

FACULTY FOCUS

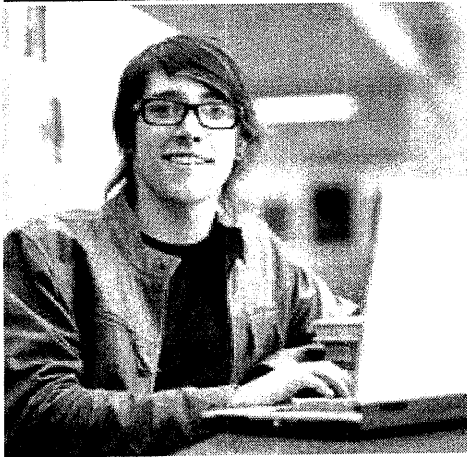
HIGHER ED TEACHING STRATEGIES FROM MAGNA PUBLICA

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Assessing What Your Students Know, Want to Know, and Have Learned

By: [Thomas Dyer and John Steele in Educational Assessment](#)

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Measuring student success is a top priority to ensure the best possible student outcomes. Through the years instructors have implemented new and creative strategies to assess student learning in both traditional and online higher education classrooms. Assessments can range from formative assessments, which monitor student learning with quick, efficient, and frequent checks on learning; to summative assessments, which evaluate student learning with “high stakes” exams, projects, and papers at the end of a unit or term.

One way to measure student learning quickly and efficiently is to use KWLs. Created by Donna Ogle, the letters KWL stand for “what we know”, what we want to know”, and “what we learned” (Ogle, 1986).

This type of assessment is fantastic for instructors to gauge each student’s prior knowledge. What our students already know can direct our instruction. This information can be used to determine if we need to address any misinformation or where in the conversation we should begin. If our students seem to know little we can start with basic instruction, if they know more than expected we can dig deeper into the content saving time for all involved. Meanwhile, knowing what our students have learned (or didn’t learn) provides instructors with valuable information regarding possible content objectives we may need to re-teach

The KWLs also fall into a category of formative assessment Clariana and Koul (2005) categorize as “multiple try feedback”. As students respond to the KWLs within the week, instructors have the opportunity to redirect responses that may be off task or incorrect. This allows students the opportunity to post additional questions under the “What do you want to know” post. This type of formative assessment also allows the instructor to lead students through the inquiry process. As students respond to the “What do you know?” prompt about a particular topic, instructors can pose real questions in response, such as with a “How do you know you know it?” follow-up question. The inquiry process in conjunction with KWLs encourages self-directed learning and communication between students and instructor. This process does not end once students respond to the “What did you learn?” prompt. Instructors have the opportunity to continue to ask questions such as “How does it connect?” to the overall objective of the week and ultimately the course (Kuhlthau & Maniotes, 2010).

How do we implement KWLs in the online classroom? It is as simple as creating three posts each week. Depending on the type of learning platform you use, how you do this, may vary. We have found that including these three simple posts as a reply to the already embedded discussion board question allows for greater overall student engagement. If you have a specific forum where it is simple to create new posts then you do not need to do that as a reply to the created discussion question, we simply found that we receive a more favorable response from students.

Timeline: Post the KWL posts each week of the course. Our courses are seven weeks in length. We post our three KWL posts all on Monday, the first day of the week for our courses, but we change the subject for each post to indicate the day we would like the post to be responded to. The reason we post all three questions on Monday is to be sure our posts are the first posts the students see. If you have the ability to always make your post first — “sticky” posts as some describe it—then you can post the “know” post on Monday, the “want” post on Wednesday, and the “learn” post on Friday. How you organize your posts is up to you. Here is an example of how we do it in our courses.

Monday: Create three additional questions under required discussion question.

Example:

- Subject: MONDAY KWL
 - Message: Please reply by Tuesday. Your reply should be based on your prior knowledge and experience regarding the following question. “What do you **KNOW** about a thesis statement”?
- Subject: WEDNESDAY KWL
 - Message: Please reply by Thursday. Please be sure to complete all the required readings this week prior to asking questions. Also, be sure to ask specific questions regarding the following question. “What do you **WANT** to know about a thesis statement”?
- Subject: FRIDAY KWL
 - Message: Please reply by Sunday. I can’t wait to read all the great learning this week. “What did you **LEARN** about a thesis statement”?

At the end of each week, you can take this strategy a step further by creating a wrap-up post that summarizes what students said they learned. This is your opportunity to show the entire class all the laudable ideas they discovered throughout the week and address any misnomers by re-teaching key points that the student did not pick up on initially.

References:

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Kuhlthau, C. C., & Maniotes, L. K. (2010). Building guided inquiry teams for 21st-century learners. *School Library Monthly*, 26(5), 18-21.

Ogle, D.M. (1986). K-W-L: A teaching model that develops active reading of expository text. *The Reading Teacher*, 39, 564-570.

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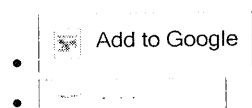
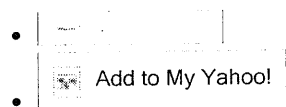
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