Establishing a Positive Atmosphere

Faculty can maximize their first-day impact by planning an engaging activity that demonstrates their interest in students' learning and well-being using an activity that encourages reflection on creating a supportive classroom environment. Borrowing from Brookfield's (2012) "chalk talk" exercise, I pose a series of introductory questions on different white boards around the room:

What aspects of this class most excite (or worry) you?

What topics in this class most interest you?

What can I do to facilitate your learning?

What classroom ground rules would encourage your engagement in this class?

Armed with plenty of markers, I ask students to write responses to the questions or to other students' responses. I encourage them to draw arrows or lines between similar responses, to circle or add asterisks to statements with which they strongly agree, or to draw question marks next to statements about which they're uncertain. With many students writing simultaneously, anonymity is more or less assured.

I review responses to at least some items and prompt students for greater specificity in their responses, e.g., Can you help me understand what 'respectful' means? What behaviors would you consider 'rude'? I make notes on the board with these added details, occasionally adding my own thoughts, e.g., my belief that classroom "engagement" comes in many forms – not only through making comments but also in actively listening, talking to other students or me after class, asking questions, or contributing to online discussion (a perspective that sometimes surprises students). I conclude by taking pictures of all the boards.

Prior to the second class meeting, I translate comments into a coherent document and add this to our course management page. I show the document to students, encouraging feedback. For the classroom atmosphere question, I ask for agreement with the behaviors spelled out in the document. I then make an effort to refer back to the document over the course of the semester, both privately (to ensure I'm doing what students asked of me!) and in class (to remind students of our agreed-upon norms).

References/Resources

Brookfield, S. D. (2012). *Teaching for critical thinking: Tools and techniques to help students question their assumptions.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Hermann, A. D., Foster, D. A., & Hardin, E. E. (2010). Does the first week of class matter? A quasi-experimental investigation of student satisfaction. *Teaching of Psychology, 37,* 79–84.

McGinley, J. J., & Jones, B. D. (2014). A brief instructional intervention to increase students' motivation on the first day of class. *Teaching of Psychology, 41,* 158-162.

Abridged from a teaching tip submitted by

Melissa J. Himelein, University of North Carolina, Asheville

Best Class/Worst Class

As instructors, most of us feel the need to set some rules and procedures before the start of the semester and include them in the course outline. However, many of the habits and behaviors that help create a good learning environment are more matters of shared norms than rules. The "Best Class/Worst Class" activity is a way to build a shared consensus around some of the daily behaviors that can help build—or inhibit-- cooperation and community.   Early in the semester, put a simple grid like this on the board or a slide. Then lead a discussion about what students remember about the behaviors that characterized the "best" and "worst" classes they have attended in the past. If students offer generalizations like "being rude" or "caring about students," it's helpful to prompt them for a more specific comment by asking, "What did that look like?" If students are shy about offering ideas, they can work in small groups. Record students' ideas, prompting for additional ideas where necessary. Feel free to add an idea or two of your own, but don't take over the activity. Together, decide on several high priority behaviors to embrace and avoid. Circle them. Occasionally refer back to the chart—both when things are going well and not so well.

Instructor's Actions	Best Class	Worst Class
Students' Actions	Best Class	Worst Class

Leverage Your LMS Tools to Get Weekly Feedback from Your Students

"I never teach my students, I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn."

--Albert Einstein

Do students have opportunities to meet each other and work together outside of class? How did that last midterm go – did students have enough direction on what to study? Are your PowerPoint slides clear or are there ways they can be improved to help students learn? What was the most valuable thing students learned this week?

Often we wait for the end of course student evaluations to learn what students have been thinking about our class, and by then it is too late to address any concerns or make adjustments.

- o A simple strategy you can use to get feedback on your teaching and student learning (weekly or at whatever interval you desire) is to set-up a questionnaire that students can complete **anonymously** to give you feedback through your Learning Management System (LMS).
- o In Blackboard the survey tool will allow you to do this—it's located in the area called "tests, surveys and Pools."
- o This process can be as simple as asking one question at the end of each week – "Tell me something valuable you learned this week?" or "What do you wish we had time to discuss more of from this past week?"
- o Ask the same question weekly or modify to get feedback on a variety of areas of your course.

