



Tech Teaching Tips

Advice for Pharmacy Technician Educators

Five Tips to Motivate Your Students

Getting your students excited about your subject and motivating them to learn can be one of the most difficult aspects of teaching. Many instructors fall flat in this regard, believing that it does not matter whether or not students are interested in the subject—they just need to learn it. That mindset, however, is outdated. Much of the current literature on teaching and how people learn emphasizes the importance of motivation in acquiring true, lasting learning. The following are a few tips to help you motivate your students.

Tip #1: Who Cares?

Although the subject of pharmacology might be fascinating to you, it might be a nightmare for your students. Try motivating your students by giving personal anecdotes about how and why you became interested in the subject, how it informs your everyday work, or even how you, too, struggled with it at first. Explain how the course applies to their future as pharmacy technicians and link what you are teaching to real-world scenarios as often as possible. Your students need to know that the knowledge gained in your class has value to them personally. Try using case studies or role playing activities that bring the content to life.

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Why Active Learning Is Important

Active learning is exactly what it sounds like—students taking an *active* role in their education. Simply sitting in a chair while someone spouts facts and then your recalling those facts for a test is not learning. Learning occurs only when it has had “a sustained, substantial, and positive influence on the way [students] think, act, and feel.”¹ (p24) Your job, as a teacher, is to offer students opportunities to take control of their education in as many different ways as possible.

Elizabeth Barkley² recommends several strategies to foster an environment where students are comfortable taking control of their learning. The first strategy is to develop a list of activities that students can choose to complete. The activities should be varied to appeal to different types of learners, but should ultimately meet the learning goals for your course. Letting students choose assignments based on their preferences, abilities, schedules, and

learning styles makes it more likely that they will be engaged and invested in their work.

Another way to get students to actively participate in their own learning is to offer contract grading. This system “allows each student to make his or her *own path* for the class.... Grades are assigned on the basis of the agreement between the student and the professor. With contract grading, students have a say in their curriculum as well as how their grade is ultimately assessed.”² (p57) This form of grading puts more responsibility on the students. The students must consider how they think and work best in choosing an appropriate assignment.

In addition to what you do with students in the classroom, you can give your students some tips for organizing their out-of-class time. Keeping students focused on their education outside of the classroom setting is key to getting them

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Understanding Metacognition

Thinking about the way you think can seem like a feat of mental gymnastics fit only for time spent on a psychiatrist's couch. However, the current literature on education agrees that students who take the time to figure out how and why they think the way they do (known in the psychology world as *metacognition*) can dramatically increase their success in the classroom.

Everyone, whether or not they are willing to admit it, has biases in the way they see and think

about the world. Our parents, peer groups, and the culture we live in all contribute to how we perceive the things happening around us. What differentiates those who practice metacognition is the willingness to examine those biases, examine new information presented to them, and adjust their thinking accordingly. In *What the Best College Students Do*, Ken Bain says that “if you learn to think about your own thinking, you can train your mind to look for those natural patterns of... bias” and then reconstruct your reality based on the new information.^{1(p81)}

From the Publisher

Welcome to the second issue of *Tech Teaching Tips*. A constant challenge for any teacher is “How do I keep my students engaged? How do I get my students to participate in their learning?” These are not trivial questions—they go right to heart of real learning, career success, and professional competency.

In this issue, we provide three different takes on student engagement. In *Five Tips to Motivate Your Students*, we provide suggestions to get your students excited about their courses and involved in their learning. In *Why Active Learning Is Important*, you will read how to encourage your students to take control of their learning and find a list of useful tips to share with your students. Finally, in *Understanding Metacognition* we ask you to consider the variety of ways in which students learn.

In the words of education author Ken Bain, “When we can successfully stimulate our students to ask their own questions, we are laying the foundation for learning.” With each issue of *Tech Teaching Tips* we want to help you to become a better teacher and lay a foundation of learning for your students that will make them become not only better students but better professionals in the workplace. As always, we welcome your suggestions for story ideas.

