

Better Teaching[®]

Tips & Techniques to Improve Student Achievement

Secondary
EDITION

Northeast USD 246
Making Success Our Business



Bringing Lessons to Life

Use 'lunch bag talks' for presentations



When people are asked to list their biggest fears, public speaking often tops the list.

Here's a fun way to help your students overcome their fear of public speaking:

1. Bring in several paper lunch bags.

Allow one bag for every three or four students in your class.

2. Assemble about 10 items that can fit inside each bag. Choose everyday items—a ballpoint pen, a package of gum, an eraser. Or look for funny or interesting items. The more unique they are, the better!

3. Begin the lesson by explaining why public speaking is so important. Ask students to talk about effective speakers. What are some of the things they do? (They make eye contact. They seem excited about what they are saying. They don't make it "boring"—the number one complaint of teens!)

4. Assign students to small groups.

5. Tell students they are going to be giving a very short speech—just 90 seconds.

6. Have students take turns reaching into a bag and drawing out an object for their speeches.

7. Allow students just 30 seconds to prepare speeches about their objects. They can use that time to jot a few notes on a piece of paper, but when the time is up, they are "on."

8. Have the group provide helpful feedback after each speech. What worked? Did the speaker make eye contact? Could the speaker be heard? Did the speaker try to make the speech interesting?

This is an activity you can repeat several times. And each time, students will gain more confidence in their presentation skills.

Source: Mariam G. MacGregor, *Building Everyday Leadership in All Teens*, ISBN: 1-575-42213-1 (Free Spirit Publishing, 1-866-735-7323, www.freespirit.com).

Motivating Students

Motivate students by gaining their trust



You can create an environment of caring and trust in your class by using journals.

Here's how:

1. Ask each student to bring a notebook to class to be used specifically for journal writing.
2. Have each student write 25 one-line topic ideas on page one. ("The day Dad tried to teach me to drive a stick-shift" or "How I felt on my first day in this school.")
3. Establish student limits. Tell them to avoid entries about illegal activities, intense religious experiences or anything harmful.
4. Establish your limits. Say you will not share their journal entries with anyone else unless they reveal something illegal or harmful. In that case, you would have to share information with the appropriate authority.
5. Set a routine. Expect students to write in their journals for the first 10 minutes of class each day. This is a great way to engage students while you attend to administrative duties. On the board, write "Today's journal entry: Use topic #17."

Respond to entries and return journals each day. Research shows that students respond more positively to teachers who demonstrate they genuinely care about them.

Sources: Robert L. Waytt III and J. Elaine White, *Making Your First Year a Success*, ISBN: 1-4129-4957-2 and Brown, Dave F., "Urban Teachers' Professed Classroom Management Strategies: Reflections of Culturally Responsive Teaching" *Urban Education*, May 2004 (both from Corwin Press, 1-800-233-9936, www.corwinpress.com).

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Discipline

You can maintain order in your class



Are you struggling to maintain order in your classroom? How would you respond to these statements?

- I often feel overwhelmed.
- I bounce between being a drill sergeant and a buddy.
- Students challenge my authority.
- I focus most of my attention on misbehaving students.
- I haven't asked for help.

If you answered *yes* to any of these statements, here's what you can do:

- **Keep a list** of discipline problems. Look for patterns.
- **See problems** as opportunities for learning and improving.
- **Address a few** problems at a time.
- **Talk with difficult students** when they have no audience.
- **Change your teaching style.** Research shows that when classwork is engaging, discipline problems decline.
- **Ask for help.** Find a counselor or seek out a seasoned teacher.

Remember, there isn't a magic formula for maintaining order. With experience, you will find the strategies that work best for you.

Source: Margaret Metzger, "Learning to Discipline," Phi Delta Kappa International, www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kappan.htm.

Cheating: Part Two of a Three-Part Series

Are you certain the work is not plagiarized?

- a.
- b.
- c.

Most teachers develop a sixth sense to identify work that has been plagiarized.

But if asked what they look for, some will say, "I know it when I see it."

Researchers have pulled together specific signs to look for. A student's work may be plagiarized if:

- **The writing style and vocabulary** are markedly different from what the student usually turns in. Check further if a student whose writing usually sounds like an instant message turns in words like "notwithstanding" and "*prima facie*."
- **The introduction sounds** like the student wrote it. Then the paper shifts in tone and topic. The student might have "padded" the paper with material from another source.
- **The paper mentions individuals,** ideas or events with which the

student is not likely to be familiar. Not many tenth graders know much about the Council of Trent.

