

Motivating Students to Complete Pre-class Readings



Oregon State University
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Defining the Issue

It is a challenge to facilitate learning when close to 70% of students have not read assigned class readings. On any given day, only 30% of students complete assigned pre-class readings (Bhavsar, 2020; Hoeft, 2012).

Reasons for non-compliance with reading assignments:

- Inadequate reading comprehension.
- Time constraints, other priorities.
- Lack of interest in assigned readings.
- No student-to-student interaction surrounding readings.
- No accountability for completing pre-class reading assignments.

Strategies & Tips:

1. Rethink Syllabus Reading Lists

- Use learning outcomes to determine reading expectations and load.
- [Entice students to read](#). Expand the boundaries of reading; include different kinds of readings and media.
- Go through the syllabus; make sure that all reading assignments are there for a purpose—tied to learning outcomes.
- Make reading and media materials available online through the [library](#) for easy access.
- Consider the various reading ability levels represented in your class. Choose readings within the cognitive reach of the majority of students.
- [Less is more](#); assign short reading assignments. Keep in mind [OSU Credits- Definitions and Guidelines](#).

2. Use Transparency

- Clarify the relevance of pre-class reading assignment: Use the [learning-focused assignment rubric](#) to assess clarity):
- Purpose: Explain the knowledge and skills will students gain.
 - Task: Delineate steps that students should take to complete the assignment.
 - Criteria: Share the rubrics or checklists for assessing student work.
 - Use friendly instructions to show students why it is important to do the reading; make connection to real-world applications.
 - Communicate in advance how readings will be used in class. Tie out-of-class readings to in-class instruction.
 - Use interactive dialogue to elicit students' perspectives on the importance of completing reading assignments.

3. Support Deep Reading

- Provide [guides](#) or [handouts](#) and implement [activities to foster deep reading](#).
- Think aloud; demonstrate how you make sense of complex reading materials (examples [here](#) and [here](#)).
- Use the [\(GSSW\)](#): Gather, Sort, Shrink, and Wrap method.
- Provide brief chapter summary videos to walk students through the reading. Avoid rehashing the material.
- Incorporate [index card reflections](#), [primary and secondary reaction discussion](#), or [Classroom Assessment Techniques](#) (CATs) to assess understanding.
- Engage students in [low stakes pre-writing](#) activities.

4. Build Community Through Peer-To-Peer Interaction

- Use structured [reading circle](#) groups. Assign students rotating roles.
- Have students share [Question, Quotation, or Comment](#) (QQC) responses in small groups.
- Use the [paired reading response](#) or the [discussion facilitation task](#) approach.

5. Require Accountability

Tie reading assignments to a portion of course grade:

- Use quizzes to increase student engagement with reading materials.
- Alternatively, turn the quiz into a questionnaire. Ask students to respond to questions about the reading material:
 - Which parts they grasped easily.
 - Which parts they struggled to understand.
 - The question raised by the reading for example, "What [one question](#) would you like me to answer about the reading?"
- Use reading assignments for instance, Classroom Preparation Assignments (CPA), [to get students to come to class prepared](#), and to stimulate class discussion.

Advice:

- Reliance on quizzes as a reading compliance strategy rewards surface learning (see [Harvard Report](#)).
- Also, it may feel punitive to students. Mix quizzes with writing assignments and discussions.
- Transparency may evoke a feeling of condescension in some students. Balance instructor explanation with peer-to-peer interactive dialogue.

References:

- Bhavsar, V. M. (2020). A transparent assignment to encourage reading for a flipped course. *College Teaching*, 68(1), 33-44. doi:[10.1080/87567555.2019.1696740](https://doi.org/10.1080/87567555.2019.1696740)
- Hoeft, M. E. (2012). Why university students don't read: What professors can do to increase compliance. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 6(2), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.20429/ijsotl.2012.060212>



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