However, if you choose to do this, you must also commit yourself to addressing the feedback! Report back to students in the following class session what you hear from them, thank them for their feedback, and respond accordingly.

A teaching tip submitted by:
Jess Gregg, University of California, Los Angeles

Universal Response Techniques

In a famous comment, Arthur Chickering and Zelda Gamson point out that "learning is not a spectator sport." So it's useful to find ways to encourage more students to participate during class. Simply asking questions may not work because typically just the "usual suspects" reply.

Using a few universal response activities is a good alternative. As the name suggests, these are activities that make it simple—and low risk-- for all students to respond. Clicker questions are a common universal response activity, and free aps like *Socrative* or *Kahoot* allow students to use their phones as clickers. But here are three no-tech options that can be easily used on the spur of the moment.

- o ***Thumbs up/Thumbs down***. Students use this gesture to respond to a yes/no question. It's a good idea to ask students to hold their thumbs close to the chest to discourage copy-cat responses. A simple true/false question can check understanding of the material that's already been presented. But yes/no questions can be used to prompt more sophisticated thinking, too. For example, such questions can address what is most urgent in a clinical situation or what might happen if one event or variable changes.
- o ***Line up***. Post a provocative statement and ask students to line up showing how much they agree or disagree. For example, students might create a line across the front of the classroom standing near the door if they agree and near the window if they don't. This activity encourages participation in two ways. First, students informally talk to others to find their position in the line. Second, the instructor can ask a few students to explain why they stand where they do. In a variation, students can be asked to put their name on a post-it note and place it close to or far from a provocative statement.
- o ***Four Corners.*** Label the corners of the room "strongly agree," "agree," "disagree," and "strongly disagree" and then present a provocative statement or ethical dilemma. Students go to the corner of the room that best represents their view. In their corners, student might be asked to decide on the three best arguments in support of their view or one argument supporting and one opposing their view.

Do you want more ideas on this topic? The Angelo and Cross book is still widely used and can be borrowed from the CTL library.
Angelo, T. A. & Cross, K. P. (1993). *Classroom assessment techniques: A handbook for college teachers.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Start with Healthy Skepticism

A recent *Wall Street Journal* article (Nov 21, 2016) shared the findings of a Stanford University research study: most students don't know when news is fake.

The research studied "nearly 8,000 students (from grammar school through college)" and examined their abilities to differentiate between news and opinions and to examine source bias. For example, a majority of students "couldn't see any valid reason to mistrust a post written by a bank executive arguing that young adults need more financial-planning help." The full *WSJ* article can be read here, and the Stanford research report Executive Summary can be found on this site.

For those who assign research projects or who teach critical thinking skills, Stanford has developed activities and assessments that can be shared with students to generate discussion. These assessments and activities examine the following:
- o Evaluating an article
- o Researching a controversial claim
- o Determining website reliability
- o Identifying strengths and weaknesses in online videos
- o Evaluating social media claims (from page six of the executive summary).

Sample assessment activities, along with rubrics and explanations, can be found on pages 9, 16, and 21-22 of the Executive Study and are easy to print and use in class. These kinds of discussions may be particularly important early in the semester before assigning research projects and papers. Additionally, the article argues that librarians' expertise in media and information literacy cannot be undervalued and can be greatly beneficial to both faculty and students.

The *WSJ* article states, "by age 18, 88% of young adults regularly get news from *Facebook* and other social media, according to a 2015 study of 1,045 adults ages 18 to 34 by the Media Insight Project." In recommendations that are relevant to all of us, the article suggests the following:
- o "Rather than trusting the 'about' section of a website to learn about it, [use]…'lateral reading'— leaving the website almost immediately after landing on it and research the organization or author."
- o Realize that "a top ranking on Google doesn't mean an article is trustworthy. The rankings are based on several factors, including popularity," and readers "should learn to evaluate sources' reliability based on whether they're named, independent and well-informed or authoritative."
- o When using social media sites, "Posts should cite multiple sources, and the information should be verifiable elsewhere."

A teaching tip submitted by
Dr. Connie Ruzich, Robert Morris University

Problems with Problem Solving Instruction--Keep It Brief!

