

Teaching For Success Spectrum

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ALL NEW



Talk about success: According to NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California, "The rovers have operated more than eight times as long as their originally planned three-month explorations on Mars. Each has driven more than 6.8 kilometers (4.2 miles), about 11 times as far as planned. Combined, they have returned more than 150,000 images."

Success is the Only Option

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Outcomes

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Positive results (outcomes) are very important today (even on Mars). Verifiable outcomes are often cited as proof of success in science and in teaching. Sure, teaching is fun, energizing, and satisfying, but when you are getting paid to teach, the organization paying you expects results, and not just any results.

Today's teaching should be guided by an instructional plan designed to produce a carefully defined set or range of outcomes. Today's teaching is anything but a hit-or-miss romp in the educational woods. It is focused, purposeful, guided, and subject to constant benchmarking and error correction.

Arriving at the end of each learning session and course confident of having achieved the outcomes you and your college or university desire is the only option when you teach for success.

Teaching For Success, dedicated to teaching and learning improvement for everyone who teaches, especially part-time faculty, brings you a broad spectrum of ideas, strategies, and

principles designed to help you accomplish two fundamental goals: choosing suitable learning outcomes and devising the best teaching approaches for achieving these goals.

TFS has been actively working for teaching and learning improvement in higher education for 18 years, focusing on one theme: Everything about teaching and learning can be improved. Commitment and effort are the two key ingredients that fuel improvement. In my book, if you teach part time or as an adjunct faculty, you are just as professional and responsible for quality instruction as are the full-time and tenured faculty.

Consider your role in producing better instructional outcomes. No matter whether you choose to improve for the sake of your students, or for your own satisfaction and pride, or for the good of your institution, the journey to improvement is one you won't want to miss. Whatever your reason, it's an opportunity to go beyond institutional bureaucracy and academic titles. Why not commit to being a professional instructor and irrefutably commit to improving every class everyday?

Consistently achieving positive results is what teaching for success is all about. ✨

The Genesis of Metamorphosis

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The French adage, “The more things change, the more they stay the same” has cynicism at its heart, as it basically says that change is pointless; it always brings more of the same.

Consistency or Stagnation?

On which side of the fence do you fall? Do you really want more of the same in your teaching term after term, class after class? There’s a lot to be said for consistency, but the downside is growing feelings of stagnation and burnout.

To prevent a comfort-zone routine from ever forming, take control, be proactive, and give planned change and serendipity a chance to build the new skills you need to propel you to the next level.

But, you ask, what amount of change is best? Where do I start? Should I clean house each term? No, of course, not. If you have developed proven winners in your teaching repertoire, you should not change them without careful consideration. But we all have weaknesses and areas that could be strengthened.

Sure, you might adopt the “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” philosophy; however, you risk accepting an eventual contentment with the humdrum. I’m

advocating taking control in favor of variation. Make reworking and revitalizing your teaching an internally directed, metamorphic process.

Expectations

Begin building a program of internal metamorphosis by carefully assessing your instructional experiences and setting clear, specific intents. Note particularly your target expectations concerning:

- Your teaching style: active or passive.
- In class and homework assignments: taken directly from the textbook or cleverly designed and modified for maximum learning effectiveness.
- Textbook currency, organization, and connectedness to students. Look for opportunities to inject freshness and challenge into these items.

Can you envision ways to alter your expectations and create some surprises and innovations for your students this term?

Has some part of your teaching style become habitual? For example, are you relying on the same jokes, the same examples, the same lectures, semester after semester?

Well then, resolve to energize your teaching. A great place to pick up new teaching ideas is to visit class sessions of colleagues—especially ones who do not teach in your field. Such visitations can be windows into new instructional

strategies, styles, and personas. Ask around and find out who are considered to be among the best instructors at your college or university. Seek them out and observe how they teach. You’ll be amazed at how much you’ll learn and how many ideas you will devise in just minutes.

Assignments

Because your students probably spend more time with your assignments than they spend in class, your assignments have a greater impact than you may realize. Therefore, carefully examine your exercises and project assignments for improvement opportunities. If you restrict assignments, exercises, and assessments to those taken from a teacher’s manual or a publisher’s website, they will likely be only mediocre in their learning effectiveness.

One canned assignment can’t possibly fit every learner in your class to a tee, so determine how you can customize each task to enhance your class learning environment. Do all you can to mark assignments with your thumbprint; it makes them connect more completely with your students and avoids wasting their time.

Embrace Your Learners’ POV

It’s actually quite easy to get an accurate picture of your students’ needs, goals, and perspectives. How? Become a learner yourself.

Becoming a student at your institution will let you see things from today’s perspective. See what new

technologies are in use today that were not when you were a student. Learning a second or third language can provide you with an experience similar to that of your students with a native language other than English.

