

## Motivating Students to Prepare for Class

### **Help students to understand the importance of the reading:**

Does the reading supplement the lectures? Does it contain important information that is not covered in the lectures? Students may need to be told whether they should do the reading before or after the relevant lecture.

### **Give students a foretaste:**

Make reading assignments at least two sessions before they will be discussed, and preview the reading for them to encourage students' natural curiosity. Suggest how the preparation will fit into the larger discussion. Instructors might simply state: "This article is one of my favorites, and I'll be interested to see what you think about it."

### **Assign study questions:**

Study questions that help students to find the key points of the reading will make them feel more confident as learners. Some studies suggest that informing students that you will base exam questions on the study questions can provide extra incentive.

### **Give preparation homework:**

Ask students to write potential quiz questions or discussion questions, to write short responses to the reading, or to select a relevant word or sentence from the assignment they would like to discuss further.

### **Consider holding students accountable with daily quizzes:**

Choosing one of the study questions can be a good way of ensuring that students study the readings before class. You can also use clickers to streamline the process. Quizzes may appear less punitive if the decision to have one is determined by the flip of a coin at the beginning of class. One study of first-year students found that they view grades as an indicator of whether they have successfully adapted their study habits to college-level coursework. Quizzes can help them understand whether they are preparing adequately or not.

### **Help students to understand that preparation will help them to succeed in the course:**

On each day that reading is due, one instructor has his students complete "survival cards" which are 3x5 cards that students fill out with definitions, key ideas, or other notes based upon the assigned readings. Students turn in those cards (after an opportunity to revise them) and then the professor allows students to use those cards during the exam.

### **Pose general questions about the reading:**

Non-stressful questions that encourage conversation may be helpful. For example:

- What item in the reading surprised you?
- What topics in the chapter can you apply to your own experience?
- Which sections of the reading do you think we should review?

**Vary your teaching methods:**

Students may be more inclined to do the reading when their notes and preparation are used in different formats throughout the semester. Consider incorporating role playing, debates, brainstorming, discussion, demonstrations, case studies, guest speakers, and small group work into your lesson plans.

**Respond when students aren't reading:**

- Promise an exam question based upon the assignment that students have failed to read. Inform them that they will have to cover it on their own. Remind them that this happened when assigning additional reading.
- When some students have not read but others have, dismiss those who are not prepared with an extra writing assignment so that the prepared students can discuss the material. Acknowledge the assignment but do not grade it. [This technique is best used no more than once per term.]
- Use the class time as reading time, making it clear that you are reluctant to take this unusual step.

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