indicate the reading and page number(s) to which it pertains. We will use the questions during class discussion.

Being able to ask thoughtful questions about what one is reading (for classes and outside classes) is an important skill. It is a defining skill of a careful reader. Thoughtful questions cannot be too general (“what was this article about?” or “what was this author thinking?”) but should instead be fairly specific (“How might the moral reasoning of this generation of young women have changed from their mothers’ reasoning?”).

Weekly questions will be collected at the end of class every week. However, only the questions with the best grades from 8 weeks will count toward the final course grade. (There will be no opportunity to make up weekly questions).

Remember that obtaining readings on time for completing class assignments is your responsibility.

From Paul Ropp (History):

I assign weekly reaction papers, due on the first class of the week if the class meets twice a week, or on the second class if the class meets three times a week. **The students are to write one or two pages (typed and double spaced) on the week’s assigned readings.** I encourage them to give me honest feedback on the readings, to summarize what seems to them most important, or what they find surprising, or what they find puzzling or hard to understand. I encourage them especially to pose questions they would like to see discussed class. This is an informal writing assignment. I don’t put grades on them, but I read and respond to all reaction papers (or my TA does part of the time if it’s a big class). And I take notes on the reaction papers and plan the next class entirely around discussion of the points and questions raised in the reaction papers. I announce that class participation, which includes weekly reaction papers and active discussion in class, will count 20% or sometimes, 25% of their final grade. This insures that students read at least part of the week’s assignment by the first class of the week, and it gives me weekly feedback from every student even in the largest class. Quiet or shy but thoughtful students can impress me and I can call on them to share their insights which they’ve already written down. Students who write perfunctory or unimpressive reaction papers don’t get called on in discussion. This also helps insure that we will go over points that people find confusing in the readings. This is a time-consuming approach (for the faculty member!), but I find it worth the effort because it ensures student involvement no matter how large the class.

From Sarah Buie (V&PA):

One strategy I have used at times (when there are four or five short articles required for the class) is to **tell them that one of them will be responsible for doing a short synopsis or overview of an article before we begin discussion of the piece.** As it could be any one of them that's called on, it has seemed to make a difference when I've done it. In my Sacred Space class, I often have 6-8 readings for each class in the reader; however, I prioritize them into required and recommended, so they can gauge their time accordingly. Often, they read everything.

From SunHee Gertz (English) (Re linkage between reading and dialogue):

I think when we teach students how to read, we teach them not only to get the literal and underlying levels, but then **consider contexts and other readers' interpretations.** In the contexts and other readers' interpretation, you can be said to lay a foundation for creating clear but respectful readers.

From Michael Bamberg (Psychology):

Students are assigned an article/chapter—and are given STUDY QUESTIONS that are helping to “break up” <or “down”> the assigned article/chapter. THEN, **at the beginning of class they will receive ONE of the STUDY QUESTIONS as their ‘Quiz Question’**, and they have 5-10 minutes to comment on or answer the STUDY/QUIZ Question, i.e., show that they read the assignment and that they are “smart”. (For slow writers, when we’ll start class with the typical organizational stuff, there is ample time to finish up and hand their answer/comments in to me.) Each answer/comment will get up to 10 points; there will be 18 quizzes in the course of the semester—and the three worst will be dropped. If a student comes late to class, s/he can sit the quiz after class in my office. In addition, there are no make-ups, coz the three worst will be dropped—meaning that you have three freebies, and you need to time them... <<the students are consistently reminded that there are NO MIDTERMS and NO FINALS!!!—ands they LOVE that!!>>

Overall, the quiz-grade counts toward 25% of my class grade.

From Michael Bamberg (Psychology):

SQUIBS (below) are written summaries + commentaries on the assigned readings (the ones they will be quizzed on), and they can hand these in before class – and collect, over time, up to 5% extra credit. The rationale given for squibs is that it will train them in their writing skills – AND assist those students who are bad in quiz-situations, but want to show that they have READ the assignment and can express their understanding by use of writing a SQUIB.

