



Ten Things to Make the First Day (and the Rest) of the Semester Successful

By Mary C. Clement, Berry College, GA
mclement@berry.edu

I like to arrive in the classroom well before the students. It gives me time to get things organized. I create an entrance table (I use chairs or desks if there's no table) that holds handouts for students to pick up. From day one the students learn the routine: they arrive, pick up handouts on the entrance table, and read the screen for instructions. They know what to do, and it saves time. Here's how I recommend introducing the routine on day one.

1. Post your name and the name and section of the class on the screen, so that when students walk in they know that they are in the right place.
2. Write "welcome" on the screen and have directions that tell students what they need to do immediately. Example: "As you enter, please tell me your name. Then pick up a syllabus, a card, and a folder from the entrance table. Fold the card so that it will stand on your desk, and write your first name on it in BIG letters. Add your last name and major in smaller print. Write your name on the tab of the folder, (last name first, then first name). Read the syllabus until class starts." [Note: By asking students to tell you their name as they enter, you can hear how the name is pronounced, and avoid the embarrassment of pronouncing it for the first time yourself.]
3. When it's time for class to start—start class! Late arrivals can catch up by reading the screen.
4. For classes of 25 or less, I have students do brief, 10-second introductions. I tell them there will be a verbal quiz after all the introductions and that they can win stars if they know who is who. (Have fun with this, but remember that these are adults and college is not like junior high.)
5. For larger classes, I have students introduce themselves to three or four people around them, and then we might do "stand-ups"—stand up if you are a Spanish major, stand up if you are an education major, and so on. I explain that students need to know each other for our small group work, and in case they have a question.
6. I collect the file folders and put them alphabetically by student name into a big plastic carrying case. When students need to turn in assignments, they find the box on the entrance table and they put their papers in their respective folders. When papers are graded, they can pull their graded tests or assignments from their folders. The beauty of this system is that time is never wasted by passing out papers. For small classes, I put handouts in the folders of absent students.
7. After the introductions and the explanation of the folder and box system, I turn to the "Today we will" list that I've written on the board, posted on a large paper flip-chart, or projected on the screen. I like to actually write this list on the board, so I can return to it even while projecting my notes. A "today we will" list outlines my plan for the day.

For example, for the first day, my "today we will list" says:

- See screen for instruction for card and folder.
- Introductions
- Turn in folders
- Go over syllabus completely
- Minilecture on _____
- Interest inventory
- Do you know what to read/do before the next class?

[Note: The "today we will" list lets me walk around the room, teach from the projection system, and then look at the list for what I should do next. I tend not to forget things if I have the list. As the semester progresses, the "today we will" list might contain warm-up questions that then appear as test questions. The list helps students who arrive late or leave early see what they have missed.]

PAGE 3

In This Issue

Students and Course Content: How Fast Do They Forget?	2
Voucher Points Encourage Student Involvement	3
Faculty-Student Interactions: The Details	4
Approaches to Teacher Growth and Development	5
Course Shopping	5
What Are They Doing Over There in the English Department?	6
Students Self-Grade: A Successful Model	6
A 'Write' That Can't Go Wrong	7



**Editor**

Maryellen Weimer, Ph.D.

Penn State Berks Campus
P.O. Box 7009, Reading, PA 19610-7009
Phone: 610-396-6170
E-mail: grg@psu.edu

Magna Editor

Rob Kelly
robkelly@magnapubs.com

President

William Haight
whaight@magnapubs.com

Publisher

David Burns
dburns@magnapubs.com

Creative Services Manager

Mark Manghera

Customer Service Manager

Mark Beyer

For subscription information, contact:

Customer Service: 800-433-0499
E-mail: custserv@magnapubs.com
Website: www.magnapubs.com

Submissions to *The Teaching Professor* are welcome. When submitting, please keep these guidelines in mind:

- We are interested in a wide range of teaching-learning topics.
- We are interested in innovative strategies, techniques, and approaches that facilitate learning and in reflective analyses of educational issues of concern.
- Write with the understanding that your audience includes faculty in a wide variety of disciplines and in a number of different institutional settings; i.e., what you describe must be relevant to a significant proportion of our audience.
- Write directly to the audience, remembering that this is a newsLETTER.
- Keep the article short; generally between 2 and 3 double-spaced pages.
- If you'd like some initial feedback on a topic you're considering, you're welcome to share it electronically with the editor.