Often as teachers it is hard for us to watch our students struggle, or easy for us to give away too much of the answer in hints during problem solving exercises. Unfortunately, giving too much help to students during problem solving endeavors reduces their own confidence and can make them dependent on being told how to solve problems, rather than developing the critical problem solving skills themselves.

So what's the solution to your problem solving problems? Asking brief questions!

When your student appears stuck or asks for help, ask brief diagnostic questions, like "What do you think the next step is?" or "What's your end goal, again?" or "Tell me what considerations you've already made and what's missing?"

Asking these kinds of question tests students' understanding of the problem and their thinking strategies. Most of the time, students will realize their own error once they are asked to think of the process, and the rest of the time, students can be guided back to the right path by more questions about content, like, "What did we learn about last week? How would that apply?" and so on.

In this way, our instruction is still helpful without crippling our students' ability to think critically on their own!

A teaching tip written by:
Kate Carnevale, FSU Graduate Student

Submitted by:
Lisa Liseno, Florida State University

Retrieval Practice

As E. M. Forster points out, "Unless we remember, we cannot understand." Even as we try to develop our students' power as critical thinkers, we must also keep in mind that memory is the foundation of learning.   Recent research supports the idea that answering questions about new material—engaging in "retrieval practice" —does more to promote long-term retention than rereading. And because college students report highlighting and rereading as their principle study strategies, retrieval practice can become an important tool for student success.

The most obvious use of retrieval practice involves building frequent low-stakes quizzes into a course, especially where technology can help with the grading. However, today I'd like to describe three simple, ungraded activities that also provide retrieval practice.
   o   Begin class by asking students to recall, without checking their notes, what they learned in the previous session.
   o   Pause every fifteen minutes or so and ask students to share with a partner the important points made so far, a personal example of the principle under discussion, or their own definition of a key term.
   o   End class with a "one-minute paper," a short and anonymous paragraph that explains the main point of the day's class and mentions any lingering questions.

Retrieval practice is easy to implement, but a few simple techniques can help us make the most of it. First, as retrieval practice is most helpful if done regularly, it's wise to select strategies that fit our personal teaching styles. Also, while answering any kind of question aids retention, open-ended questions are more powerful than multiple-choice items. Finally, to help students commit, instructors can explain how retrieval practice can enhance their learning.

Here are three good sources that discuss retrieval practice.
Brown, P. C., Roediger, H. L. & McDaniel , M. A. (2014). *Make it stick: The science of successful learning.* Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard UP.
 This is a very readable and practical account of recent research into memory.

Lang, J. M. (2016). *Small teaching: Everyday lessons from the science of learning.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
        Lang emphasizes research-based teaching strategies that are easy to implement; two of the ideas mentioned above came from his chapter on retrieval practice.
Putnam, A. L., Sungkhasette, V. W. & Roediger, H. L. (2016). Optimizing learning in college: Tips from cognitive psychology. *Perspectives on Psychological Science 11(5),* 652-660. DOI: 10.1177/1745691616645770.
        Written for students, this article explains why research-based study strategies like retrieval practice work, even though they may initially feel less effective than familiar approaches.

A teaching tip submitted by:
Susan Hall, University of the Incarnate Word

Strategy for Collecting Mid-Semester Student Feedback

Collecting feedback a few weeks into your course is a great way to see how things are going and demonstrates to your students that you care about their concerns and ideas. One simple strategy you can use is called "Start-Stop-Continue". It takes about 15 minutes of class time.

Ask the students to take out a piece of paper (or you can create a shared Google document/spreadsheet to work in) and have them answer the following questions (stress the anonymity of the process and that you are only interested in understanding how things are going and whether you should consider making any changes):

1. What can we **start** doing to improve your learning in this class?
2. Is there anything we should **stop** doing that is making it difficult for you to learn in this class?
3. What should we **continue** doing that is helping you to learn in this class?

Framing the questions around their learning helps keep students focused when responding.

Collect and process the students' responses (organizing them into a table or spreadsheet can be helpful). During the next class period, take some time at the beginning to discuss the results with your students. Topics might include:

- Suggestions from students you are willing to act on and how you intend to do so
- Suggestions from students that you are not willing to act on and **why**
- Any contradictory responses (e.g., some students say the textbook is helpful, others say that it is not). Ask more probing questions to get clarification on these discrepancies.