SQUIBBING – an exercise in **READING: Doing Justice to the Text/Author**, and **showing/telling what I can do with the Text** (= what’s on display is ‘how smart + professional I am’) <<and: *smartness* (+ professionalism, too) is/are not anything we were born with **but how we present ourselves** – and a lot of it is rhetorical – and that means it can be learned – AND, we can improve it!>>

Reading Strategy 0

Not having read the assigned reading and not posting your squib (though worse is: not having read the assigned reading + bullshitting)

Reading Strategy 1

“*There was ONE thing that I thought was particularly interesting; it actually reminded me of when I was with my aunt back in Australia and we were chasing cars....*” <<rest about ‘chasing cars’>>

Reading Strategy 2

“*There was One thing that I disagree with. The author mentions ‘life’. What I think ‘life’ REALLY is, is...*” <<rest about readers’ thoughts about ‘life’>>

Reading Strategy 3

“*The reading was very difficult. Here is what I did not understand. The author says on page 31 that And then, on page 15, the author says.... - - - I couldn’t make sense of any of this.*”

Reading Strategy 4

“*Here is what I took away from (or: got out of) the reading*” <<followed by an eclectic arrangement of points covered by the author/reading>>

Reading Strategy 5

“*Here are the key concepts that the author is presenting in this reading*” (followed by sequential list of how the author arranged his/her arguments)

Reading Strategy 6

“*The basic issue addressed by the author is XYZ; the author elaborates and supports this key issue by the following other arguments/issues*” <<basically revealing the hierarchical structure of the reading>>

Reading Strategy 7

Following Strategy 6 and adding *my personal criticism/agreement // likes/dislikes*

Reading Strategy 8

Following Strategy 7 and adding *support* for my personal opinions with references to other sources (trustworthy ones is better)

Reading Strategy 9

Following Reading Strategy 8 – but in addition proofreading

From Judy Miller (CETL):

For each reading assignment, post an online, open-book, multiple choice quiz on Blackboard, due in advance of class, that tests students' initial engagement with the text. The questions should reflect some minimal level of processing of the text—that is, it should not be possible to do well by scanning for italicized terms and selecting correct definitions—but doing well should also not require mastery of the material. The online multiple choice quiz must be completed before class, and in fact you can “set” the quiz in Blackboard to become unavailable at any time you choose. If the quiz is multiple choice, Bb automatically grades it for you and records grades in the online gradebook. You can also set the Bb feedback options so that students know how many they got right, but not which ones. And if students collaborate, for me that's a plus—at least they are talking about the assigned reading! I have used these reading quizzes as the basis for 10% of the course grade, with an extra credit option if students complete more than the required number. I view the online summary of students' responses before class, and from that I can get a good idea about which points students are generally clear on and which will require some class time to clarify. I have found that this system results in 70-80% of the students having done the reading in advance of class, and that makes a huge difference in class participation and my options for use of class time.

Compilation of Strategies from POD Listserv

(Anyone can subscribe to this listserv; go to http://www.podnetwork.org/publications_resources/mailling_list.htm)

Date: Tue, 28 Aug 2007 17:52:51 -0400
From: "La Lopa, Joseph M" <lalopaj@PURDUE.EDU>
Subject: The best "lecture" ever

In the past I have asked students to read the chapter that was to be covered on any given day so they would be somewhat familiar with what I was going to cover in the lecture, which was an overview of the materials using powerpoint. Of course, few actually read it which meant they did not really understand what I was talking about.

So, I educated myself on ways to get the most out of assigned readings this summer. After reading a series of articles on getting the most out of assigned readings **I started to require my students to prepare detailed study notes (that will be graded) for the chapters that are to be covered on any given day this semester.**

Today we covered chapter 1. Guess what? In a class of 80 students we had the most wonderful "lecture" about the information contained in the chapter **starting with the simple question of "What did you learn from your study of chapter 1?"** After calling on about 9-10 students we had covered the key points. Having the students know the chapter contents and share it in class also freed me to augment what they read with relevant practical examples from our industry to assist with retention.

Best of all, the students indicated that they were HAPPY that they were being required to prepare study notes because it forced them to read the chapter and be in a position to understand what was being discussed in the class and so they got a lot out of today's session.