The *Teaching Professor* (ISSN 0892-2209) is published monthly, except July and September, by Magna Publications, Inc., 2718 Dryden Drive, Madison, WI 53704. Phone: 608-246-3580 or 800-433-0499. Fax: 608-246-3597. E-mail: custserv@magnapubs.com.

One-year subscription: (U.S.) \$79. Outside the U.S.: \$89. Discounts available for multiple subscriptions (please call for price quotes). Periodicals postage paid at Madison, WI. POSTMASTER: send change of address to *The Teaching Professor*, 2718 Dryden Drive, Madison, WI 53704. Copyright © 2007, Magna Publications, Inc.

Back issues cost \$20.00 each. A specially-priced collection of previous year's issues with index and official *Teaching Professor* 3-ring binder is available for \$59.00 plus shipping and handling within the US. We accept MasterCard, VISA, Discover, or American Express. To order, contact Customer Service at 1-800-433-0499.

Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use, or the internal or personal use of specific clients, is granted by *The Teaching Professor* for users registered with the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) Transactional Reporting Service, provided that 50 cents per page is paid directly to CCC, 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923; Phone: 978-750-8400; www.copyright.com. For organizations that have been granted a photocopy license by CCC, a separate system of payment has been arranged.

Students and Course Content: How Fast Do They Forget?

Although faculty would like to think optimistically, most know that when it comes to how much content students take with them from a course, even a course in their major, reality dashes optimism. This grim fact was confirmed in a study of students enrolled in a business consumer behavior course. Using a sophisticated methodological analysis that involved repeated tests, researchers found that most of the knowledge that students had gained in this course was lost within two years. Interestingly, even though A students had higher achievement in the beginning, they lost knowledge at a faster rate than C students, so that after two years the difference between what an A and C student knew about consumer behavior was much smaller.

In this analysis the faculty researchers also explored approaches that might lessen the amount of course knowledge lost. They first hypothesized that content learned at a deeper level would be retained better than surface knowledge. Deep knowledge corresponds with an elaborated understanding of something, whereas surface learning equates more closely with memorizing. This deep learning hypothesis was confirmed, leading researchers to recommend that faculty “develop a pedagogy that requires deep learning early and often” even if this means a sacrifice of breadth for depth. “It is important to remember that although we hate to ‘give up’ some of our favorite topics, the topics that are only covered in passing are not meaningfully retained. Thus, we have already been giving them up; it just has not been obvious.” (p. 189) Another way to promote deep learning and retention involves building links between what students are being asked to learn and the concepts and tools needed on first jobs. This link motivates students to learn the material. And even if they still forget, when they encounter on the job what they were taught in a class, they are likely to be able to relearn it quickly.

A second hypothesis was also confirmed: students retain course knowledge better when they are tested repeatedly. Researchers recommend the use of cumulative tests throughout a course. In fact, they go so far as to propose that in an “ideal program” cumulative testing would occur across courses in a major. Obviously, this kind of testing would be very unpopular with students. If they use course ratings to register their discontent, then instructors may be conflicted about testing learning in these ways.

One final hypothesis was **not** confirmed in this study. The researchers thought that learning resulting from participation in a project would be retained longer. Most student projects require an application of content—which is hard to do if the content is not well understood. Most project work allows students certain choices, which means they are completing work in areas of interest to them. But the positive effects of projects on learning were not confirmed by this study. On the other hand, “the analysis does not strongly deny the possibility that projects are associated with retention. However, if one were to accept that projects were not associated with retention here because different students learned different things on different projects, then one must also accept that projects represent a kind of hit-or-miss method of learning, which may be troublesome in itself.” (p. 188)

What most faculty suspect was confirmed in this research: students in this course quickly forgot what they learned, even though the course was in their major and therefore something of interest and relevance. The challenge for faculty is to carefully consider any and all ways to stem this loss of knowledge.