- **The paper suddenly shifts** in font, pitch or margin size. This is a tell-tale sign that the student didn't even bother to reformat the work.
- **The paper includes references** the student was unlikely to access. Most public libraries, for example, don't have a subscription to the *Journal of Clinical Microbiology*.

Probably the single best way to tell if a student has taken work belonging to another is by asking. If the student has difficulty responding to a simple question or two about the paper, odds are it's plagiarized.

Source: Gregory J. Cizek, *Detecting and Preventing Classroom Cheating: Promoting Integrity in Assessment*, ISBN: 0-761-94655-1 (Corwin Press, 1-800-233-9936, www.corwinpress.com).

Writing

Teach 'hook-link-thesis' to boost essay scores



Essays—students are expected to write them on national and state tests, the SAT and other college entrance exams. To prepare your students, reinforce the importance of writing a good thesis statement. Tell them to keep in mind that the grader will see essay after essay responding to the same prompt.

Try this opening paragraph "hook-link-thesis" strategy suggested by veteran teacher **Lenna DiFabio**:

1. **Give each student** a lined index file card.
2. **Ask, "What is your essay about? What are you going to prove or explain?"** Ask students to tell you in one sentence. Tell them this sentence is the **thesis** statement.

Have them write their sentences on the bottom lines of their cards.

3. **Ask, "Who is the audience** for your essay? How can you 'hook' your reader?" On the first lines of their cards have them write a rhetorical question, an example, a description or an anecdote that will engage the reader. Allow them to use several sentences.
4. **Tell students to write** a sentence in the middle of the card to **link** the hook to the thesis.

With the hook-link-thesis strategy, your students will have a head start on their next essay exam.

Source: Amy Benjamin, *Writing Put to the Test: Teaching for the High-Stakes Essay*, ISBN: 1-59667-026-6 (Eye on Education, Inc., 1-888-299-5350, www.eyeoneducation.com).

Testing Tips

Get creative to motivate students on tests

a. — Want to boost high-stakes test scores? Get the whole school involved—and make it fun! Try using:

- **Posters.** Have a contest to design motivational posters. Display them on school walls, on your website and in your community.
- **Videos.** Ask upperclass students to create a video sharing tips for test success. Allow them to interview students, teachers, counselors and administrators.
- **A slogan.** Have a contest to come up with the best motivational test-prep slogan. Ask a crafty parent to screen it onto T-shirts.
- **Music.** Invite your school's "most talented" to come up with new words to familiar tunes. And encourage teachers to get involved, too.

- **PowerPoint®.** Invite students to get creative using all the graphic enhancements of this program. Find opportunities for students to give "Test Success Tips" presentations at PTA meetings, school assemblies and other gatherings.
- **Computers.** Ask your "techno-wizards" to find the best "test success" websites and show other students how to use them.
- **Practice Packets.** Invite a group of students to find and print the best reproducible practice tests.

Yes, these activities are gimmicks, but if they build a school feeling of pride and enthusiasm, you're likely to see more motivated test-takers.

Source: Heidi Fedore, "A Spoonful of Sugar," *Principal Leadership*, October 2005 (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1-866-647-7253, www.principals.org).

Resources



David A. Sousa has collected the latest information on brain research and special needs students in *How the Special Needs Brain Learns*. Written for lay readers, the book has chapters on autism and attention disorders. It has references to more than 230 new scientific articles. Teachers can learn how to identify, accommodate and motivate special needs students. (ISBN: 1-412-94987-4, Corwin Press, 1-800-233-9936, www.corwinpress.com.)



Everyone's focusing on assessment. But who has the time to research and develop assessment tools? You'll find help at Kathy Schrock's Guide for Educators web page on Assessment and Rubrics at <http://school.discovery.com/schrockguide/assess.html>. From rubric builders to report card comments, you're sure to find what you need on this easy-to-use site.



Make following the November elections more fun with a short unit on editorial cartoons posted by the well-respected *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*. You'll find lessons for two to four class periods at www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/socialstudies/Vote2004/political_cartoons.html. The site offers examples of modern political cartoons and an election cartoon project. Follow up by having students create their own political cartoons.

Mathematics

'Could be/Couldn't be' develops number sense

+ -
÷ × In real life, most people don't find a mathematical solution to the nearest thousandth. Instead, they rely on their number sense—their feel for numbers. Will \$20 cover the groceries? Usually, people start with an estimate and then do a precise calculation.

But number sense isn't something you can teach in a three-week unit. Instead, giving students regular opportunities to work with numbers can help them develop this valuable skill.

"Could be/Couldn't be" is one way to do that. Start by writing three columns on the board: one column for a number, one labeled "Could be" and one labeled "Couldn't be."