Jack Bruggeman

Director, ASHP Special Publishing

If all that still seems like psychobabble, consider what Elizabeth Barkley says in *Student Engagement Techniques*: “Being aware of oneself as a learner and constantly monitoring the effectiveness of one’s learning . . . can help learners acquire new information and integrate it with existing knowledge as well as retrieve stored information.”^{2(p30)}

As a teacher, she suggests creating activities for students to promote metacognition such as “previewing, summarizing, paraphrasing, imaging, creative analogies, note taking, and outlining.” Consider asking students to keep a journal and give them

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Tip #2: The Need to Succeed

In *Student Engagement Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*, Elizabeth Barkley says, "Students must have confidence that with appropriate effort, they can succeed. If there is no hope, there is no motivation."¹(p11) Set your students up to succeed. Make sure your lessons and assignments have all of the following components:

(1) *Clear goals*—gives the students what they need to know, why they need to do the assignment, and how it applies to them.

(2) *Immediate and continuous feedback*—allows students to correct wrong thinking before they are graded.

(3) *Appropriate level of difficulty*—ensures that the students have an assignment that is not so easy that they do not have to work to complete it, but not so hard that they give up in defeat.

In addition, ask questions to help your students get to the right answer rather than giving them the answer and then expecting them to memorize and regurgitate what you taught. Real learning happens when students have to work for the correct answer.

Give the students what they need to know and why they need to do the assignment.

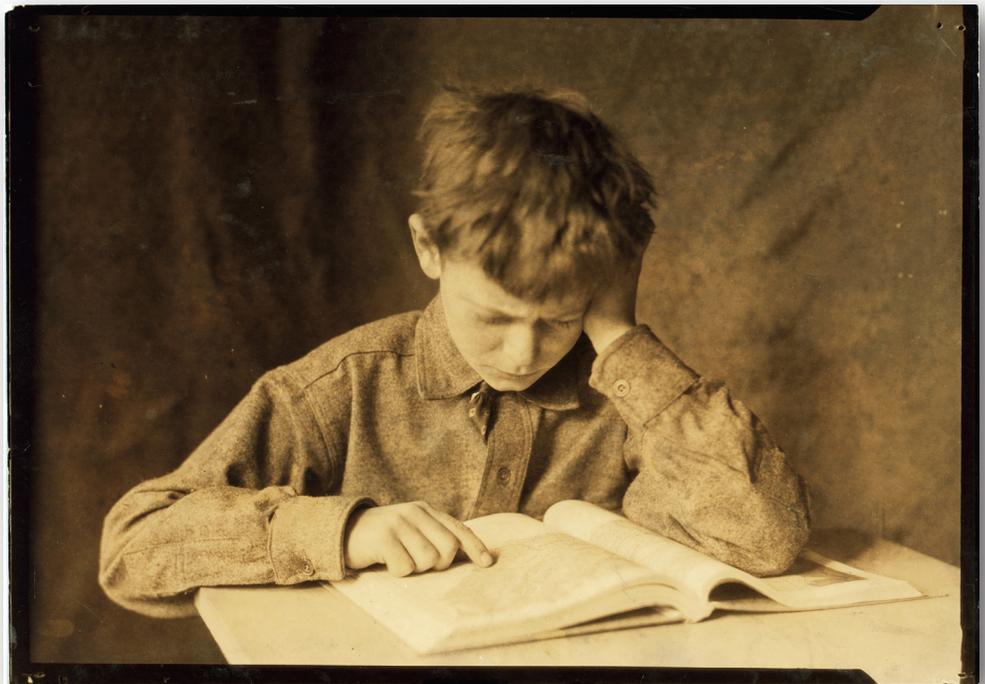
Tip #3: Avoid Extrinsic Motivators

In *What the Best College Teachers Do*, Ken Bain found that highly successful college teachers "generally avoided using grades to persuade students to study. Instead they invoked the subject, the questions it raises, and the promises it makes to any learner."²(p36) Although you obviously have to assign grades at some point, try to focus your students on what they will do with the knowledge gained in your class once they move on, whether it is in their first job as a pharmacy technician or in the next class they take.