Reference: Bacon, D. R. and Stewart, K. A. (2006). How fast do students forget what they learn in consumer behavior? A longitudinal study. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 28 (3), 181-192. ●

Voucher Points Encourage Student Involvement

By Melvin Billik, Northwood University,
MI - billikm@northwood.edu

I happened on the idea of giving voucher points accidentally. A number of years ago while I was still teaching math in high school, a student came up with a particularly clever method of solving a mathematics problem. As a reward, I wrote him an IOU good for one point on any of my tests. A few months later it happened again, and then later on I gave out a third voucher point. That semester, I received very positive comments about the practice on my student evaluations. Students requested that I “do voucher points more often.”

I’ve continued to use the technique, but I’ve refined it over the years. I still give voucher points for particularly insightful student contributions. But I also ask specific voucher point questions during class. And students can now use these points on

any test, in any course that I teach (so if an “A” student gets a voucher point and doesn’t need to use it, he/she can use it in a future class that I teach). As a result of this adjustment, I had top-notch high school students take my computer programming course in addition to my honors calculus course. They would earn voucher points in the programming course and use them in the calculus course. I might add that I have had two of my former high school students use my voucher points in my college class!

In addition to offering voucher points for correct responses to challenging mathematical questions posed during class, I have also offered a point for completing a quote from Macbeth and for spelling “mnemonic.” The other day, I muttered “ecsetera, ecsetera, ecsetera” and offered a voucher point for the famous movie that expression came from (“The King and I”). When we finish a mathematical proof, we

write “QED.” It’s a Latin phrase that loosely translated means “the truth has been demonstrated” although we jokingly say “quite easily done.” I then said that English mathematicians say “EMDW” and for a voucher point one of my class detectives should be able to figure out what that meant. Finally, after quite a number of guesses by different students, one correctly answered, “Elementary, my dear Watson.”

The voucher point is a simple device that helps me make the class enjoyable, and it encourages student involvement. Students with expertise in nonmathematical areas still have a chance to earn a voucher point in my class. My hope is that if students have an enjoyable time in my class, they will discover that learning math can be equally pleasurable. ♥

FIRST DAY

FROM PAGE 1

8. The minilesson/minilecture—whether it’s a short overview of the first reading assignment, some sample problems, or 10 interesting questions students will be able to answer at the end of the course, I strongly recommend doing some course content on the first day. For classes that last longer than 50 minutes, I include a short student activity. I also think it’s important to begin with course material on day one so that students begin to see who you are and how you teach. Since I teach courses in teacher education, I often talk about my teaching career. I include a few stories about how times have changed and about how some things in teaching never change.

9. Interest inventories are great for the first day of class. An interest inventory is just a short list of questions about students’ backgrounds and interests. It may assess their prior learning as well. In addition to name and major, students can write about a hobby, interest, or goal. Do not be too personal. You can have them answer several questions about content—maybe solve a problem, write a short paragraph or answer specific questions. Finally open-ended questions are useful:

- What are your goals after graduation?
- What has a teacher done in the past that helped you to learn _____ ?
- Is there anything else that you want me to know about you and your course of study?

You can always add one fun ques-

tion:

- If your song played when you entered the room, what would that song be?

10. Every good class has an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. I usually teach the minilesson, and then save the last six to eight minutes of class for the interest inventory and individual questions. This way, students don’t have to wait on others to finish. I instruct students to turn in their interest inventory as they exit. As they are writing, I alphabetize their folders and put them in the box on the table. Another good closure is to ask if they know what to read/do before the next class, and if they know three people to ask about the assignment if they have a question. ♥

Faculty-Student Interactions: The Details

Research starting in the '70s consistently and repeatedly documents the value of faculty-student interaction, especially when that interaction occurs outside the classroom. These studies tell us that such interactions help students make better career choices, aid students' personal growth, and make it more likely that students will graduate from college. Surprisingly, other than knowing that interaction with faculty benefits students, few details about the nature of those exchanges are known. The research cited below aimed to uncover more about the kind of exchanges that occur between faculty and students.

