

How do I respond when students don't do the reading?

Module focus

- students not coming prepared to tutorials

Module outcomes

- you will be able to develop strategies to respond to un- and under-prepared students

“The readings for every tutorial are listed in the Study Guide. I remind them at the end of each tutorial what is required before the next class, and still they don't prepare. How can we have meaningful discussions if the students don't know what we are discussing? I don't want to penalise those who have prepared for class!”

Take a moment to reflect on this issue.

What challenges does this pose for *your* teaching?

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Possible solutions

1. Make sure readings are clearly scheduled in the Unit Guide and in DSO.
2. Present in spreadsheet form when each reading needs to be done by.
3. Assign study questions. Hand out study questions that alert students to the key points of the reading assignment.
4. To provide extra incentive for students, tell them you will base exam questions on the study questions.
5. Ask students to write one complex sentence in answer to a question you pose about the readings and provide three sources of supporting evidence: e.g. “In one sentence, identify the type of ethical reasoning Singer uses in his article ‘Famine, Affluence, and Morality.’ Quote three passages that reveal this type of ethical reasoning” (p. 125).
6. Organise prepared students into small discussion groups. Non-prepared students form other groups.
7. Provide discussion activities for the ‘prepared’s’ and require the ‘unprepared’s’ to skim read the reading(s) on the spot.
 - a. NB: All groups are expected to report back to the class on what they discussed.
8. Acknowledge the reality that some students prefer to read after the tutorial, so focus discussions more generally around some key points, and then remind students they will need to follow up before the final exam (if the unit has one).
9. Using some subtle peer pressure can work – e.g. start each tutorial with a short quiz on one of the readings.
10. Try discussing a case study relevant to the focus of the readings.
11. Ask non-threatening questions about the reading. Initially pose general questions that do not create tension or feelings of resistance: “Can you give me one or two items from the chapter that seem important?” “What section of the reading do you think we should review?”
12. Prepare a roster of students which requires each student, or preferably pairs of students, to report on the readings in their designated tutorial week.
13. Have students discuss hypotheticals based on the readings, share their thoughts, and remind them that they will need to follow up on the ‘realities’.
14. Use a card system whereby each student’s name is written on a card, and inform students that each week you will randomly select two cards and ask those students a question about the readings.
15. Start each class with small group work based on the reading(s). Peer pressure can be a strong influence.

16. Arrange the class into small groups and have each group work on a hypothetical scenario related to the topic. Each group reports back on their discussion.
17. In small groups, require the students to respond to some of the questions or case studies often included at the end of chapters in their textbook.
18. Placing the responsibility for what happens in the tutorial on the students is an effective strategy.
19. Be wary of just telling the class what the readings are about as they will come to expect it of you.
20. Require each student to post a comment about the reading(s) in the Unit's online discussion space.

Sources: some ideas adapted from Fredericks, A. 2007 *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Teaching College*, Alpha Books, New York; Lowman, J. 1984. *Mastering the Techniques of Teaching*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco; "When They Don't Do the Reading" In M. Weimer (ed.) *The Teaching Professor*. December, 1989.

More help

Here are some resources from which you may seek some advice. They are all annotated so as to assist you in making judgements about what might be useful advice for your particular teaching context. By exploring some or all of these resources, you may well be able to generate strategies to suit your particular circumstances.

1. <http://teaching.berkeley.edu/bgd/motivate.html> - some ideas from Barbara Gross Davis, more aimed at lecturers than tutors.
2. <http://lsn.curtin.edu.au/tlf/tlf1999/summers.html> - explains an interesting strategy based on asking students to summarise readings on cards and submit at each lecture.

Alert !

If you resort to telling students what the readings are about in detail, they will most likely come to expect it from you. Making it clear to students that they share the responsibility for learning right from the start of semester can help.