Motivating Students to Read Using Guided Notes

Undergraduate college students lead busy lives that include heavy use of technology and are not always motivated to complete required reading for their college courses (Starcher & Proffitt, 2011). Because there is always more content to convey and limited class time, this poses a critical problem for student learning. To promote an active classroom and interaction with content at higher orders of cognitive processing (Krathwohl, 2002), faculty need to motivate students to read articles and assigned chapters in the textbook. The purpose of this article is to describe guided notes, a weekly assignment to establish a culture of reading, and accountability that requires minimal grading. Our sample group was first-year students in a required nursing course in the second semester of an undergraduate baccalaureate nursing (BSN) degree program.

Guided notes is an assignment we developed based on class preparation assignments (Gillette, Davis, & Gillette, 2013), with 17 to 23 short or longer answer questions based on the readings. Questions could be written at any level of the cognitive domain (Krathwohl, 2002) depending on time of semester or desired comprehension. The guided notes were due electronically at the start of class. Assignments were graded as pass/fail, with pass requiring a relevant response to every question. Grading did not require feedback on each question by faculty. Rather, students retained a copy of their submission and were responsible for locating the correct answers from class, discussion with peers, or the text. Guided notes were worth 10% of the final grade, and the lowest grade was dropped.

We found that nontraditional BSN students appreciated the value for these weekly assignments to keep them on target and on task with the readings. These students took notes on a hard or electronic copy in class, used them to study for examinations, and requested them for future courses. Traditional BSN students were not entirely pleased with the assignment. Some expressed frustration when they forgot to answer a question, which resulted in lost credit for the assignment. However, at the end of the course, several students admitted that this was the only text they purchased during the semester.

The traditional students seemed to perceive this as a culture shift as prior students did not have to complete guided notes. To avoid struggles over partial credit, guided notes were awarded just one point. The limited weekly point led to some confusion about the value of the assignment.

Guided notes were due at the start of class but could have been more useful to faculty if submitted sooner. If these had been submitted 1 or 2 days before class, faculty could have reviewed them and addressed gaps in student understanding of the content as a just-in-time assignment. Although easy to grade, faculty still looked at each question for completion and relevance. Thus, it took approximately a minute per assignment to grade, which can be substantial for larger classes.

When using guided notes, it is important (a) not to make the questions too easy or too hard, (b) that they cover content that appears on examinations, and (c) that interactive activities such as the fishbowl game, jigsaw, debate, and class discussion aimed at higher levels of thinking be used for classroom interaction (Gillette et al., 2013).

References
Gillette, L., Davis, K., & Gillette, J.R. (2013, June). How to ensure that students prepare for class so that class time can be used for deep learning. Paper presented at International Lilly Conference on College Teaching, Oxford, Ohio.

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The authors have disclosed no potential conflicts of interest, financial or otherwise.
doi:10.3928/01484834-20191223-15