This study is interesting for a number of reasons. First, these researchers did not use the quantitative methods that are most often used to analyze faculty-student interaction. Rather, they opted for a multimethod qualitative approach that included focus groups, individual interviews, and observations. Also of interest is the site of the study: a residential college within a large public university. In an attempt to cultivate faculty-student exchanges, 40 faculty members agreed to participate in a number of college-wide events such as dinners, teas, lectures, and banquets. To encourage student participation, all of these events were free, but student attendance was not required.

When analyzing the data, the researchers identified five different kinds of faculty-student interactions. Although each type was unique, the interactions were not isolated or unrelated. Rather, the researchers describe them as occurring "along a fluid, contextually influenced continuum." (p. 350) Here are a few details about each type.

Disengagement—In this case, interaction between faculty and students did not occur. "Our study revealed that, despite institutionally established conduits through which interaction could occur, the majority of the students and faculty members were not engaged with one another outside the classroom." (p. 351) Often the

interaction did not occur simply because faculty were not present at events. Researchers never observed more than eight of the 40 faculty associates at any of the events designed to promote faculty-student exchanges. Even more surprising, when faculty did attend those events, they often interacted with each other and not with students. Researchers observed this at every event they attended. "Even when they were in the same room at events, faculty and students tended not to interact with one another." (p. 352)

This lack of interaction has been confirmed by other research, including the very large National Survey of Students Engagement (NSSE). Of the five benchmarks for effective educational practice, faculty-student interaction occurs less frequently than all but one other benchmark.

Incidental Contact—After no interaction, the second most common type of faculty-student interaction was incidental or unintentional. These are interactions that include polite greetings or maybe a wave of recognition. Researchers use the adjectives "trivial" and "perfunctory" (p. 352) to describe these exchanges. However, even these brief exchanges and the mere presence of faculty members at events were mentioned by students in focus groups, and students described even these short exchanges appreciatively.

Functional Interaction—"Functional interaction occurs for a specific, institutionally related purpose." (p. 353) These were exchanges mostly about academic or intellectual issues. Students frequently initiated this kind of dialog by asking a question. The value of these exchanges was that they frequently led to more interaction. Faculty and students discovered a common interest, or the answer to a first question led to a second question and still more discussion.

Personal Interaction—Typically these personal interactions developed out of the functional exchanges. The outcome was

the beginning of a relationship between professor and student. It became personal rather than purely professional. In focus groups, students repeatedly talked about how much these exchanges meant to them. They reported feeling valued and important when a professor invited them to coffee, spoke with them about their interest in their discipline, or just talked about a range of issues related to life. These interactions served to "humanize" professors and students.

Mentoring—This type of interaction was found least often in this study. Using a definition from previous research that proposes the presence of mentoring when the professor provides direct assistance with career and professional development, emotional and psychosocial support, and role modeling (p. 356), researchers in this study found only one faculty-student relationship that qualified as mentoring. Despite the observed absence of mentoring, interviewed faculty frequently described what they did for and with students as such.

The researchers conclude that the most significant finding from their analysis of faculty-student interaction was the lack of it—and interaction was absent "within a well-funded residential college intentionally designed to foster meaningful interactions between students and faculty members outside of class." (p. 357)

This study is helpful in its characterization of the types of faculty-student interaction. It should also motivate all faculty to recommit themselves to interactions with students. In the busyness of faculty life, it is easy to forget just how important and significant even a brief exchange can be for a student.