Mick La Lopa

Date: Tue, 28 Aug 2007 17:06:48 -0700
From: Barbara Millis <millis@UNR.EDU>
Subject: Deep Learning Relates Even Better to The best "lecture" ever

Hello, All! To accomplish the same goal--getting students to come to class prepared--I follow the "Deep Learning Model." There are four parts to the international research on deep learning: motivation, active learning, interaction, and a deep foundational knowledge based on concepts. I advocate getting students into the knowledge base through motivating homework, often **homework that involves choice and/or is related to the students' own lives.** At the very least, I use graphic organizers or sentence prompts that require students to do the reading and bring their homework to class.

I collect the homework only at the end of the class period and mark it rather than grade it, awarding pass/fail points if the quality is up to par. But, most importantly, I build on the homework by engaging students interactively and activity using the homework--the middle pieces of the deep learning model. I can build through jigsaws, paired discussions, academic games,

debates, etc. Many things happen because of the in-class activities: among them, (1) the homework becomes "authentic" (for an genuine audience of peers rather than a bored expert who has to agonize over grading it) and (2) learning occurs, particularly if you remember Bob Leamnson's wonderful quote: "Learning is defined as stabilizing, through repeated use, certain appropriate and desirable synapses in the brain," Thinking about Teaching and Learning, p. 5.

Many of you have seen me model this approach in numerous workshops on cooperative learning, critical thinking, deep learning, etc. I also practice what I teach in my own classes! (For a brief 6-page summary of this approach-and more-see IDEA paper #38, Enhancing Learning-and more!-Through Cooperative Learning at http://www.idea.ksu.edu/papers/Idea_Paper_38.pdf)

Warmly, Barbara

Date: Tue, 28 Aug 2007 19:43:22 -0700
From: "Ed.Nuhfer" <ed.nuhfer@CSUCI.EDU>
Subject: Re: The best "lecture" ever

Wonderful Mick--and what is really terrific is your getting them to do this at the opening of the term. You've set a precedent that has momentum, and they will expect to continue this. I'm sure they enjoyed it, because when they see us having fun, the atmosphere is contagious.

I've done a couple of variants--they are just different--not better. In my freshman class, **I've had them compose a quiz question per page**. They then pull into groups of four and share the question they created they think is best, and the question that covers the muddiest material. It is kind of a "minute paper" at the start of class rather than the end. As Barbara Millis noted, there are many directions to go, none of them any better than what you described.

In my majors, the assignment went from a question per page to a question per paragraph. Gradually, they get the idea that the ability to ask the right questions is a far more useful skill than just providing the right answers.

Ed Nuhfer
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Date: Wed, 29 Aug 2007 07:08:59 -0600
From: Lynn Sorenson <lynn_sorenson@BYU.EDU>
Subject: Re: The best "lecture" ever

For those not "blessed" with such a "plethora" of TA's (as Mick is), one could **"mark" or "check off" that the students completed the assignments** (or not)--the teacher not actually *reading* and evaluating them. What I'm talking about is just checking to see if they did it (could be recorded as a "plus" for "seems complete"; a "check" for an "OK"; and a "zero" for "not handed in" or for "only a few words on the page").

This saves time for the teacher but helps the students feel accountable, and they "get credit" for having done the assignment. But most important, it prepares them to come to the class session ready to engage and contribute (LEARN!). --Lynn Sorenson (Brigham Young University)

References on Getting the Most from Reading:

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Teaching Today.
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Using Textbooks Effectively. Getting Students to Read =
Them by Denise Boyd. Teaching Tips.
http://www.psychologicalscience.org/teaching/tips/tips_0603.cfm

Motivating Students to do the Reading (September 1999) by =
Barbara Gross Davis, University of California, Berkeley from Tools for
Teaching
<http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip=/motivativ.htm>

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<http://www.morris.umn.edu/services/dsoaac/aac/NeedToKnow.html>

Teaching Tips for TAs: When Students Haven't Done the Reading. Office of
Instructional Consultation, Univ. of California Santa Barbara.
<http://www.oic.id.ucsb.edu/TA/tips/read.html>

Reading Skills in the Social Studies from Learning Enrichment, Inc.
<http://www.learningenrichment.org/reading.html>

IDEA paper #40 by Eric Hobson, Getting Students to Read: Fourteen Tips at
<<http://www.idea.ksu.edu/>>