Collecting this feedback benefits both you and your students because it helps you to identify problem issues while you are teaching the class, rather than after the class is over (which is often the case with more formal end of semester evaluations). It also helps build good will with your students and shows them that you value their opinions and ideas.

One important caveat is that if you collect midsemester feedback, you **must** respond to students' input. Asking for their feedback and then not processing it in a meaningful way may alienate students and potentially damage any rapport you've built with them throughout the semester. I've found that if you engage in this process earnestly with students, they generate really insightful, helpful suggestions for improving the course.

A teaching tip submitted by:
Kristi J. Verbeke, Wake Forest University

Designing Interactive Lectures that Make the Most of Students' Attention Spans

We've all been there, diligently "covering" the day's content as we watch our students' eyes glaze over. Lecture remains common because it allows course content to be shared with a large audience in a timely manner, it enables teachers to control which content is elaborated and which content is de-emphasized, and it engages students in real-time, oral delivery of information that creates a multi-modal learning experience when paired with prior reading and simultaneous notetaking and discussion (Charlton, 2006; Kelly, 2017). Although lecture should never be used exclusively, it can be used effectively when teachers understand their students' attention spans.

Bunce, Flens, and Neiles (2010) used clickers to monitor college students' attention spans during a chemistry lecture. They found that lapses in college students' attention typically last less than one minute and occur roughly 30 seconds, 5.5 minutes, 13.5 minutes, and 21.5 minutes into a lecture. After 22 minutes, students' attention lapses about every two minutes (Briggs, 2014). Knowing approximately when students are likely to "zone out," teachers can design their lectures to accommodate students' attention spans:

During the first 1 or 2 minutes: Open the lecture with a brief "warm up" activity, such as a multiple choice question, a problem, or a short story or example that reviews previous content or previews current content.

Around the 5 minute and 13 minute marks: Stop lecturing and engage students in a brief, interactive activity such as:

- Pause-and-think: Pose a question or assign a simple task (e.g., Think of a first-hand example of sociocultural learning theory from your childhood.) Allow 2-3 minutes for students to share their examples with a classmate – and one or two examples with the entire class – before continuing with the lecture.
- Think-write-discuss: In preparation for the lecture, prepare three questions: 1) a motivational question, 2) a question seeking clarification about a specific point, and 3) a reflective question such as, what is the most interesting thing you learned today? Open the lecture with the first question, pose the second question mid-lecture, and close with the third question. Direct students to respond to each question in writing
- Collaborate-and-apply: Before the lecture begins, assign students to small working groups. After lecturing on a specific point or concept for up to 13 minutes, assign a lecture-specific question, problem, or task to each group. Allow 5-20 minutes for students to complete their assignment and share their outcomes with the class before continuing the lecture.

Around the 21 minute mark: End the lecture while student attention remains strong and engage students in activities that emphasize some type of active learning or practice.

Resources:

Briggs, S. (2014, June 28). The science of attention: How to capture and hold the attention of easily distracted students. Retrieved from http://www.opencolleges.edu.au/informed/features/30-tricks-for-capturing-students-attention/

Bunce, D. M., Flens, E. A. & Neiles, K. Y. (2010) How long can students pay attention in class? A study of student attention decline using clickers. *Journal of Chemical Education 87,* 1438-1443. Retrieved from http://pubs.acs.org/doi/pdf/10.1021/ed100409p

Charlton, B. G. (2006). Lectures are an effective teaching method because the exploit human evolved 'human nature' to improve learning. Retrieved from https://www.hedweb.com/bgcharlton/ed-lect.html

Kelly, M. (2017, February 21). Lecture pros and cons. Retrieved from https://www.thoughtco.com/lecture-pros-and-cons-8037

Abridged from a teaching tip submitted by:

Jana Hunzicker, Bradley University

Who Cares about Metacognition?

"You can observe a lot by just watching" --Yogi Berra

Metacognition is conscious awareness of our own thinking. When we watch our own thinking, we note how we plan, monitor, and evaluate our own learning. Those of us with a low tolerance for jargon may be tempted to stop reading right now, but an important NIH study suggests that considering metacognition is worth our time. *How Learning Works,* a massive synthesis of important work in the sciences of learning, points to metacognitive teaching approaches as one of the three most effective ways to increase learning. Metacognitive teaching strategies share an important similarity: they prompt students to reflect on *how* they are learning, as well as *what* they are learning. Let's look at three:

- **Add a "wrap":** A wrap is a short reflection attached to an existing assignment. For instance, after writing a paper students might attach a paragraph describing the challenges of the task and how well they addressed them. Or after receiving a graded exam, students might complete a form that helps them to connect their study strategies with their performance and to consider what changes might be in order.