Reference: Cox, B. E. and Orehovec, E. (2007). Faculty-student interaction outside the classroom: A typology from a residential college. *The Review of Higher Education*, 30 (4), 343-362. 🍎

Approaches to Teacher Growth and Development

How do faculty approach their development as teachers? Gerlese S. Akerlind has been using a qualitative research method known as phenomenographic analysis to try to answer this question. In this particular study, 28 faculty members at a research university in Australia were interviewed. The faculty hailed from different disciplines, had different cultural backgrounds and genders, and had varying levels of experiences and different kinds of academic appointments. The interviews were semistructured, with all faculty being asked what growth and development as a teacher meant to them, how they went about it, and what they hoped to achieve. Based on interviewee responses, follow-up questions were also asked. All the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed from a phenomenological perspective.

Five different approaches to growth and

development emerged from this analysis. They are highlighted here, but explained in more detail in the article. The author also talks about the implication of each approach for those who work with faculty on instructional development agendas.

1) *Teaching development as building up a better knowledge of one's content area, in order to become more familiar with what to teach*—The goal here is to know the content area better. The assumption is that with more subject-area knowledge, teacher confidence will increase and teaching will become easier and more comfortable. To build up content knowledge, these faculty consult disciplinary literature, search for more relevant materials and examples, and conduct research. Most of these teachers see further content acquisition as an ongoing process.

2) *Teaching development as building up*

practical experience as a teacher, in order to become more familiar with how to teach—Growth from this perspective equates with experience. With more experience comes greater confidence, ease, and comfort. These teachers believe that growth comes naturally from experience—they learn by doing. Teaching is a natural ability, and practice is what allows skill to emerge and develop.

3) *Teaching development as building up a repertoire of teaching strategies, in order to become more skillful as a teacher*—In the previous category, the emphasis was on how to teach. Here, the focus is on something other than just doing teaching and having growth accrue naturally and automatically. These teachers approach growth as the process of acquiring teaching strategies.

PAGE 8

Course Shopping

Most colleges and universities have fairly lenient drop/add policies. Students can drop a course well into the semester, and courses can be added during a short time window at the beginning of the semester or term. During that course add period, some students do course shopping. They sign up for a course, attend the first couple of sessions, then drop the course and replace it with another course. Some students course shop regularly and extensively. A group of researchers were curious about the details of this course-shopping behavior. They wondered how prevalent it was, whether students who course shopped shared any demographic characteristics, whether students shopped for some kinds of courses more than for others, and most important, if the behavior influenced GPA and course completion.

The researchers studied course shopping in urban community colleges—nine Los Angeles community college campuses, to be specific. They used data collected as part of a larger study of transfer and reten-

tion issues in urban community colleges.

In this community college system course shopping could only occur in the first four weeks of the semester. The research team identified two basic kinds of course-shopping behavior: cyclic shopping and bulk shopping. Cyclic shoppers dropped a course one day and shortly thereafter added a course to replace it. Bulk shoppers enrolled in a set of courses (frequently a lot of courses) and then proceeded to drop half or more of those courses. If cyclic shopping happened more than 30 percent of the time a student enrolled in a course, it was labeled “frequent”; if less than 30 percent, it was labeled “occasional.” They also discovered that some students did both cyclic and bulk shopping. This group of very active course shoppers they referred to as mixed bag shoppers.

In this sample, almost a third of the students did cyclic shopping with about 7 percent doing it often enough to meet the “frequent” level. About 7 percent of students engaged in bulk shopping and 1 percent

were mix bag shoppers. Thirty-eight percent of the sample engaged in some kind of course shopping.

Bulk and frequent cyclic shopping were widely distributed across this student population. There were some slight correlations with characteristics such as gender, employment, and high school GPA, but the associations were very small.

Math courses were more likely to be dropped than English courses and remedial courses were less likely to be dropped than either. When course shoppers did drop a math, English, or remedial course, they were likely to select a replacement course in another sector.

“The cyclic and mixed bag shoppers were more likely to achieve lower grade point averages than those achieved by students who were classified as nonshoppers. Similarly, nonshoppers had higher course completion ratios than the frequent cyclic and mixed bag shoppers.” (p. 479) Mixed

PAGE 7

What Are They Doing Over There in the English Department?