Or, study a subject totally new to you in order to understand what it is like for a student who is new to your teaching discipline. By returning to class after an extended absence from formal education, you will gain insight into the experience of the returning student.

Textbooks

If you are permitted to select a textbook for your course, take time to review new possibilities.

You can order free examination copies of texts from many publishers, and even if you do not select the texts you review, you may still find new ideas in examination copies that you can adopt. Also, an analytical comparison with other textbooks will provide new insights into how to introduce, organize, and present content to your students.

Additionally, complete your professional metamorphosis by seeking out and embracing opportunities to speak to civic and social groups about new developments in your discipline. And finally, choose to interact with business leaders and community professionals.

If you are observant, you will undoubtedly sow the seeds of new approaches to teaching and learning in your imagination, continuing your success metamorphosis. ✨

Real Power Points Enhance Learning

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"To speak and to speak well are two things. A fool may talk, but a wise man speaks."

—Ben Jonson (1573–1637), dramatist, poet, and wit.

Many college administrations are trying to persuade faculty to use more technology in classroom teaching. In its simplest and most common expression, "teaching through technology" often translates into using PowerPoint presentations as a lecture enhancement. Unfortunately, there is a wealth of evidence that many PowerPoint presentations used in college science classes are ineffective.

Many educational researchers view PowerPoint presentations as serving largely the same role as the traditional blackboard; it is a convenient teaching tool that looks good but does not enhance the intellectual environment. In summary, it reinforces passive, ineffectual learning strategies. Research shows that student grades on tests and class performance are not improved when instructors replace chalkboard or overhead transparency presentations with the PowerPoint format.

There are two components of effective PowerPoint usage in college



Brian R. Shmaefsky science teaching—but these principles are not limited to the sciences; they can be transferred to other discipline areas. First, the presentation must be a visually effective instructional tool that enhances rather than distracts from teaching. Second, the presentation should encourage active learning and not merely be an appendage to passive learning. An effective presentation should inform, motivate, and persuade students to learn the content.

Don't Be Pointless

Educational PowerPoint presentations should not be what the presentation experts call "Power-Pointless presentations." A typical pointless presentation is static and does nothing to advance the skill level of the student.

Many PowerPoint presentations are described as empty. This means the presentation is a mirror of the lecture notes and does nothing to stimulation memorization, solicit questions, or bring up issues related to the content.

On the other hand, PowerPoint presentations used in educational settings are often overly flashy or "Disneyfied." These are empty presentations offering arcade-quality cartoons or graphics that contribute nothing to the learning experience. Training research shows that all these special effects and fancy transitions do little improve the effectiveness of presentations.

Educational and training experts have drawn up the following guidelines for PowerPoint usage that is effective in conveying the type of technical information found in science classes:

- The presentation should have a logical flow from beginning to end, very much like a written document.
- Use colors, fonts, and images that are easy to see when projected onto a screen.
- The presentation should avoid jumping from one point to another. In addition, you must be careful to avoid adding information not directly related to the main points of the lecture.
- Use text sparingly, and include a maximum of six main points per slide, with six words per point if possible. The presentation is not a lecture transcript. Rather, it is a summary of the main points that directs the students' focus. Use a font size that can be read from the back of the classroom when projected on the viewing screen.
- Time the slides so that they appear at a rate of no more than three slides per minute. Leave the students sufficient time to take notes on the slide.
- Switching between programs such as a database or Web page only when necessary.

Quick Tip

The Gift of Feedback

Catch your students doing something right and let them know you've noticed. Give them the gift of positive feedback concerning their learning performance. Too often teachers focus exclusively on catching mistakes and errors. Use strong negative feedback only when their safety is at stake. ✨

Transitions take extra time and can make it difficult for students to remain focused on the lesson. Any type of transition should be reserved for an active learning component involving student participation.

- Use images that stress the main points or that provide concrete examples of an abstract concept. Avoid extraneous images and illustrations that may distract from the text or the flow of the presentation.

Figure 1 (page 4) shows an ideal PowerPoint slide depicting a simple concept in thermodynamics that is fundamental to all of the sciences. The image presents the concept in the title, defines it in a quote, and shows a picture that an instructor can use as a visual cue for explaining the concept. In addition, the slide contains a non-written signal, the heat images, that would elicit student questions. Heat loss is an important factor that causes energy loss during

continues on page 4

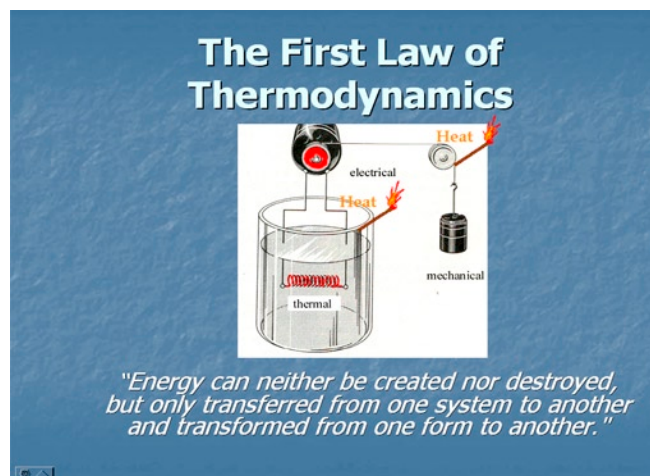


Figure 1 -An Ideal PowerPoint Slide

continues from page 3

energy conversions. Transitions take extra time and can make it difficult for students to remain focused on lesson. Any type of transition should be reserved for an active learning component involving student participation.

