

The Practical Professor

No. 25

Quick and easy tips, questions, and suggestions for improving teaching and learning.

The Power of the Recap

Teaching Tip Series #7

As instructors, we know our courses better than anyone (especially our students). We understand the sequence of the lessons, the scaffolding of concepts and content, and the connections between ideas. This is even more true if we have taught a class multiple times. We also remember perfectly what we covered in the previous class (ok, maybe *somewhat* perfectly).

Our students do not. It is unrealistic to expect them to, especially if the last class met the previous week. Your class is one part of their day, one part of their week, and one part of their life this semester. They are likely not as interested in your subject and course as you are. In short: they don't know it the way that you know it and *won't remember and understand it* as well or as easily as you do unless you *ask* them to.

Tip

Dedicate at least the first five minutes of each class (ten is better) asking students to recap the most interesting or important points from the previous class. Tell them they can be something you explained, something a member of the class said, or something the class discovered through a discussion or activity. Outline their recap on the board or, even better, ask them to represent these points on the board themselves.

If you do this at the beginning of every class, you can encourage students to create **concept maps** by asking them to present ideas on the board “visually.” Show them examples of good concept maps. It is best if you can leave this recap of the previous class on the board for the entire class so that students can continue to see it as you teach the new class. This allows them to see connections and context.

Do not think for a minute that spending the first ten minutes this way is a waste of time. You are *priming* students for new learning by *activating* previous learning. You are “waking up” their minds. You are encouraging them to see *connections* between what they learned previously and what they are learning now, and you are prompting them to communicate (visually) their understanding of ideas and the connections between them.

In the next *The Practical Professor*: Reflective Practice Series #7

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