How Do I Get Students to Read Their Assignments Before Class?

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Presenter Bio:

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How Do I Get Students to Read Their Assignments Before Class?

Maryellen Weimer
Editor, *The Teaching Professor*

The syllabus *says* to do the reading before coming to class
Instead, we hear:

“I didn’t do the reading, but I can tell you what I think.”

1. Let there be consequences
Why do they show up unprepared?

• They’re busy
• Some are lazy/have trouble with motivation
• Might not be good readers

The real reason?

Nothing happens to them if they come unprepared!

1. Let there be consequences

Students should not be able to sit comfortably in class when they are not prepared
Sample strategies:

• “What in the reading influenced your opinion on this topic?”
• “Why is the Yardley Case relevant here?”
• “We will start class tomorrow with a discussion of this topic.”

2. Use text in class

Show students that reading assignments are important when you use their contents in class –
Not with general references but with specific bits and pieces of content

Sample strategies

• First day: take out books and tell them what you have underlined
• The next day: don’t tell them what you’ve underlined.
• Discuss what they have underlined
3. Make students responsible for material you don’t cover in class

This approach isn’t popular because students have little or no confidence in their ability to figure out what they should “get” from the reading.

Sample strategy:

• Put students into groups. Make each group responsible for a section of text material that you haven’t discussed.
• On the due date, distribute copies of materials to the rest of the class.
• Let students “grade materials”

But what about using quizzes?

• In general, they test recall
• They rely on extrinsic motivation
• They don’t make students want to do more reading
I may be idealistic, but...

I think we want students to do the reading because they discover how much more they learn and how much easier course material is to master once they've done the reading.

Thanks for your time!

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