

But I Studied Really Hard Last Night ...

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Evaluate Learning Styles ("VARK site")

Consider having students evaluate their learning styles. Numerous online resources are available; having students complete an evaluation could be assigned as homework. Ask students to report on which source they used, their preferred learning styles, and the specific study techniques that they can use to compliment their styles. This exercise focuses students on how they process information and can really help them study more effectively. Afterward, you might supply a handout of suggested techniques for each learning style. Keep track of each student's results for reference later, if he or she begins to struggle.

Schedule a Time and Place for Studying

I find that most of our students do not schedule studying; it gets fit in randomly around their other activities. Unfortunately, it often is put off or left undone. Consider having students complete a schedule. First, have them list their daily activities and the times for each. Next, provide a blank schedule with a grid of days and times, and ask students to fill in the grid with all the commitments they just listed, including work, school, family, socializing, meals, and sleep. Have them mark remaining times during which they can study, and stress the importance of committing those times specifically for studying. By writing their schedules, students often see that there is time to study. This might lead to a discussion of time management.

You might also discuss where they study. It needs to be quiet, comfortable, and relatively free of distractions. For parents with older children, a daily family study time might be effective, and reinforce the importance of studying for the next generation. Students who have the constant distraction of younger children might study on campus or go to a library. Identifying potential obstacles allows us to help students develop coping strategies to improve their success.

Use Pre- and Post-Test Assessments

I often have students complete pre- and post-test assessments. A pretest assessment may be just a few

questions at the start of an exam: How much time did you study for this, and when? Specifically, *how* did you study? Do you feel that you prepared adequately for this exam? If not, why not? What grade do you anticipate?

After they complete the exam, I give them another assessment, sometimes as a take-home assignment. Among its questions are:

1. Now that it is over, do you feel that you prepared adequately, and if no, why not?
2. How do you think you did, overall, on this test?
3. What section(s) were most difficult for you?
4. What section(s) were easiest for you?
5. Did the test cover material you were told it would cover? If not, please explain.
6. On a scale of 1 (I could do this in my sleep) to 100 (Einstein couldn't pass this test), how difficult did this test seem to you?
7. On the same scale, how difficult do you think it actually was?
8. How satisfied are you with your performance on this exam?

The last two questions can be asked after students get their grades. This exercise helps them think about how their efforts translate into graded performance. With practice, they get better at perceiving how well they really prepare for an exam, and many alter their study habits accordingly.

Pop quizzes are also handy tools. Knowing that many students neither read nor study until they must, tossing in an occasional pop quiz can rock their world enough to get them into the books more often. These can be just a few questions at the beginning of class, and classroom clicker systems can make this a rather efficient process. When they realize that they are missing out on points and not understanding material previously covered, serious students will study more frequently.

To focus on the goal of our job—education—we must have genuine concern for our students' success. However, we should also emphasize personal accountability. I frequently remind my students that I do not give grades—they earn grades. Nonetheless, part of our responsibility must also be to teach them how to be students. ■

Editor's Note: Lori Garrett is author of *Get Ready for A&P*, (Benjamin Cummings, 2007), a workbook and online tool that saves classroom time and frustration by helping students quickly prepare for the two-semester Anatomy and Physiology course.