- **Ask about the muddiest point:** At the end of class, students briefly reflect on what has been covered and write down what still seems unclear, the day's muddiest point. The instructor collects these short, anonymous statements and revisits them at the start of the next class by clearing up a common misconception or inviting the class to consider what is so challenging about a specific topic.

- **Do a pre- and post-assessment:** Make a list of five true/false statements that address the session's important concepts. At the start of class, students mark these true or false. At the end of class, they revisit the statements, possibly adjusting their answers. Ask students to share with a partner one place where their thinking changed and what prompted that change.

To make metacognitive strategies work, two things are worth keeping in mind. By the time students get to us, many have internalized the idea that the only important thing about learning is getting the right answer. For that reason, it's useful to be explicit—and probably repeatedly explicit--about why we are asking them to reflect on how their learning process is going. In addition, many students' greatest fear about school is looking foolish because they have made a mistake. Since metacognitive approaches demand that we own our errors and false starts, establishing a safe classroom climate is crucial.

Here are three on-line sources with good ideas for metacognitive teaching approaches.

Chick, N. (2017). "Metacognition," Retrieved from https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/metacognition/

Freeman, S. M. (2014). "Exam Wrappers." Retrieved from https://teachingcommons.stanford.edu/teaching-talk/exam-wrappers

Jaschik, S. (2011). "Can Students Learn to Learn?" Retrieved from https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2011/01/31/colleges_try_to_use_metacognition_to_improve_student_learning

Teaching through Debate

"The essence of free speech is that we allow people with whom we disagree to speak."
Robert Sharpe of the Worldwide Writers' Association, PEN International.

Develop a short, 15 question "opinionnaire" that is an easily gradable quiz on an issue that you want students to examine in class. Create a Likert scale quiz that has 15 questions. Students get 4 points for a Strongly Agree, 3 Points for an Agree, 2 points for Undecided, 1 point for Disagree, and 0 points for a Strongly Disagree. This will result in a range of student scores from 0 to 60 points.

Have students take and self-grade the opinionnaire.   Divide the students by score into thirds. There will be a high score group, a medium score group, and low score group.

Give the three groups some time to discuss the issue at hand (possibly in remote breakout rooms) and develop arguments for or against the issue under discussion. Each group selects a spokesperson.

Bring the students back together (if you separated them into rooms previously) and have the three spokespersons sit in the middle. The spokespersons have a conversation/debate about the issue presenting their best arguments to support their positions.

After the spokespersons are done talking ask the middle score group to vote via a secret ballot on which side they will join if forced to join either the high score or low score group. Display the results of the middle score group voting.

Ask volunteers from the middle score group if they want to explain what elements they found persuasive in the arguments of the high score group or the low score group. Have a class-wide discussion of the issue and what was learned via this exercise.

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A teaching tip submitted by:
Dr. Harold A. Laurence, IV, The Army University, Fort Leavenworth

Providing Feedback that Helps

Feedback is essential to learning, or as Ken Blanchard puts it, "Feedback is the breakfast of champions." The kind of feedback that really works has three important characteristics.

- **It's timely**. When we wait too long to give feedback, neither we nor our students remember much about the original work. Giving prompt feedback is difficult, but these things may help:
  - Focus the feedback on just a few things that really matter.
  - Use a rubric.
  - Give the whole class feedback on common issues you noticed in a recent assignment and ask students to reflect on which comment is most relevant to their work.
  - Have students give each other feedback; using a rubric usually improves the quality of student feedback.

- **It's specific.** Useful feedback points out specific strengths or weaknesses. Compare these two comments on a student's literature review:
  - This first comment is specific enough to guide efforts at improvement: "The section on cognitive approaches is well organized around major themes and includes the important citations, but your treatment of behaviorist approaches just summarizes studies in insolation. Before you rewrite that section, ask yourself how studies could be grouped and what major themes unite each group."
  - This more general comment would be much less helpful: "This lit review is rather spotty. It includes some but not all of the citations I expected to see.   Also, sometimes I wondered what your central point was. Try revising this to be clearer and more complete. You might also add more on behaviorism."