By Amy Getty, Grand View College, IA
 agetty@gvc.edu

At the recent Teaching Professor Conference in Atlanta, I was privileged to have many great conversations on teaching. In one, my group of six contained only one English professor—me. While discussing what our students know (or more frequently don't know) about the citation of sources in research essays, many of my group members expressed their exasperation over what the English department was failing to teach our students.

"Our students just don't know how to write, let alone use documentation." "I'm not an English teacher, so I don't know how to teach writing." "I'm just not sure what they're doing over there in the English department."

That was not the first time I'd heard such complaints over the course of my career, nor, I fear, will it be the last. I do, however, have some responses to these frustrations.

1. Realize that first-year composition cannot create perfect academic writers. The first year of college is a trying time for many students and, as rigorous as it may be, a writing course during the first 15 weeks of college students' careers will not make those students experts in argument, research, and writing for their

majors. An analogy may suffice: expecting first-year students to be expert academic writers after their first-year composition class is equivalent to expecting them to set up a medical practice after taking biology 101. Both courses are essential in laying the foundations, but should never be considered the courses where students learn all they need to know about the subject.

2. Know that we are all writing teachers. You may not have a Ph.D. in English, but that does not mean that you can't teach students to write. Personally, I am not an expert in how to write like a nurse or how to write like a sociologist. To tell the truth, I don't think the nursing or sociology departments at my school would want me to teach students how to write like nurses or sociologists. As valuable a course as first-year composition is, it cannot and should not be the last time students receive detailed instruction in writing.

3. Collaborate with the English department. The best way to teach students to write in your field is to lay out clear expectations along with the assignment sheet for each essay. A simple rubric or even explicit essay goals on the assignment sheet can save a lot of student frustration. These tools may also make your grading experience less exasperating and more enjoyable. If you're not sure what

you want from your essay assignments or don't know how to articulate what you know you do want, take an English colleague to lunch. Ask her or him to help you delineate a rubric. I would hazard a guess that most of us would be happy to help—especially if free food is involved.

4. Assign more writing. Complaining that students don't know how to write and then not assigning writing is akin to complaining about your love handles while eating double chocolate cake. Students need to exercise their writing muscles or those muscles will atrophy. If your school fosters a situation in which your majors come to you as juniors with little to no writing experience since the first semester of their first year, it will be no wonder if the papers they produce for you are a tad flabby. Regardless of whether or not your campus has a Writing Across the Curriculum program, the trick to making better writers is to assign writing—informal, formal, graded, nongraded—as frequently as you can at all levels.

Ultimately, our students will need to write—not only as professionals, but as functioning members of society. If we all assume responsibility for developing this essential skill, then we can all take credit for the results. ♥

Students Self-Grade: A Successful Model

Given student motivation to get grades and the prevalence of cheating, most faculty would never seriously consider letting students grade their own work. However, self-grading, especially of homework, does accrue some significant benefits. It can move students away from doing homework for points to making them more aware of why and how doing problems helps them learn. If students grade their own work, they see exactly where they are making mistakes. And they obtain that feedback far sooner than if the

instructor collects the homework, grades it, and then returns it some days later.

But could a system like this ever be designed so that cheating is controlled? Nelta M. Edwards (reference below) describes a method, used in a social statistics course, that does show promise. In this course, students grade their own homework. They do that at the beginning of the period on the day the homework assignment is due—this effectively takes care of the late homework problem. If a student isn't in class with completed homework,

no credit is awarded. Edwards passes out an answer key that not only provides the correct answer, but shows all the steps needed to solve the problem and includes other comments, explanations, warnings, and tips. Edwards used to make these comments repeatedly on individual problem sets only to discover that students seldom read or heeded the advice. When students grade their own work, Edwards finds that they attend to information on

PAGE 8 ♥

A 'Write' That Can't Go Wrong

By Susan R. Wilson,
DePauw University, IN
srwilson@depauw.edu

In 1999 some colleges sounded an alarm against a phenomenon referred to as “mall-speak” that seemed to pervade student discourse. Student speech riddled with “likes,” “you knows,” and “whatevers.” This kind of speech was not limited by context: it was used when students hung out in the cafeteria, when they were making presentations in the classroom, and when they found themselves in the “real world.” According to the *Boston Globe*, Smith College’s “alumni began reporting back their horror at the way graduates spoke in job interviews, or remarking how unprepared they felt to express themselves in the working world.”

