

Tips for Effective Preparatory Classwork



Preparatory Assignments include work students are asked to complete before coming to class. This could be done individually, in pairs, or in small groups. Preparatory Assignments or Prep Work usually take the form of readings, online activities, videos, and/or self-knowledge assessments.

LOGISTICAL CONSIDERATIONS



IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

Prep work should be readily accessible and available at least a week before a session. Determine if prep work is necessary to reach the session's learning objectives.

Students should be notified if and how much of the prep work is required. Consider students schedules - the timeframe of their exams and other prep work.

Students prefer receiving a broad view content over small details in the prep resources. Best practices recommendation is to assign 1:1 - an hour of prep work for one hour of class work.



PROVIDE TIME ESTIMATION

What may take expert or more advanced learners an hour to read may require more time from novice learners.



ENSURE KNOWLEDGE BASELINE

This will help you avoid assigning material that is too easy or too hard.

Curricular and/or course leaders can provide information on what the learners have already been exposed to in the curriculum. (This will also help you with the design of your in-class session).



SET EXPECTATIONS FOR PREP AND CLASSWORK

Provide guidance for the ENTIRE session, from their preparation for the session to the review afterward with clear expectations for each step.

Indicate what they should "master" in the prep work (i.e. what level of detail); what you will cover in class; what they should do after class to solidify their understanding of the concepts.

Use class time for engagement with the prep material: applying it; integrating it with previous learning, etc.

EMBEDDING ACCOUNTABILITY



READ CASE STUDIES

Provide an overview of the cases that you will cover during the class session at the end of you prep work so learners know what to expect.

This will help orient students to the session and relate the content to the prep work. Students are more inclined to do the prep work for case-based session in class.



PROVIDE INTERMITTENT SELF-TESTING

Provide some stopping points during the prep work where students can assess their own learning of the material. Every 15 minutes is suggested.

Intermittent self-administered questions can help students identify what they need to spend more time on.

Questions can be embedded by faculty in prep work materials (slides, videos, notes, etc.) Alternatively, encourage learners to identify their own weaknesses using prompts (e.g. What if anything is still unclear?)



DEVELOP SUMMARY

Encourage students to participate in the development of a summary of the main points of the prep work.

This serves the purpose of "linking" to what the students need to access to maximize their learning from the forthcoming class session.



ASK FOR PREP WORK CHECK UP

The best preparatory work ends by asking the learner to do something to solidify the knowledge they gained. This can be done after completing the prep work, at the beginning class, or both.

Those that best help solidify independently learned knowledge are:

- Questions/Quizzes
- Defining Features matrices (empty outlines)
- Concept maps.

References: DeVaul, N., Goldman, E. 2023. The Medical Student Experience With Pework. Journal of Medical Education and Curricular Development.



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