- **It's goal-oriented**. The point of feedback is to prompt improvement.
  - Link comments to the goals of the assignment.
  - Make the comments when there is still time for students to make improvements.
  - Here's an example: "The point of this journal is to connect your field experience with classroom readings. Your first two entries did that well, but the third entry just summarized what you did that week at the agency. As you write the next entries, reread each one and look for places where you make an explicit connection to class readings."

Interested in exploring alternative ways to provide useful feedback to students? These resources are both available in the CTL library.

Angelo, T. A. & Cross, K. P. (1993). *Classroom assessment techniques: A handbook for college teachers.* (2nd ed.) San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Barkley, E. F. & Major, C.H. (2016). *Learning assessment techniques: A handbook for college faculty.* San Francisco: John Wiley and Sons.

Responding to Challenging Comments in Class with the ACTION Framework

Despite the feelings of paralysis that take over when a student makes a comment in class that seems inappropriate or offensive, certain practices can help maintain a positive learning environment. Consider using a communication framework such as ACTION to inquire about intent, reduce tension, explore impact, and offer a positive direction. The steps below provide a guide on how to take ACTION.

Ask clarifying questions to assist with understanding intentions.
"I want to make sure that I understand what you were saying. Were you saying that…?"

Carefully listen to their response.
● If they disagree with your paraphrase and clarify a different meaning, you could end the conversation. If you suspect they are trying to "cover their tracks," you may consider making a statement about the initial comment.
"I'm glad to hear I misunderstood you, because, as you know, such comments can be…"
● If they agree with your paraphrase, explore their intent behind making the comment.
"Can you tell me what you were you hoping to communicate with that comment?"
"Can you please help me understand what you meant by that?"

Tell others what you observed as problematic in a factual manner.
"I noticed that . . ."

Impact exploration: ask for, or state, the potential impact of such a statement or action on others.
"What do you think people think when they hear that type of comment?"
"As you know, everything speaks. What message do you think such a comment sends?"

Own your own thoughts and feelings around the impact.
"When I hear your comment I think/feel…"
"That comment can perpetuate negative stereotypes and assumptions about…"
"Such negative comments can cause division and defensiveness. I would like to think that is not your intent."

Next steps: Request appropriate action be taken.
"Our class is a learning community, and such comments make it difficult for us to focus on learning because people feel offended. So I am going to ask you to refrain from stating your thoughts in that manner in the future. Can you do that please?"
"I encourage you to revisit your view on X as we discuss these issues more in class."

When practiced, the ACTION framework can be a tool that is quickly retrieved out of your mental toolbox to organize your thoughts and describe the situation in a way that cools down the tension. When students make comments that are offensive or inappropriate in the classroom, doing nothing is a damaging option (Souza, Vizenor, Sherlip, & Raser, 2016). Instead, we can engage thoughtfully and purposively in strategies that maintain a positive climate that is conducive to learning and models the skills needed during difficult conversations (Souza, 2016).

Read More about the ACTION Framework:

Cheung, F., Ganote, C. M., Souza, T.J. (2016). "Microaggressions and Microresistance: Supporting and Empowering Students." In Faculty Focus Special Report: Diversity and Inclusion in the College Classroom. Madison, WI: Magna Publication.

Souza, T.J. (2016). Managing Hot Moments in the Classroom: Concrete Strategies for Cooling Down Tension. In Faculty Focus Special Report: Diversity and Inclusion in the College Classroom. Magna Publication.

