

Teaching

A series of practical and innovative teaching tips for college faculty No. 19

The Top 10...

Practical Study Tips to Share with Your Students

Many of us assume our students know how to study. In fact, most of our students have terrible “study habits.” We can help them immediately do better in our courses by sharing and reinforcing what we know are effective study habits. Helping students dramatically improve their study skills will improve their participation in class and their confidence. This, in turn, will improve their self-efficacy in relation to college courses. Share these ideas with your students.

- ✓ Put cell phones in “airplane mode” and, if working on a computer, disable *all* programs that interrupt studying. After an interruption, there is good research that it takes the average person 20 minutes to completely reconnect with what she or he was doing.
- ✓ Develop a weekly schedule of when they will study each subject, in a quiet place without distractions. Consider copying a calendar and handing it out, to make it simple for students to fill in their work times, study times, etc.
- ✓ Read through the chapter or reading assignment, without taking notes or trying to understand everything completely first, then go back and read for understanding. Giving our brains a general picture of something first aids in later putting new information in order.
- ✓ Stop after 10 minutes of reading and write down a few sentences explaining the main points of what they have just read. Stop. Think. Write. This engages their brain much, much more than simply reading and highlighting.
- ✓ After completing a reading assignment, urge students to explain, **in their own words**, what they consider to be the 4 key points in the entire reading. Read, think, write. It works.

- ✓ Go over class notes within 24 hours after class, to see if they make sense. Suggest they write a question mark next to anything unclear and ask you about it, via email or in class. In more advanced courses, give them some reflection questions to write about.
- ✓ Combine class notes with reading. You can help them do this by having them take notes on the readings on only one half of each piece of paper, so class notes on the same subject can be added right next to anything they wrote down from the readings.
- ✓ “Triple-up” with two other people. Each shares her/his study schedule for your class with the others. When finished studying **each week**, urge them to check in with each other to discuss material, make sure of homework assignments, and help each other out. The regular time puts pressure on to have homework done.
- ✓ Teach students to plan ahead for tests and other longer assignments, to help them start them well before assignments are due. If they have calendars, have them put reminders two weeks before due dates, and one week ahead of time – blocking out time to do work.
- ✓ Look over everything they get back from an instructor to see where they lost points, or had a problem, and figure a way to do better on the next assignment. Consider giving credit if they prepare a written “grade report” analyzing why and how they lost points and identifying a plan for improvement.

What works is immediate reinforcement of the study behaviors you are encouraging. Whatever you do, make it worth their time for students to do more than glance at the readings.

Now, **how will you reward your students for studying the way you know helps them learn?** You could randomly ask 7 students per class to show you their notes so you can give them extra credit for good notes. Or, perhaps have some hand in their explanations of the 4 key points.

Attached is a draft of a handout you may give students. Adapt it to your needs and your students!

Need more ideas? Check out *The Teaching Top 10 No. 5*, “Tips to Promote Effective Student Study Skills.”

Study Tips to Make You an Effective Student

Studying for college courses is hard, but not nearly as hard as most students make it. Learn how to study and you will (1) get better grades, (2) be a more effective student, (3) learn skills you can use to learn new material at work your entire life. Start now! Here are some ideas to get you started.

- ⇒ When studying, put your cell phone in “airplane mode” and disable all “instant” notifications on your computer— otherwise, you are only pretending to study. Take a break every hour if you need to, in order to get back to your friends.
- ⇒ Don’t be alone in the course. Form a “triple-up team” with two other classmates, share emails and ways to connect via texting, set up a time each week to contact each other on homework assignments, what is due, and questions about the course.
- ⇒ Develop a weekly schedule of when you will study for each course, and follow it as if it was your work hours.
- ⇒ Text, email or call your “triple-up team” when you have completed study assignments each week.
- ⇒ Read through each assignment, without studying or taking notes, one time to let my brain get a general understanding of the topic. Then, go back and study the material, taking notes.
- ⇒ After each ten minutes of **studying** the material, stop and decide what the most important points are and write them down in my own words.
- ⇒ After completing the entire reading assignment, decide what the four most important points are and explain them in my own words.
- ⇒ Go over your class notes within 24 hours of class to see if they make sense.
- ⇒ Combine your notes from class with notes from homework so that they make sense, and to make it easier for you to study for tests.

- ⇒ Examine assignments you get back from instructors and review their comments to see how you can improve. Ask instructors questions if they wrote something or had a grade you did not understand.
- ⇒ Put all tests, long assignments and papers on a calendar so you can see what you have to do, and when, and plan accordingly.

Okay, look over the list and identify *three specific things* that you will work on *right now*.

1.

2.

3.

And, how will you and I know you are doing these things? What realistic reward should you get for achieving these changes in your studying?

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