

Talking about learning how to learn

By Robert R. Neuman, Ph.D.



Each semester, it's a daunting task to face so many students, often with too many problems. If you feel it's time to reevaluate your routine and if you're looking for an interview pattern around which to organize your usual strategy—one that benefits the student with a good counseling experience and yet keeps the line moving—let me suggest a basic set of questions.

A “back to basics” review

Begin by asking the student, “What are students supposed to accomplish in school?” Students may give you the easy, obvious answer: Students are supposed to learn. The next logical question: What does that mean, specifically? Students may eventually tell you that they listen in class, a decidedly passive approach to learning.

With the right questioning, you may spark a discussion that sooner or later elicits these parts of the learning process:

1. In each course, learning should begin with pre-class preparation (looking ahead at the material to be covered tomorrow).
2. Learning continues in class by being attentive, taking notes and participating in discussions.
3. More learning occurs at home: reviewing materials, organizing notes and creating study aids, (like

charts and timelines). Studying means more than just “doing homework.” Do students know that learning is the result of studying, and studying is best done in layers? Not in my experience.

A second way of discovering what students know and don't know about learning is to ask, “How many hours do you study each day and each week?”

In my experience, too many students have, over the years, developed their own “personal” study methods, which are often undefined, arbitrary, and disorganized. Even students with consistently high grades have ill-defined ideas of studying. In high school, they succeeded due to their well-honed practice of cramming, which often yields good grades, but not long-term knowledge.

Consequences

What's more, if students study only as much as homework, tests and assignments require, that habit will create serious problems in college, where readings on a syllabus can be postponed since there's no assignment to be handed in. After a few days of postponing readings, students can find themselves 350 pages behind in a single course. Much of this procrastination comes from the mistaken notion that learning is sitting in class and

listening. The personal dimension of independently processing and retaining material escapes these students.

The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 2004 found that 65.6 percent of college-bound high school seniors studied, at most, five hours per week. As college freshmen taking a typical 15-credit load, they will be expected to study independently for at least 30 hours a week: two hours of study for each hour in class. Will they know what to do? College graduation rates underscore that students cannot cope with the workload.

Students should understand that learning takes effort and time, quiet and concentration; that students learn better when they are not fielding cell phone interruptions; that study is an independent undertaking. If students develop better and better study skills from year to year, they will not only gain knowledge, they will also learn how to learn. ¶



Dr. Neuman's book, *Are you really ready for college? A College Dean's 12 Secrets for Success—What high school students*

don't know is available at www.areyoureallyreadyforcollege.com or online at Amazon, Barnes & Noble and other online book sellers.