Now write a number, say 10. With students, brainstorm some things the number could be. For example, ten could be a number of fingers. It could also be a number of bowling pins in a game.

What could the number *not* be? It couldn't be the number of hands on your body or the number of bowling balls you would use at any one time.

Have students work in pairs to come up with their own examples. Ask them to come up with examples using larger numbers. Can they think of examples for a million? A billion?

Source: Michael Naylor, "Number Sense," *Teaching preK-8*, February 2007 (1-800-249-9363, www.teachingk-8.com)

Share an Idea?

Do you have an idea to improve student learning that should be in this newsletter?

Send your ideas to Better Teaching, Editorial Dept., P.O. Box 397, Fairfax Station, VA 22039, fax to 1-800-216-3667 or go to www.teacher-institute.com/ideas/.

Full credit will be given with each article published. Materials sent cannot be returned.

Focus n: Reading Skills

Reading

Learn scaffolding do's and don'ts



You may have heard of “scaffolding”—providing learning support for students. But sometimes, teachers may think they are scaffolding, when they are removing responsibility for learning, instead.

Here are some examples of scaffolding that is *not* appropriate, followed by ways to help students who have difficulty with text. To help:

A student with ADHD,

- **Don't** give the student all the information in the text, assuming he will never read the assignment himself.
- **Do** break the reading expectations down into smaller, more manageable chunks.

An English Language Learner,

- **Don't** give the student the same assignment as everyone else, assuming her ELL teacher will take responsibility.
- **Do** provide the teacher with key words and phrases the student will need to know.

A student with limited decoding skills,

- **Don't** choose reading material for the entire class that is at this student's grade level.
- **Do** look for a simplified version of the text the student can read.

Source: Amy Benjamin, *But I'm Not a Reading Teacher: Strategies for Literacy Instruction in the Content Areas*, ISBN: 1-5966-7049-5 (Eye on Education, 1-888-299-5350, www.eyoneducation.com).

Reading for Success

Remember: Practice really *does* work



It sounds simple enough: If you want students to read, give them plenty of practice. When one high school principal brought that philosophy to his school, the results were striking.

Every day, his entire school devoted 20 minutes to silent reading. As a result, overall reading levels climbed dramatically.

Even if your school does not have a daily sustained reading period, you can implement it in your classroom. Set aside class time to get a head start on reading assignments. Follow this six-step process for reading textbooks.

In order, have your students:

1. **Look at the pictures.**
2. **Read the captions.**
3. **Look at maps and charts.**
4. **Look for BIG IDEAS**—words in bold, in color or in italics.

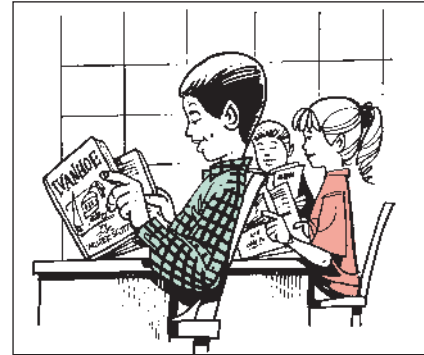


Illustration by Bob George

5. **Skim the first and the last** paragraphs.

6. **Then read the text.**

By using this method, students will have a much better understanding of what they read.

Source: Gay Ivey and Douglas Fisher, “Learning From What Doesn't Work,” *Educational Leadership*, Summer 2006 (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1-800-933-2723, www.ascd.org).

Reading Comprehension

Give students strategies for comprehension



To help students with comprehension, create a one-page self-assessment which they can fill out as they read.

At the top, have students fill in name, date and title of the article or chapter. Then include lines where students can enter the following information:

- **Page where I ran into trouble.**
- **Confusing word or phrase**
- **Strategy I used to understand.**

Repeat these lines as space permits.

On the back of the form list the following problems and strategies:

- **Difficult sentence:** Break the sentence into parts.

- **Didn't make sense:** Stop, reread. Make a mental picture or connect text to prior knowledge.
- **Unknown word:** Use context clues, glossary or a dictionary.
- **Unfamiliar phrase:** Ask someone. Keep reading and look for an explanation in the text.
- **Being distracted:** Turn off TV and phone. Find a quiet spot. Collect self-assessments periodically. Use them when guiding student reading and in parent conferences.

Source: Martha S. Beaudoin et al., *Motivating the Struggling Adolescent Reader: Connecting Literature, Literacy, and Life*, ISBN: 1-933760-04-4 (Christopher-Gordon Publishers, Inc., 1-800-934-8322, www.christopher-gordon.com).