Tip #4: Create a Community

Your students come from a variety of different educational and cultural backgrounds. You may have 18-year-olds fresh out of high school or 55-year-olds looking for a career change. You will have to tailor your classes to account

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actively involved in their own learning. Stefanie Weisman gives some good tips in her book, *The Secrets of Top Students: Tips, Tools, and Techniques for Acing High School and College*³(pp32-38):

- Keep a calendar to keep track of major events (midterms, papers due, projects due, etc.).
- Keep a planner or list of the day-to-day activities that need to be done.
- In a to-do list, include a deadline next to each task.
- Give yourself a countdown for major events so you do not lose track of your progress.
- If a complicated task is broken up into separate steps, include a deadline for completing each step.
- Set artificial deadlines to make sure there is enough time to finish big projects.
- Remind yourself that the project does not need to be perfect.



- Tell a friend or parent what you are working on to keep yourself accountable.
- Work on something for 10 minutes and then see if you can work on it some more.
- Remember that you do not have to begin at the beginning.
- If your surroundings cause you to procrastinate (TV, radio, roommates), move to another location (library, coffeehouse, student lounge).
- Reward yourself after you accomplish your task.
- Limit your use of websites that can tempt you to procrastinate (Facebook, Twitter). Turn off your Wi-Fi if you have to!

Remember that your students have complex lives outside of the classroom, and they might not have learned how to schedule their time effectively. Taking the opportunity to show them some time management techniques will not only help them stay on top of assignments, it will also show them that you care about them as individuals and that you recognize that balancing schoolwork with life is not easy. If your students know you care about them, they are much more likely to be enthusiastic about your class and take an active part in their education.

References

1. Bain, Ken. *What the Best College Teachers Do*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; 2004.
2. Barkley, Elizabeth. *Student Engagement Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass; 2010.
3. Weisman, Stefanie. *The Secrets of Top Students: Tips, Tools, and Techniques for Acing High School and College*. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, Inc.; 2013.



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for a wide variety of experience and learning ability. In these circumstances, it is important to create a safe, productive learning environment in which all of these people can flourish. Here are some suggestions from Barkley¹(pp 48-50):

- To get a better sense of where your students are in terms of course knowledge, have small groups create a cognitive map (see example) on the course’s topic. One member of the group will then report back to the class about what they created. The process is repeated at the end of the course to show the instructor and students what has been learned.
- To help students develop empathy and cultural understanding, have students make a list of things they are good at and things that need improvement. Then, ask each student to choose an item from the Needs Improvement list and discuss them with the class.
- Role play to help students learn to recognize and respond to things such as folk remedies in appropriate, culturally sensitive ways.

