



Prepared Students

Purpose

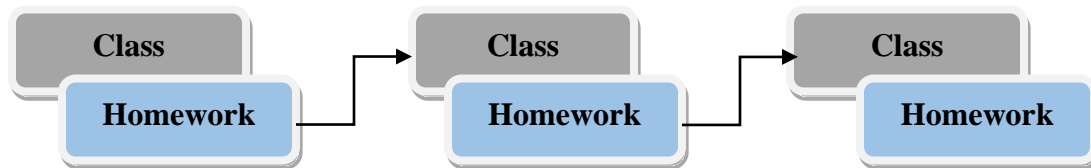
Preparation is the first step in the learning process for students. Before students can achieve deep learning, or effectively share their learning, they must qualify themselves through appropriate preparation.

Description

Student preparation work is designed, guided, and aided by the instructor, but the impetus for actually doing the work is on the student. Students rely on the help of the instructor to show them how to successfully prepare. The instructor defines the questions framing the assignment, provides support materials like worksheets, reading questions or the like, and the instructor defines both the way in which students are expected to engage the new material and how it will be assessed.

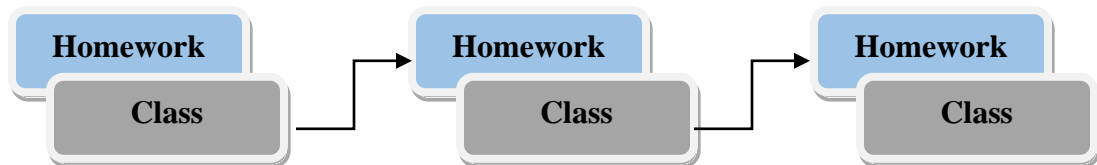
A common pattern for student engagement begins with the class lecture, followed by a homework assignment to review the material covered in class.

Traditional Student Behavior



A better learning model suggests that students prepare before class so they can better benefit from and contribute to in-class learning and teaching experiences.

Prepared Student Behavior



This approach shifts student effort so that introductory or foundational knowledge is studied before the class meeting. Class time is then used for activities designed to deepen the level of understanding from simple recall to comprehension and application. Even in this model, homework is a common follow-up to what was discussed in class, but focuses more on preparation activities.

Role Changes

From the student perspective, such a change might seem to affect only whether the student studies before or after a class. From the instructor perspective, however, the change requires a whole new way of thinking about instruction. Designing ways for students to prepare new content before class allows the instructor to spend class time not in transmitting information, but in helping students come to understand at much deeper levels.

Requiring more of students early in the process allows the instructor to spend time deepening understanding rather than dispensing information. The earlier the student effort relative to the classroom experience, the higher the level of learning achieved.



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Prepared Students vs. Student Preparation

Getting students to engage in pre-class preparation is easy to say, but harder to achieve. This is because student preparation encompasses at least two areas. Students need to prepare the homework, but they also need to prepare themselves as people. Getting the most from a classroom experience requires personal student characteristics such as desire, motivation, and perseverance. Part of our purpose is to help students develop the understanding, the desires and the skills relative to their studies that will allow them to learn. We expect students to prepare for our classes. Students expect us to help them prepare both for their disciplines and for their future. Insisting on rigorous preparation for a classroom experiences helps students gain a deeper understanding of the material, and how to ask for help in aid of their learning.

Develop a Culture of Preparation

Instructors who are more successful developing prepared students and getting students to prepare, are so because they develop a course culture where students feel responsible to come prepared. Such a culture fosters community among the students as class goals are established and pursued. Four key principles are essential in establishing and maintaining this learning culture:

- **Explain why.** Help students understand how their investment in preparation can pay large dividends in learning for themselves and their peers.
- **Show how.** Be explicit about how preparation fits into the learning architecture of the course. Show how class sessions build upon preparation to deepen student learning or bridge and develop ideas from one class to another.
- **Keep preparation relevant.** Preparation should be necessary to understand classroom activities.
- **Always hold students accountable.** If students are unprepared, do not bail them out. Build incentives into the course structure for student preparation and have consequences for the lack thereof.

Examples

Before Class

- **Structured online interaction.** Use forums, quizzes or discussion boards to engage students with material before class.
- **Learning groups.** Structure face-to-face learning groups that interact with the content material.

During Class

- **Build lesson plans around prepared students.** This will leverage the learning from preparation activities.
- **Allow students to demonstrate preparation by**
 - Mutual peer tutoring
 - Student presentations
 - Questioning, discussion, etc.
 - Cold calling
 - Group work
- **Processing preparation.** Refresh and reframe student preparation with learning activities that build up to new material and lesson outcomes.
- **Comment on pre-class online assignments.** Reference specific students' statements from their online preparation. Motivation increases when they know you draw upon their preparation.



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Tips

- **Preparation material must be purposeful and given in appropriate amounts.** Align preparation with learning outcomes. Gauge the time required and maintain appropriate bounds.
- **Always check preparation.** Students will be quick to regress to poor habits in the absence of oversight. Re-establishing the culture can be more difficult than developing it in the first place.
- **Consider attaching a percentage of the overall grade to preparation.** Some faculty assign between 10-25% of the grade to preparation.

Pitfalls

- **Irrelevant preparation.** Students are quickly turned off by pre-class “busy work.”
- **Not setting the example.** If students detect that you are behind or unprepared for class, they may justify themselves for coming less prepared.

Resources

Felder, R.M., Brent, R., (1996). Navigating the bumpy road to student-centered instruction. *College Teaching*, 44(2), 43-52.

Wiggins, G. P. (2004). *Assessment as Feedback*. New Horizons for Learning.