

7 High-Impact Tactics to Increase Your Learning Success

(Dr. Roblyer, POLS, Spring 2017)

Definitions:

- **Familiarity** – A low-level standard of learning where we keep some characteristics of information in our short-term memories, hoping it will be enough to help us recall the information later through recognition and luck(!). Very volatile methodology: affected easily by stress, time, amounts of information presented, etc. Provides no solid basis for further learning.
- **Understanding** – A high-level standard of learning whereby we build knowledge through discovering and connecting components, relationships, and other characteristics (e.g. what makes it important, similarities & differences, how it fits into the bigger picture). Embeds new knowledge into our long-term memories, making recall much easier and more reliable. Enables us to explain things, concepts, and processes in our own words—effectively “teaching” the material. Builds a solid foundation for learning new, related information.

1. TRIPLE YOUR EXPOSURE TO THE COURSE MATERIAL.

- Pre-read within 24 hours before your class meeting
- Attend and pay attention at the meeting, lecture, etc.
- Post-review the notes, slides, problems, etc. within 24 hours after your class meeting

2. DROP THAT HIGHLIGHTER! INSTEAD, READ FOR UNDERSTANDING.

- Leave behind your old reading approach (“*read from page x to page y, expecting my brain to act like a sponge, my highlighter to scan the words directly into my head, and me to remember everything I have read.*”).
- Instead, CONSTANTLY EVALUATE the material and your own knowledge as you read, asking yourself in which of the three categories below each section or concept belongs.
- Instead of highlighting, TAG THE MATERIAL with the suggested marks after each category below (or those of your own creation) in order to KEEP YOUR FOCUS ON EVALUATING the material for understanding.
 - I can explain this in my own words (*tag these portions with “✓”*)
 - I need to spend some time learning this (*tag these portions with “?”*)
 - I need to find someone to explain this to me (*tag these portions with “✗”*)

3. DURING CLASS, LISTEN FOR UNDERSTANDING.

- “*I’ll just listen and let my brain absorb what I need to know for the exam*” is a recipe for failure. Just as our eyes don’t automatically store information just because we read, neither do our ears help us remember just because we hear!
- If the instructor posts slides in advance, bring them to lecture! If not, and you have some notes from your pre-reading (see #2 above), bring those.
- While listening in class, CONSTANTLY EVALUATE the material and your own knowledge. TAG THE MATERIAL with “✓” or “?” or “✗” to help you KEEP FOCUSED ON EVALUATING what you

are hearing and seeing. ASK QUESTIONS before, during, or after lecture when you note that you don't understand something.

4. FIGHT FOR UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN CLASS MEETINGS.

- Don't Settle for Familiarity – *"I plan on recognizing the correct answer on the exam"* is not a success-oriented strategy.
- Take Responsibility – Once we have recognized that we are the ONLY ones who can identify what we don't understand (see definitions at the top of the first page), then the logical conclusion is that ONLY we are responsible for filling in those holes and fixing the problem.
- Draw on Resources – Achieving understanding of any topic in a course is NOT your sole responsibility. You must be the engine and the coordinator of the effort, however. Constantly use the resources you already have: instructor, text, lectures, notes, problem sets, classmates, friends, the web, Academic Success Center, Peer Tutors, paid tutors, etc. Also, keep your eyes open for new resources.

5. **POST-REVIEW** the lecture material (slides + your notes) within 24 hours after each lecture. KEEP UP THIS PACE so you are regularly completing your post-review before attending the next lecture! COMPLETE THE TAGGING of this material.

- For all "✓" tags, START QUIZZING that day on this material that you believe you can explain in your own words
- For all "?" or "x" tags, FIGHT FOR UNDERSTANDING. DO THE EXTRA WORK (diagraming, memorizing, outlining, etc.) you need to finish understanding all of your "?" tags. CHOOSE THE AVENUES YOU WILL USE (ask the prof, review slides/text, ask a friend, go to a Peer Tutor, search for an explanatory video, etc.) to find the keys to understanding all of your "x" tags.

6. **QUIZ EARLY AND OFTEN** using open-ended, short-essay-style questions about the material you have marked with a "✓" tag. FORCE YOURSELF to answer these questions IN YOUR OWN WORDS verbally to a friend, typing them on your computer, or writing them on a blank sheet of paper. DO NOT LOOK AT YOUR NOTES while doing this! This may be very hard at first, but if you can explain any portion of the material, you very likely understand that portion. STICK WITH IT—you are teaching your brain to learn in a better way, where you are coming to own the knowledge, not just borrowing it until the next exam! GET A QUIZZING PARTNER to add a teamwork aspect to this process, boosting learning efficiency, increasing accountability, and adding in some fun!

7. LOOK FOR THE CONNECTIONS (i.e., story, logic, structure, system) within the subject and topic you are learning. Finding the keys to seeing the terms, concepts, dates, processes, and numbers as part of a bigger something—parts that fit and make sense because you learn to see the "forest," as well as the "trees." Every subject in academia has patterns, themes, or threads within it, binding it together and making sense out of what otherwise would seem like a confusing jumble of information. Identify the objective of the overall field in which your class lies. How does the objective of the class fit into that? How does your instructor THINK when teaching that class? Learning how to THINK like your instructors in each of your classes is a powerful way to learn how to master the course material.