Abridged from a teaching tip submitted by:
Tasha Souza, Boise State University

Informal Writing

Informal writing is typically done in class to encourage students to explore an important idea. These activities are short (3 to 15 minutes long) and unedited; students responses to a prompt might be as short as a word and rarely longer than a paragraph.   Why bother, you may be asking yourself. To learn anything, we must actively process the new material, and informal writing helps students to move from passively listening to actively engaging with class content. When we use informal writing, it's helpful to explain to students how it can enhance their learning. Here are some simple ways to add informal writing to a class session:

- At the beginning of class, students can list the most important things they learned in the last session. If they do this without consulting their notes, they are engaging in the kind of retrieval practice that helps build long-term learning. Various students might share one idea from their lists until the key ideas from the previous session have been mentioned.
- During a lecture, students might define a key term in their own words, generate their own example of a concept, or pose a question. They might share their responses in small groups, or a few students might read what they wrote to the whole class.
- After a small group activity, students can be asked to relate what they did to an important idea for the day. For instance, we might show a short passage from the assigned reading on a slide and ask students to write a few sentences relating their conversation to that quotation.
- At the end of class, students can be invited to write a "minute paper" explaining the central point of the session and describing what remains unclear to them. We collect these anonymous papers and begin the next class by addressing important questions and misconceptions.

What about grading? In general, the more we explicitly connect informal writing to the work of a class session, the less grading we will need to do. Some informal writing assignments are never graded, for instance a "minute paper" and its cousin "the muddiest point." Most of us will choose to grade some of the informal writing, to help students see that we take it seriously. When we choose to grade, it's fine to be selective, choosing assignments that seem particularly important.   Because of its unedited and exploratory nature, most people grade informal writing lightly, perhaps giving a check or a single point for an acceptable entry and counting these grades as participation points. If we make a comment, one related to the content is more suitable than one about mechanics or writing style.

Do you want to read more about informal writing?

Bean, J. (2011). *Engaging ideas: The professor's guide to integrating writing, critical thinking and active leaning in the classroom.* 2nd. ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Flash, P. (2015).   Informal, in-class writing activities.
http://writing.umn.edu/tww/assignments/informal.html

Helping Students Prepare for Final Exams

Research reveals a pretty dispiriting picture of how college students prepare for exams. About 80% of students depend almost entirely on rereading material—particularly previously highlighted textbook passages—and they do most of that work a day or two before the exam.   In short, there is a stampede toward largely ineffective study practices. This common emphasis on rereading and cramming largely ignores psychologists' current understandings of how learning works. Here are three simple ways students can study more effectively.

- *Spread the studying out*. It's best to start studying 10 to 14 days before a final exam and to study each subject a moderate amount (45 to 60 minutes) each day. In between study sessions, a little bit of material will be forgotten, but the effort of recalling anchors it more firmly in memory. And with each pass over the material, less is forgotten.
- *Emphasize quizzing over rereading*. Excessive rereading is dangerous. The material starts to look familiar—and it's easy to mistake familiarity for knowing or understanding. Quizzing puts us in touch with what we really know or still need to learn. Flashcards are a good tool for quizzing; so is turning textbook headings into questions and answering them. Whatever the format, it's important to keep quizzing long enough. Answer a question correctly multiple times, in different orders, and on different days.
- *Go beyond rote learning*.   Rewording definitions, writing sample essays, coming up with additional examples of a concept, or making connections between the text and personal experience—these are examples of what psychologists call "elaboration." This richer approach to understanding can make it easier to retrieve material in stressful circumstances like an exam. Even if the goal is simple recall of key terms like "homeostasis" or "time value of money," elaboration helps.

One more piece of advice is useful. Our brains consolidate memories during sleep, so it's wise to get a good night's sleep before an exam.

If you want to know more about what does and doesn't work during study, here are two good sources:

Brown, P. C., Roediger, H. L. & McDaniel, M. A. (2014). *Make it stick: The science of successful learning.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Putnam, A. L., Sungkhasettee, V.W., & Roediger, H. L. (2016). Optimizing learning in college: Tips from cognitive psychology. *Perspectives on Psychological Science 11(5),* 652-660. doi: 10.1177/1745691616645770

FERPA in the Classroom

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) protects students' right to privacy in their education records. While FERPA has its complexities, here we will focus on areas where FERPA touches everyday faculty practice.

What's an education record? For faculty, here's a useful rule of thumb. If something contains a student's name plus an ID number or grade, it's an educational record and must be kept private. When we put a grade on a student's test or paper, we create an education record. When we use a roster with names and ID numbers, we are handling an education record. These records can be electronic or paper.

