Test Yourself: A Lesson Plan on Student-Created Quizzes
by Lauren Rein

University students today are not asked to be mere sponges; they are expected to do more than memorize information to repeat back on assessments. Students require a variety of effective study techniques as well as well-developed critical thinking skills in order to achieve academic success. One effective study technique involves self-testing: creating study questions based on class materials. Rohrer and Pashler (2010) cite research that supports self-testing methods of study as far more effective at improving recall of materials than only rereading materials, even if surveys show students prefer the latter.

In addition to possessing strong study skills, university students are expected to analyze information critically and objectively. They should be able to raise essential questions and problems with materials, gather relevant information, recognize their own assumptions, and communicate these ideas effectively (Paul & Elder, 2014).

The purpose of an intensive English program (IEP) is to set students up for academic success and prepare them for study by teaching various topics and study skills, all in the English language. Through valuable practice, they can go beyond mere comprehension of course material and learn to deeply analyze what they are learning. This lesson plan is for a content-based and/or test-taking skills course in an academic English program, such as an IEP. Students will learn a new method to study class material and think critically about test questions.

Materials: For students: Content materials, such as a textbook; paper; small whiteboards (optional). For teacher: Chalkboard/whiteboard or document camera and projector.
Audience: High-intermediate to advanced level university or IEP students
Objective: Students will • create and take student-created quizzes, • participate in appropriate classroom discussions, and • critically analyze quiz items
Outcome: Students will • review and study course content, • practice appropriate discussion behavior, and • learn to critically analyze study materials
Duration: Approximately 30 minutes of student preparation outside class and 45–60 minutes of in-class work

Preclass Preparation

Step 1

Weeks beforehand, the instructor should assess students with instruments that utilize the same tasks the teacher plans to use for this lesson, such as true-or-false statements. The student-created

quiz should be assigned after several assessments are given by the instructor, so students have a model of appropriate question tasks, types, and forms.

Step 2

Instruct students to create their own "mini-quizzes" on their own paper using content materials, outside of class. Students should not put their names on these quizzes. Set a specific type and number of items, such as three true-or-false statements and two short answer questions. Emphasize that students will give these mini-quizzes to their peers.

Production: Individual Work (15–20 minutes)

Step 3

In class, pass out the quizzes students have made. Have students trade their quizzes with each other, or you can collect them and redistribute the quizzes to students to complete in order to review and study course content.

Step 4

Move around class to explain or clarify quiz items if needed. In the quizzes they're reviewing, students should look for test items with:

- inaccurate or unclear grammar
- poor word choice
- generally vague structures
- unclear or incomplete scope of the task
- a task scope that is too broad or too narrow

Depending on the level of your students, you may want to model these issues beforehand. For example, in a class where the carrier content is geography, a strong short answer prompt would be "Define the concepts of relative and absolute location in geography." The writer is expected to provide definitions for the two types of geographic location named in the statement, a topic presumably covered in the class.

A prompt with inaccurate grammatical structure might be "Definition location absolute and relative location." The statement "Explain the absolute geography of Brooklyn, New York City" might be too narrow and have poor word choice. The precise longitude and latitude of a neighborhood is difficult to remember. It is also difficult to "explain" geographic coordinates—*provide* or *state* are better direction verbs here.

Production: Group Work (15–20 minutes)

Step 5

Organize students into small groups, keeping the quizzes they completed. Groups should compare answers and check their knowledge. This reinforces the review and enables students to collaborate on selecting relevant information to answer questions.

Step 6

If available, distribute small whiteboards to each group. Instruct groups to compile lists of "good" quiz items and "bad" quiz items on the whiteboard or a separate sheet of paper. Students should go through each quiz and discuss positive and negative aspects of each question. This is both communicative and pragmatic practice and allows students to negotiate meaning from quiz items as well as debate the quality of quiz items.

Students will often identify "bad" items as those that are too easy, too obvious, or too general. They will also analyze "bad" items that are unclear due to inaccurate word choice or grammar. Again, bring these lapses in clarity to students' attention. Unclear answers due to structure errors impact the clarity of their answers during a testing situation, which may impact their grades.

Wrap-Up

Debriefing (15–20 minutes)

Step 7: Share lists of "good" and "bad" questions with the entire class: The instructor can lead the debriefing, or students can present. The small whiteboards or projector can be used to display answers. Ask students a variety of questions to engage critical thinking:

- Ask them to describe for the class the positive or negative aspects of the quiz items they critiqued.
- Ask them to explain why certain quiz questions are better than others.
- Ask what items they would prefer to have on an assessment and why they prefer those questions.

Also, bring attention to the presentation of items—in grammar, vocabulary, and clarity. These all matter, most especially in students' questions and answers on graded assessments.

Additional Study (optional)

The instructor can collect "good" questions and compile a class list of study questions for a forthcoming assessment and provide this to students.

References

Paul, R., & Elder, L. (2014). C*ritical thinking: Concepts and tools* (7th ed.). Tomales, CA: Foundation for Critical Thinking Press.

Rohrer, D., & Pashler, H. (2010). Recent research on human learning challenges conventional instructional strategies. *Educational Researcher, 39*(5), 406–412.

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