

Enhancing Learning Inside and Outside the Classroom

The night before class, I always look over my notes, refresh myself on the material, check the textbook, and look for additional resources. One evening before class, I came to the realization that even though I was preparing for class, most of my students were not! Many of my students come to class looking like the proverbial “deer caught in the headlights,” caught off guard and overwhelmed by material they have not read. Although some students may be able to grasp new information as it is presented, others may be left behind. Exams can be especially challenging for students whose only contact with the information was during class because they try to “cram” all of the reading in at the last minute. Of course, I was to blame for enabling students to get away with this behavior. I had provided no incentive for them to come to class prepared and no disincentive for not being prepared.

If the instructor and the students were both well prepared for class, it would greatly improve the learning environment. Instead of the instructor being the sole possessor and distributor of knowledge, information could be shared bi-directionally if students had some knowledge about the topic. Class time would also be enhanced because the instructor could spend less time delivering basic facts and information, and more time on higher learning activities such as case studies, problem-solving, and critical thinking exercises.

In order to get the students to read the textbook material, I needed to demonstrate that the reading was important. My solution was the implementation of “admission tickets.” I have used this concept with only minor modifications over the past eight years. Students must submit a completed admission ticket prior to the start of class in order to be admitted. The ticket is a textbook-driven, guided reading worksheet that emphasizes the major concepts from the text related to that week’s class. I usually use a fill-in-the-blank format, but diagrams, matching exercises, and crosswords can also be used. The worksheets are particularly helpful with students who struggle to discern what information is important in the textbook. The worksheets are returned the following week for students to use when studying for exams. I also give students a nominal amount of points for each completed ticket.

The admission tickets have also prevented misunderstandings between the students and me. During one semester, I assigned something I thought the students already knew, but was important enough to merit an admission ticket. A group of students flagged me down before class to tell me they had no idea the assigned material was important. Without the worksheet serving as a communication device, I would not have discussed the topic in class because I assumed they knew it, and the students would not have asked because they did not know it was important.

Using admission tickets has shown me how different the classroom learning environment can be when students come prepared for class! Even with cursory knowledge, students are better able to participate in a class discussion, which provides an interesting environment for everyone. Learning is a shared responsibility of the instructor and students that requires both parties to be prepared when they come to the classroom.

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