Eight years later, this kind of casual discourse is still pervasive. Couple the filler phrases associated with “mall-speak” with the mad/sad/bad/glad problem (speech choices restricted to simple sentences with nondescript adjectives) and we end up with student contributions in classroom discussions that go something like this: “I liked Russo’s book. It was really good. Like, the characters are so real and interesting. That one part, you know, was pretty bad, I mean, the description got kinda bloody. I’m glad it turned out in the end though.” Perhaps comments like these can be tolerated when students are young and first learning to discuss, but hearing them

in a college classroom makes most faculty cringe.

I use a very simple and short writing/performance assignment that creates an awareness of the power and eloquence of well-crafted language. Students write two paragraphs. In the first one, I ask them to write a bland, incompetent description about some topic such as a favorite food, a particular song, a landscape or place that holds special meaning, a favorite holiday or season, a historical event of significance, or something of that nature. In the second paragraph, they rework that description using effective and evocative language.

Students bring these paragraphs to class to share with their classmates. I have volunteers read their pairs of paragraphs. Students are often embarrassed to read the first paragraph; they and their classmates frequently chortle throughout the reading. When I ask them why the snickers, they say that the writing seems juvenile and simplistic. Even the writers admit that the first paragraph was painful to write. And yet, further probing reveals that each student has heard college-level presentations that sound like this paragraph.

The second paragraph provides a marked contrast. The writing is more detailed, more evocative of feelings and attitudes, and consequently draws the audience in more thoroughly. While the “text” of the second paragraphs is noticeably improved, sometimes the presentation

is not. Some students are embarrassed to own their words; they mumble, rush, or speak softly. In the discussion that follows, I try to help students understand what it might mean to “perform” their words, to translate what is on the page into a spoken description. Sometimes I have students work in small groups to coach each other on how this kind of presentation sounds. If students bristle at the notion of “performing” the text, I remind them of awards ceremonies where presenters merely read or mumbled or misread an important quotation. Usually this jolts them into realizing that effective writing can be compromised by ineffective presentation. What you say and how you say it both matter.

After this 30- to 45-minute exercise, I ask students to write a journal entry in which they select any text—from literature, essays, speeches—that they believe is eloquent and then justify that choice. This ungraded assignment allows us to play around with improving the level and effectiveness of written and spoken discourse. Students internalize this activity in ways that lecturing about sound language use (or even viewing great speeches) misses. In fact, often when a discussion becomes peppered with “mall-speak” and simplistic discourse, it is the students who remind each other, with a chuckle, that it is time, as Chef Emeril Lagasse says, to “kick it up a notch.”

COURSE SHOPPING

FROM PAGE 5

bag shoppers had the lowest GPAs and course completion ratios.

Researchers point out that drop/add policies exist for good reasons. Students need the flexibility they provide, especially students who attend community colleges where life schedules and course schedules are more likely to conflict, and where students are more likely to need remedial work. They do point out that their find-

ings challenge the assumption that “course shopping is just a benign part of college culture.” (p. 465) Some students overuse the practice, and this is to their detriment. “While occasional shopping may have its advantages, it is clearly better for students to make initial wise choices in the enrollment process so that they do not need to drop and add subsequently.” (p. 481) The researchers offer a variety of suggestions that might help students make those wise first choices, such as posting all syllabi online, making academic advising more

readily available to students, and instituting a flagging system where computers could be programmed to identify frequent shoppers likely to be hurt by the practice.

Reference: Hagedorn, L. S., Maxwell, W. E., Cypers, S., Moon, H. S., and Lester, J. (2007). Course shopping in urban community colleges: An analysis of student drop and add activities. *Journal of Higher Education*, 78 (4), 464-485.

