

Getting Your Students Ready for Exams



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Discussion

When is a good time to first address the exam with students? Why is this a good time?
How do you approach the subject?

My notes:

Beginning the Year Right!

Establish good habits from the beginning

- Seminar expectations should parallel assignments and exam
- Assign specific seminar questions
- Facilitate discussion with exam in mind

Students will only write exams according to what they've experienced all year. Keeping a well organized seminar will keep students prepared.

Tips:

- Discussion should be as coherent as what is expected on the exam. Make an effort to get everyone talking and discussing – intervene with questions that bring student understanding to a higher level.
- Being able to establish good habits from the beginning eases stress levels for you and your students when exams start.
- Consider assigning specific seminar questions, or gearing discussions that will guide your students to the same kind of understanding of the topic that you want to see in their exams.

Get to Know Your Students

It is important to understand what kinds of learners you are working with.

Visual? Auditory? Tactile?
Consider:

- group work
- mini-lectures from TA
- weekly questions to direct discussion
- regular reviews of important material from lecture

*NOTE: As a TA you are aware of what the students should be learning in order to be ready for their exam. Gearing the course towards the end goal – an overall understanding of content which will give the students adequate preparation for their exams – is something that you can actively work towards all year long.

Giving Feedback

Making the extra effort to give feedback helps your students, but it also helps you to see what areas you could spend more time reviewing in class. It might take more work, but keeping track of students' grades, strengths, and weaknesses really help your students understand what they need to do to get prepared for the exam.

Tips for Giving Feedback

- Update and inform your students of current marks for assignments AND participation.
- Offer **specific** comments regarding what was done well and what needs more work.
- Give feedback to your seminar group as a whole on strengths and weaknesses that are common.

Tips for Tracking Seminar Participation

Prepare attendance and tracking sheets to identify and track targeted behaviours.

| Name | Present | Engaged | Used Examples | Explained Thinking | Significance | Insightful | Grade /10 |
|------|---------|---------|---------------|--------------------|--------------|------------|-----------|
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Helping Students Help Themselves!

Keeping students informed of their progress during the year helps keep them ready for the exam. It also helps you gear their work towards what they should be learning overall – however some students don't always respond to your efforts.

- Offering a mid-semester progress report with the students' grades and offering a few lines regarding their participation and assignment strengths/weaknesses does take extra time but some students will appreciate it!
- Encourage students to come to your office during office hours to discuss their work AND their marks. This discussion gives them the opportunity to improve. They can find out and improve weak areas before the exam.
- Regarding **participation**: students seldom know if their participation is adequate and would appreciate knowing their status. Knowing how to get those extra marks now can help ease student anxiety later.

Doing a Review

Why Offer a Review?

Offering a review helps you confirm student understanding and eases exam anxiety for your students.

Some Suggestion You Might Consider

- Model your approach after the exam style: memorization and factual definitions or conceptual analysis and connection making (or a combination of both).
- A review lecture summarizing the course
- Assign specific topics to students and have them make review handouts/presentations
- Make a list of all the main topics covered and questions corresponding if appropriate
- What interests of the instructor might influence topics/weightings?
- Are there old exams or model questions available for practice? Where can students find solutions?
- What resources are available for help if questions arise?
- What percentage of the final mark is the exam worth?
- Inform students which topics are covered and how they are presented
- Do a 'rehearsal' of exam questions
 - Use questions with similar themes/material and have the class discuss the answers together

Exam Preparation Strategies - Studying Checklist

When I am studying I...

- read assigned readings _ before class _ after class _ don't do
- underline/ highlight main ideas
- make notes from readings
- make notes in class
- write summaries of materials read
- test myself on material read
- write answers to study questions
- work on assigned problems
- work on other problems
- read over notes from last class
- re-organize/write summaries of notes under key words
- explain main ideas to someone else
- participate in a study group
- spend enough time studying between classes
- speak to my instructor or TA

*Note: An exam preparation checklist such as this may be a useful exercise and study tool for your students. You can adjust it to reflect the themes of your course, or use it for yourself when you are preparing your exam preparation seminar.

Exam Preparation Strategies - What am I doing right now?

My notes:

Exam Preparation Strategies - Seminar Activities

- Think Pair Share
- Brainstorming
- Mind Maps
- Jigsaw
- Venn diagrams
- Academic controversy
- Chart/matrix
- Fishbone
- Graffiti
- Role playing
- Learning Centres
- Games (e.g., Who am I? or Millionaire)
- Be the teacher.
Have students create exam questions.

Exam Preparation Strategies - Questioning

Bloom's taxonomy can help you create questions for students in your seminar.

✓ Tip: Starting with knowledge and comprehension questions can help prepare students for more complex analytical and evaluative discussions.

- Knowledge – who, what, where, when, how
- Comprehension - what is the main idea of . . . ?
- retell in your own words . . .
- Application - how is ...and example of...
- how is ...related to ...?
- why is ...significant?
- Analysis - classify...according to...
- outline/diagram/web...
- how does...compare with...?
- Synthesis - what would you predict/infer from...?
- how would you create/design a new...?
- how would you go about solving...?
- Evaluation - what do you think about...?
- prioritize...according to ...
- what criteria would you use to assess...?

Above instructional and questioning strategies adapted from Barrie Bennett and Carol Rolheiser's text *Beyond Monet*, Toronto, 2006.

Key Words - What are You Expected to Do?

- **Evaluate** -To assess the worth of something
- **Discuss** -Usually to give pros and cons on some assertion, quotation, policy, etc.
- **Compare and Contrast** – To give similarities and differences of two or more objects, subjects, stories, theories, etc.)
- **Analyze** -To break into parts
- **Criticize** -To judge good and bad points of something
- **Explain** -To show causes of or reasons for something
- **Describe** -To give major features of something
- **Comment** -To make statements about something
- **Demonstrate** -To show something

Dealing with Distractions

Students may blame their difficulties in studying on a number of reasons:

External Distractions

- **Place** - free from clutter, remove 'toys', pictures from work area
- **Time** - your prime time
- **Noise** - does it cause a problem? Can you ignore it?
- **Interruptions** - let others know when you are busy, put a sign on the door, forward phone, shut off ringer, etc.
- **Schedule**- set out only the work you intend to do in a particular time block

Internal Distractions

- **Mind wandering**- use thought stopping, say 'stop' make a ✓ to record how often you wander
- **Uncomfortable** –environment, physical
- **Anxiety**- personal problems, take care of it, record it on paper

Simple Study Tips

- Review notes, texts
- List major concepts
- Note stressed topics
- Know 'the language' or jargon
- Show relationships between ideas, concepts - charts, diagrams
- Create questions - answer them - set time limit
- Recite
- Review information in detail.
- Study old exams. What types of questions were asked?
- Recall and apply information
- Practice with a partner or study group

Exam Anxiety

Did you suffer from exam anxiety as a student?

Do you have any experiences dealing with anxious students?

In small groups, discuss these questions and jot down your ideas.

Be ready to share your ideas with the rest of the group!

| Easing Student Anxiety |
|------------------------|
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My Plan

| Strategies for My Students | My Plan |
|----------------------------|---------|
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Thank You for Your Attendance at this Workshop!
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