

## Teaching Tip 3: Getting Students to do Assigned Readings

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This tip addresses the issue many faculty experience, students arrive at class and a significant proportion have not done the readings. This is especially troublesome if the pedagogy within the course involves discussion or analysis of the readings. Below are a several suggestions on how to incentivize students to do the assigned reading before class (also see Teaching Tip 2, How Much Assigned Reading is Too Much or Too Little?)

### 1. Require a pre-class reflection

For classes where discussion of assigned readings is an important component of the in-class learning activity one option is to have students post a required short reflection on the class learning management site before class. For undergraduate classes it may be necessary and certainly wise to explain what a reading reflection is and a guideline of what you expect. My guidelines for reflections are to answer the following three queries: what was the key idea or take-home lesson from



the reading? what did you take away/learn from the reading? and how does the reading contribute learning in the course? I routinely assign reading reflections in my graduate seminar courses. One efficient approach it to have the reflection posts be submitted via a LMS discussion forum tool. I generally make reflections due by 6:00 AM the morning of the class. By having a consistent due time, students always know when the reflection is due. This also gives me adequate time to compile and skim the reflections before class. It is easy to skim through the compiled reflections and rapidly assigned a score on a 0 to 3 scale, with zero for nothing submitted by due date, one for reflections of poor or marginal quality, two for an adequate but not exceptional reflections, and three for an exceptional reflection, e.g. one that shows insight, brings in new information, e.g. impresses, see the rubric below.

### Reading Reflection Scoring Rubric

Score	Attributes
0	Missing, nothing posted
1	Poor or marginal quality, post shows little or no evidence of effort, simply restates the article, no reflection, is turned in on time F to D level work/effort.
2	Solid post, identifies key points, states what they learned, evidence of appropriate effort, clear that they read and thought about the reading. This is the expected score, C to B level work

3	Exemplary post, clear they read and thought about the reading, provides new insights and/or perspective, may include reference to prior reading or other material, may challenge points in the reading, A level work
1*	Any 2 or 3 level post that is turned in after the forum closes

It is useful to assign 10 to 20 percent of the class assessment points for reading reflection posts. To convert the reflection scores to a value use in assignment of the final grade try the following. drop the two lowest reflection scores (this allows a student to miss two posting without being penalize) and total the rest to get the student's raw score. To convert this score to the final course reflection points determine an index number, e.g. what you would expect for a B performance. To get the index number multiply by 2 times (the total required posts -2, to compensate for dropping the two lowest scores), then then divide the students raw score the by index number and multiply this percentage by class assessment points for reading reflections. For example, if there are 12 required postings, than multiply  $2 \times (12-2) = 20$ , this give an index factor of 20. If a student raw score is 20; then raw score/index number =  $20/20 = 1$  and the student gets 100% of the course reading reflection assessment points, if the raw score is 15 then  $15/20 = 0.75$  and the student get 75% of the course reading reflection assessment points, if the raw score is 25 points then  $25/20 = 1.25$  and the student gets 125% of the course reading reflection assessment points. It is useful to allow students to submit late reflections since the process of writing reflections is a learning process and this eliminates having to deal with request for extensions or excuses for why it is late, in addition because the two lowest scores are dropped, there is no reason for extensions. The maximum score they can receive for each late post is one. Operationally it may be useful to close the discussion forum a minutes after the due time, and have a separate semester long forum entitled "Late Submissions" where they can post reflections that are past due.

## **2. Require Completion of a Short On-line Quiz or Questionnaire**

For undergraduate courses where much of the reading is from a textbook, you might require students to complete an on-line quiz based on the assigned reading. For example in a large introductory course (>100 students) one might use a LMS auto-graded multiple-choice questions. The purpose is to provide an incentive for students to open the textbook and read the assigned chapter. Based on instructor experience and student responses from end of the class surveys suggests that the biggest hurdle in getting students to read the textbook is to have them open it. On suggestion is to use MCQ questions from the end of the chapter or those provided by the publisher. Unfortunately, developing auto graded quiz questions using the LMS quiz tool can be time-consuming. It is generally a good idea to close the quiz 30 minutes before the start of class and those students who miss it forfeit the participation point(s).

## **3. Give Students Choice in the Assigned Readings**

A third way to help incentivize student reading of assigned texts, is to reduce the amount of text they need to read, while this sounds counterproductive in fact it can be quite useful. One approach is to assign 3 to 4 readings and allow students to choose one or two and reflect on

those. While not every student will have read every assigned reading, enough students will have read each of the readings so that it is possible to hold a discussion on each of them. Moreover, since the student posted reflections that are available to all students every student has the opportunity, through the work of their peer, to see the key points of each of the readings. In my graduate courses this has worked exceedingly well and was greatly appreciated by the students. It also provides feedback on which items they chose to read, this in combination the reflections helped to determine which of the readings are most useful for the next time the course is taught.



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