APPROACHES FROM PAGE 5

The strategies are not necessarily ones a teacher would happen on naturally. They come from outside (maybe from pedagogical reading, attending a workshop, or from observing colleagues), and they require a certain amount of effort to master and to successfully incorporate.

4) *Teaching development as finding out which teaching strategies do and don't work for the teacher, in order to become more effective as a teacher*—This approach goes beyond the previous category in that these teachers actively seek to discover which strategies work best for them. They experiment with different strategies, reflect on their results, and buttress their understanding of effectiveness with feedback from students and colleagues. These teachers are

seeking new strategies even though the ones they use may already work quite well. Here success is measured by student satisfaction with the strategy and by teacher comfort with the approach.

5) *Teaching development as continually increasing one's understanding of what works and what doesn't work for students, in order to become more effective at facilitating student learning*—As in the previous category, the objective here is to discover what does and doesn't work. Here too student and colleague feedback is an important part of the process. The difference is the exclusive focus on student learning. Teacher concerns go beyond student satisfaction, or whether or not they liked the strategy. These teachers care about what a student will take away from a course long term. What students learn and retain is more important than their short-term satisfac-

tion. "Category 5 represents the most complex and inclusive approach to developing as a teacher that emerged from the interview data." (p. 31)

In the article, Akerlind cites a variety of research addressing the impact of faculty conceptions of development on student learning. Teachers who focus on students and student learning tend to have students who orient to learning as understanding. Teachers who focus on themselves and what they are doing tend to have students more likely to equate learning with memorization. The idea of faculty orientation to development having implications for students is a new idea, and one that merits thoughtful analysis.

Reference: Akerlind, G. S. (2007). Constraints on academics' potential for developing as a teacher. *Studies in Higher Education*, 32 (1), 21-37. 🍀

STUDENTS SELF-GRADE FROM PAGE 6

the keys more closely, even using the keys as study guides to prepare for exams.

Students score each problem using a 0 to 4 scale. If they made no attempt to solve the problem, they assign themselves a 0. For an answer that is partially correct, students may assign themselves between 1 and 3 points. A perfect answer gets a 4. Students score each individual problem and then put a total score on the top of their paper.

Edwards then collects the graded homework. "Before the next class, I recheck the self-graded homework. For the first several weeks, I recheck all of the homework very carefully until I think that students have a firm grasp of the grading scale. Later in the semester, I check the homework less thoroughly; in my experience, an overwhelming majority of students grade homework problems either exactly or very closely to how I would have graded them." (p. 73)

Edwards uses much the same system to

have students grade their own exams. In this case, though, correct answers are revealed one at a time on an overhead projector. This keeps everyone on the same page. Edwards also collects and carefully checks student grading on the exams as well. "About 20 percent of scores change two or three points in either direction, and only about 10 percent change more than five points in either direction." In addition to checking their grading, Edwards keeps students honest by identifying consequences for those caught cheating. Those consequences start with a zero on the assignment but may end up with the student being expelled from the course, possibly even from the university. When Edwards asked students what their sense was about how much cheating was occurring in the class, 88 percent responded that there was no cheating occurring in the class or "not enough to worry about."

Student response to this self-grading system is very positive. Eighty-six percent evaluate it either as a "good" or "great" teaching method. And the reasons they give for liking it verify that the approach is

accomplishing its intended goals. Students see the value of identifying their own mistakes shortly after making them. "You learn more when you find out what you did right or wrong." (p. 74) Edwards sees one final benefit. "My impression is that self-grading alleviates student anxiety and, subsequently, eases student-teacher conflict by demystifying the grading process and making students feel that they have control over their own evaluation." (p. 75) When students ask questions about homework or exam problems, they are interested in how many points should be taken off for certain kinds of errors. They aren't complaining about the problems or grouching about the difficulty of the homework assignments or exams.

It's an intriguing system with enough fail-safes to guarantee the integrity of the grading process at the same time that it offers students a unique learning experience.

Reference: Edwards, N. M. (2007). Student self-grading in social statistics. *College Teaching*, 55 (2), 72-76. 🍀