

Motivating Students to Do the Reading

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Assign the reading at least two sessions before it will be discussed. Give students ample time to prepare and try to pique their curiosity about the reading: "This article is one of my favorites, and I'll be interested to see what you think about it." (Sources: Lowman, 1984; "When They Don't Do the Reading," 1989)

Assign study questions. Hand out study questions that alert students to the key points of the reading assignment. To provide extra incentive for students, tell them you will base exam questions on the study questions. (Source: "When They Don't Do the Reading," 1989) Encourage students to discuss questions with classmates outside of class. For departments supported by the Teaching Fellow Program, this is a great opportunity to have students discuss the material with someone in their discipline outside the class.

If your class is small, have students turn in brief notes on the day's reading that they can use during exams. At the start of each class, a professor in the physical sciences asks students to submit a 3" x 5" card with an outline, definitions, key ideas, or other material from the day's assigned reading. After class, he checks the cards and stamps them with his name. He returns the cards to students at a class session prior to the midterm. Students can then add any material they would like to the cards but cannot submit additional cards. The cards are again returned to the faculty member who distributes them to students during the test. This faculty member reports that the number of students completing the reading jumped from 10 percent to 90 percent and that students especially valued these "survival cards." (Source: Daniel, 1988)

Ask students to write a one-word journal or one-word sentence. Angelo (1991) describes the one-word journal as follows: students are asked to choose a single word that best summarizes the reading and then write a page or less explaining or justifying their word choice. This assignment can then be used as a basis for class discussion. A variation reported by Erickson and Strommer (1991) is to ask students to write one complex sentence in answer to a question you pose about the readings and provide three sources of supporting evidence: "In one sentence, identify the type of ethical reasoning Singer uses in his article 'Famine, Affluence, and Morality.' Quote three passages that reveal this type of ethical reasoning" (p. 125).

Ask nonthreatening questions about the reading. Initially pose general questions that do not create tension or feelings of resistance: "Can you give me one or two items from the chapter that seem important?" "What section of the reading do you think we should review?" "What item in the reading surprised you?" "What topics in the chapter can you apply to your own experience?" (Source: "When They Don't Do the Reading," 1989)

Prepare an exam question on undiscussed readings. One faculty member asks her class whether they have done the reading. If the answer is no, she says, "You'll have to read the material on your own. Expect a question on the next exam covering the reading." The next time she assigns reading, she reminds the class of what happened the last time, and the students come to class prepared. (Source: "When They Don't Do the Reading," 1989)

Give a written assignment to those students who have not done the reading. Some faculty ask at the beginning of the class who has completed the reading. Students who have not read the material are given a written assignment and dismissed. Those who have read the material stay and participate in class discussion. The written assignment is not graded but merely acknowledged. This technique should not be used more than once a term. (Source: "When They Don't Do the Reading," 1989)