

Frequent Testing and its Impact on Students' Performance

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Many of our students appear to do well during a semester, but then some of them fail the final tests. Other students cram for the exam, but don't retain enough of due material to move on to more advanced levels. The problem may not be that they aren't knowledgeable enough or can't retain information for long, but need more incentive to learn, require motivation, strategy, and drive. Or they are not tested efficiently.

Recent studies have highlighted the testing effect and elevated interest among high school teachers. These multiple studies investigating retention after different study and test sequences have been conducted, for instance, by Karpicke and Roediger. If learning were solely a function of studying, then we would expect that **study-study-study-test** would yield the best results, while **study-test-test-test** would have a neutral or detrimental effect. Furthermore, if there were no need to study material after it had been mastered, the traditional paradigm of studying something and then moving on would yield the same results as intensive studying interspersed with testing, or intensive studying followed by multiple tests. However, Karpicke and Roediger affirm that testing is not a neutral event and that it is not a good idea to skip over mastered material when studying. Students who follow the **study-test-test-test** pattern have superior long-term recall of content when compared with students who had followed the **study-study-study-test or study-test-study-test sequences**,

Furthermore, *both study-test-study-test and study-test-test models bring much better results* than models where students study and are tested, and then no longer have to study or be tested on content that already has been tested. **In short, practice makes perfect; Students who are repeatedly tested on the mastered material do best of all.**

Tests are a vital part of the teaching and learning process. Your testing strategy affects how well students will learn and retain the material. Although two midterms and a final are common strategies, research suggests that they may not be the best ones for students. There

are **some alternative testing strategies** which can be combined if necessary:

Frequent testing or quizzing

Research evidence suggests that frequent testing with tasks that stimulate "effortful recall" improves long term memory. Frequent testing also reduces stress on students because they have less information to learn at one time.

Mastery Learning

This is a strategy in which students repeat unit tests until they are able to achieve a set mastery score. Between tests students review their test performance with a teacher. Prescriptions can be provided to help students prepare for another attempt at the unit test if they have not yet achieved mastery.

In-class quizzes

Scheduled in-class quizzes can improve attendance and student learning because they motivate them to keep up with the material on an ongoing basis. .

Pretest and post test

A test given in the first weeks of class and then again toward the end of a Unit can provide information about the impact of the course on student learning.

Collaborative testing

In group testing, students first take the test individually. Then they work in groups to discuss their answers and submit a group response. Proponents of collaborative testing suggest that it more accurately reflects real world setting such as team-working.

It is really important how teachers create tests that can fully assess what students are learning. Below there are some suggestions to improve learning before and after a test.

Useful tips for testing students:

Give frequent and challenging assignments

Before issuing their first test, teachers should give students meaningful assignments that encourage them to work with the material that will be covered. When students have to apply and synthesize information, they learn better than when they simply read or re-read material under study. For instance, in a business English class in Raising finance (Market Leader Upper – Intermediate Unit 9), students may

revise various sources of financing their advantages and disadvantages and may discuss new efficient solutions to funding start-ups.

Emphasize practical applications

It's easier for students to remember offered material or various business concepts when they're related to practical applications than when they are presented as abstractions. Therefore, in most Business English classes, grammar or marketing theory should be kept to a minimum, used only to help students communicate and keep disputes open. Once students digest one topic and its application, they can more readily see how it applies in similar instances, which allows them to transfer what they have learned to novel situations. Such transfer of knowledge is at the heart of all learning.

Carefully design tests

Frequent testing isn't beneficial if tests aren't well-designed. Teachers need to plan their test content and tasks just as carefully as they plan the outlines or frameworks they use for teaching. Tests may also serve as a source of new knowledge for students. Tasks can be made more attractive if arranged in the form of texts containing factual material and thus raising their interest.

Test relevant materials and skills

A test is only valid if its tasks are built around knowledge that teacher has communicated to students and expects them to have mastered. It's easy to develop a poor test especially if the teacher is drawing tasks from adjoining material, it doesn't help students with long-term retention.

Prepare right tests

Learning is enhanced when students must generate answers instead of simply recognizing answers that are provided. That's why *essay* tests with open ended questions are better than most multiple-choice or true-false tests which are found in abundance in test banks.

Assess frequently

Frequent testing enhances short term and long-term learning and encourages students to study continuously throughout the semester. Accumulative content tests that include what has been mastered along with new material—are more effective than non-overlapping assessments of separate content.

Provide timely feedback

New generation of students or Net Geners are used to getting regular feedback to their performance. Frequent assessments not only measure

how much students tend to learn, but also reveal precisely *what* they learn. Testing enables teachers to correct misunderstood material before it has become ingrained in a student's mind. If repeated testing is used as feedback, it can lead to better teaching.

Use It, It's Yours

For true learning, it's better for high school teachers to test early, to test often and test everything. For students this kind of active practice will make them letter-perfect.

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