Here are a few good practices for keeping education records confidential:
- When returning graded work, hand assignments to each individual. Avoid emailing grades and instead refer students to the learning management system (Blackboard for most of us). If a student calls on the phone, ask a few questions to verify his or her identity before discussing grades.
- If using a sign-in sheet for attendance, be sure it includes just names—no ID numbers.
- Get a student's written authorization that references FERPA before writing a letter of recommendation with information about academic performance.
- If posting grades, devise a system that allows only the individual student to identify his or her grade; never include part of the Social Security number or post an alphabetical list.
- When disposing of graded tests and assignments, shred them.
- Be conscious of what appears on a computer screen or open grade book.

Parents who want to discuss their student's grade present a tricky issue. While university students have the right to keep their education records private from their parents, FERPA makes an exception for those who are dependents on parents' tax returns or have otherwise authorized the parent by written authorization. As faculty, we may not be able to determine if a specific conversation with parents would be legal, so it's a good idea to refer these requests to the Dean of Student Success or the academic dean of the area.

These resemble FERPA issues, but they aren't:
- Having students critique each other's work is a legal educational activity. Students don't give grades and they are not agents of the university, so no education record is created.
- Student work can be collected and analyzed as part of official program evaluations. FERPA specifically allows universities to conduct this kind of activity without asking students' permission.

Want to read more about FERPA?
"FERPA: What Faculty and Staff Need to Know" http://www.bc.edu/offices/stserv/ferpa_faculty.html

A teaching tip submitted by
Cynthia Escamilla, University of the Incarnate Word

Are Your Students Communicating Effectively?

"If you're in the presence of a true expert, you will understand everything they say. If you don't understand what someone is saying, they are not an expert." – Nido Qubein

As a graduate student going to one of my first conferences, I remember my advisor telling me that if I'd truly mastered my subject I'd be able to talk about it cogently in a variety of settings: in a 1-hour seminar, in a 5 minute conversation at a poster session; and in 2 minutes during a coffee break.
As a faculty member watching my students give presentations, that advice comes to mind again. Different formats require different skills. How could I help my students learn to communicate clearly, concisely, and confidently? And how could I help them learn from the presentations of their classmates, so that end-of-semester oral presentations truly were a valuable use of their time?

Establish the goals
For oral presentations at the end of the semester, take 15 minutes of class time 3–4 weeks in advance to talk about them. Lay out some possible strategies; discuss the framework of an effective presentation, and consider demonstrating "good" and "bad" techniques. This list of criteria is adapted from the AACU VALUE rubric on oral communication.
   o **Central Message:** What's the main point? Make it vivid. State it at the beginning and reiterate it at the end.
   o **Delivery Techniques:** Engage listeners by making eye contact. Modulate your voice to emphasize what's important. Don't read from slides or cards. (Yes, this may require practicing the talk a few times!)
   o **Language:** Clearly formed sentences reflect – and convey – a clear understanding of the topic. Use the terminology of the discipline correctly.
   o **Organization:** Presentations should be structured in the same way that a good essay might be. Include an introduction and overview of the main points. Separate the presentation into clear sections. Support main points with evidence. Summarize at the end, reiterating the main points.
   o **Supporting Materials:** These materials are most credible when they are relevant, link clearly to the topic, and are from reliable sources. Using a variety of supporting materials – a list of examples, diagrams of experiments, data tables, vivid images or quotations – further enhances credibility. Slides are designed to reinforce the organization of the talk, contain an appropriate amount of information, and use visual cues to indicate main ideas, details, and transitions.

Assess the presentations
To keep the student-listeners focused, state your expectations for them as well. Do you want them to ask questions, write a 1-paragraph summary of what they learned from each presentation, or add a list of questions they still have? Have students evaluate the quality of each presentation by answering two questions:
   o What did the speaker do in the presentation that was especially effective?
   o What might the speaker do differently to enhance his/her presentation?
These two questions will help students reflect on what makes a presentation effective and help them think differently about their own presentations. For maximum impact, compile the responses to the questions and give each student a list of the responses for their own presentation.

Resources:
AACU VALUE rubric for oral communication. Retrieved on 2/8/2017 from
http://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/oral-communication

Sample peer evaluation form for class presentations. (Modify as you like.)
https://www.dropbox.com/s/6vfhcb2c0icu1th/EvalForm.doc?dl=0

Abridged from a teaching tip submitted by:
Francine Glazer, New York Institute of Technology