

Teaching Tips/Notes



RECAP – A Reinforcement Strategy for Student Learning

Professors are expected to prepare graduates to possess the ability to problem-solve and use higher order thinking skills (Lewis & Smith, 1993). Learner-centered pedagogies such as classroom discussion take more class time compared to a teacher-centered method like lecture. However, with learner-centered teaching methods, students are more likely to comprehend and remember ideas since they are active in creating understanding (Halpern, 1993).

Students need to be engaged in the classroom for meaningful learning to occur (King, 1993). *RECAP* is a student-centered strategy designed to reinforce student learning (Radhakrishna, 2008). The acronym *RECAP* stands for: **R**-Read/Recall class materials; **EC**-Engage in discussions, and group activities in class; **A**-Apply what was learned in class via exams, assignments, projects; **P**-Progress/Performance as determined by course grade.

The procedure for using *RECAP* involves a series of sequential steps. First, the instructor describes this learning strategy to students the first day of class and through the course syllabus. Second, the instructor develops a set of questions for each class session to be taught during the semester. Following each class session, students are given the *RECAP* sheet containing the questions for that class session, which is to be used as a review at the beginning of the next class session. In other words, this is a summary presentation of what was taught in the previous class session. Third, at the beginning of the next class session, a student is selected at random to present this summary. The rationale for selecting a student at random is to ensure that every student prepares for presenting the summary. During this presentation, which is approximately 15 – 20 minutes in length, other students and the instructor discuss or respond to the presentation. The instructor evaluates each student's presentation and select *RECAP* sheets throughout the semester for grading.

The *RECAP* strategy has been implemented for over three years in two different graduate-level classes. Students' comments indicate that this is a very helpful strategy for keeping track of content discussed in class. Overall, students agreed that this strategy was helpful in identifying where they need further help or reinforcement on key concepts discussed in class. Student comments like the following support the use of *RECAP*.

"RECAP sheets helped me to prepare for exams. The assignments were helpful in understanding concepts."

"During the whole of my academic life, the RECAP sheet proved to be the most effective way I came across in motivating me to revise weekly and more thoroughly. After each RECAP I felt prepared for on the spot questions and tests. In addition, by revising the RECAP sheets, I spent less time preparing for the mid semester and final tests. I am such a big fan of the RECAP sheet, I even explained it and recommended it during an "effective lectures" presentation I had to give for a Teaching and Learning course."

From the instructor perspective, the *RECAP* strategy has both challenges and opportunities. The challenge is to prepare effective questions that allow for critical thought and reflection of class content each week. On the other hand, this strategy provides opportunities for students to review course content on a weekly basis and come prepared for each class session. The strategy also helps students to learn presentation skills and respond to questions from their peers.

RECAP has proven to be beneficial to both the students and the instructor. The students have a better grasp of concepts taught in class, as well as a systematic way of preparing for exams. Further, the instructor is able to assess not only student learning, but also track student progress in the course. The *RECAP* strategy works best for small to medium sized classes. Although, it will be a time consuming effort in large classes, it is worth trying.

References

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