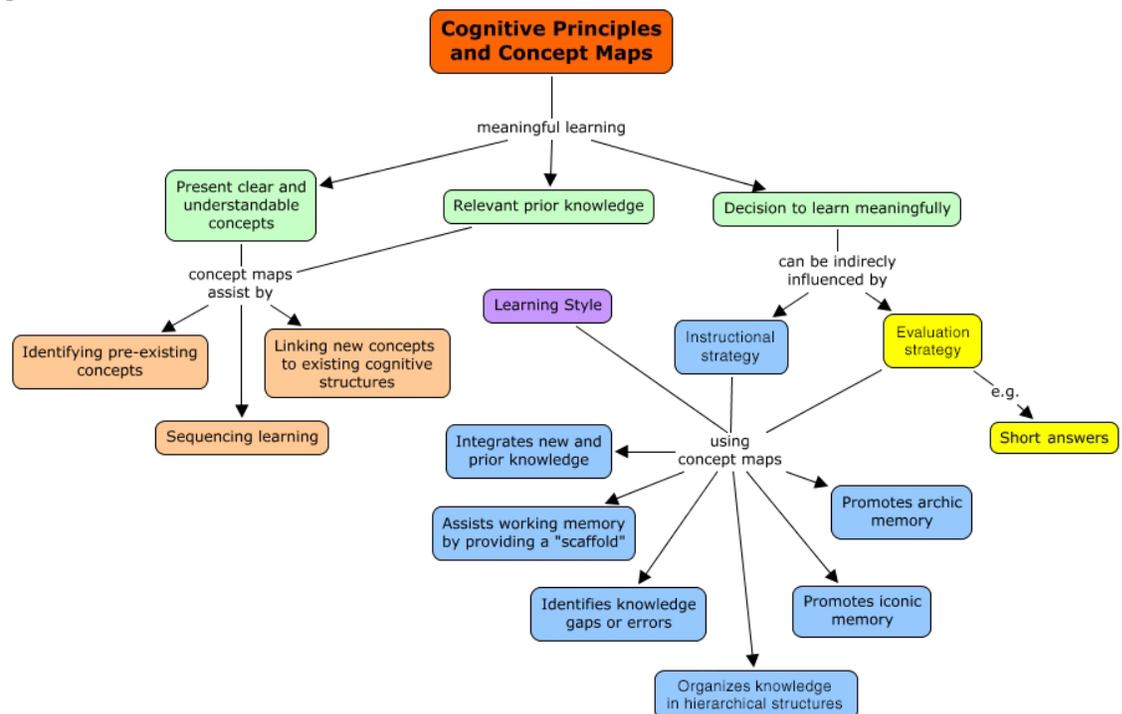
Tip #5: Think Like a Pharmacy Technician

One overlooked problem in teaching, especially teaching in disciplines like the sciences, is that students often are not taught how to read or study in the specialty. Reading a report on the latest

breakthrough in diabetes treatment or a textbook describing how drugs affect the nervous system is very different than reading a novel or popular magazine article. When students understand *how* to study the topic, they are much more likely to be motivated to do the reading assigned to them. Bain found that “the best professors looked for suggestions they might make about how to read the scholarship in the field, or questions they might ask to highlight particular analytical strategies.”²(p56) Try analyzing your own reading habits. How do you approach the scholarly work in your field? Are there things that you do in your own reading that would be helpful for your students to learn how to do?

References

1. Barkley, Elizabeth. *Student Engagement Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass; 2010.
2. Bain, Ken. *What the Best College Teachers Do*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; 2004.



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prompts to which they can respond that will foster metacognitive thinking. Have them read an article about something happening in your field and ask them to point out possible biases in the writing, why they might exist, and how the author could overcome them.

Perhaps Bain said it best in *What the Best College Teachers Do*: “When we can successfully stimulate our students to ask their own questions, we are laying the foundation for learning.”^{1(p31)} Creating a space where students feel comfortable reflecting on their thinking, a space where they can say the “wrong” thing without fear of embarrassment, will encourage them to make connections between what they know, what they thought they knew, and what they are learning. In this way, you enable them to be active participants in, and to take control of, their own education.

References

1. Bain, Ken. *What the Best College Teachers Do*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; 2004.
2. Barkley, Elizabeth. *Student Engagement Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass; 2010.



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Amberly Hyden, T³ Managing Editor, at
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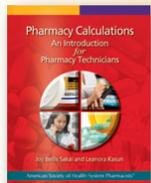


ASHP Pharmacy Technician Education and Training Resources

For information on these and other resources for technician training go to: www.ashp.org/menu/InformationFor/Technicians.aspx.

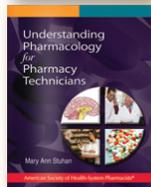
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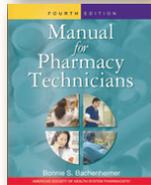
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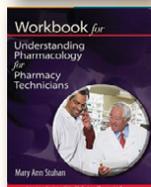
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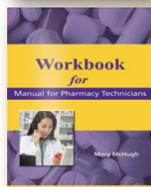
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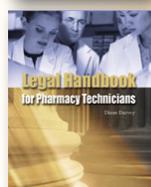
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