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is an important factor that causes energy loss during energy conversions.

Students learn more effectively when they are able to make connections between knowledge they already have and new content being covered in class. The opening

of a lecture should facilitate these connections by helping students apply their prior knowledge of the subject matter to the new topic being covered. An effective way to do this is by opening the lecture with a question pertinent to both topics. This opening question should be placed on a PowerPoint slide and timed to give students a moment to think about their response.

You should then ask the class for answers, followed by a PowerPoint slide that provides the correct answer. It's effective in small or large classes and focuses student attention on the topic. It also provides you with feedback on what students already know about the material being covered. Always use an image or animation sequence that reinforces the concept under discussion.

PowerPoint Power Points

Real Power Point presentations have the following properties:

- A format that encourages the students to consider:
 - ◊ What do I already know about the material?
 - ◊ How does it relate to other topics I've studied?
 - ◊ How does what I'm learning fit in what I already know about the world?
 - ◊ How do I know if the facts are accurate and relevant?
- Questions and activities that require students to participate and contribute to the lecture.
- Occasional breaks in the lecture to allow for small group discussions, questioning, and writing, all of which provide a basis for evaluating student participation.
- Pauses following questions, to give students time to respond without rushing them to an answer or resolution.
- Rewards for student participation, including supporting their answers and paraphrasing them, while showing the preferred answer on a PowerPoint slide.
- Time for students to ask questions at the end of a topic or upon completion of the lecture, cued with a PowerPoint slide.

There are many ways technology can be used to improve classroom instruction. However, technology alone does not contribute to student learning;

it must be employed appropriately, using an active learning approach to make it an effective teaching tool.

The following quote by popular commentator Andy Rooney best summarizes the use of technology in the classroom: "Computers make it easier to do a lot of things, but most of the things they make it easier to do don't need to be done."

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Dwight's Speech Coach and You

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Are you looking for ways to inform and entertain your public speaking class? I teach public speaking for freshman at a Southeastern State University, and I am constantly looking for ways to keep my students' attention during our 8 a.m. class period. The activity "Dwight's Speech Coach" is one that has worked well.

It combines my communication students' interest in media and comedy with my desire to see what they have learned in my class over the previous 14 weeks. The activity asks students to identify and apply public speaking vocabulary to the popular NBC sitcom *The Office*.

The following are guidelines for preparing for and implementing this activity in your class.

Before class:

1. Obtain a videotape or DVD of "Dwight's Speech" from NBC's, *The Office*. Cue it to begin after Dwight is eating the grapes when Michael asks "So, Dwight, ready for your big speech?"

2. Write out a note card for each student in your class. On each note card, there should be a word related to public speaking that you have discussed throughout the semester.

For example: pronunciation, ethos, projection, filler words, etc.

During class:

First, tell the class that this is going to be a wrap-up activity to determine how much they have learned throughout their semester of public speaking. Tell them you are going to show a video clip about a person with serious communication apprehension (speech phobia), and that the class must work together to become his speech coach.

Then, show the "Dwight's Speech" episode. (I taped it without commercials, and it runs approximately 17 minutes.)

Before you show the clip, consider introducing the scene you are about to show. Mention that Dwight is an office employee who is required to give a speech at a sales convention and is very nervous about doing so. He solicits help from his very confident boss and others in the office. They give him a range of questionable advice. In the end, when Dwight's name is called to deliver his speech at the convention, he freezes.

You might consider fast-forwarding through the elements of the episode that aren't relevant to Dwight's speech (i.e., the discussion of Pam's wedding), so as to keep the students focused on the public speaking elements of the program.

Next, stop the tape at the point when Dwight is unable to get out of his seat to deliver his presentation.

Now, hand out the note cards with the public speaking terms on them to your students.

How to Promote a Sense of Belonging

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Most of the writing classes I teach are compressed into a half semester. These classes consist of technical program internship students who split their time between campus

Tell the students it is now up to them to come up with a phrase or two of advice for Dwight based on the tip written on their note card.

Not only are students required to understand and apply each public speaking term, each student must also connect his or her statement with the statement made by the previous student (hopefully using a smooth transition while doing so).

In the end, the students will be giving an impromptu, smoothly-connected group presentation to Dwight regarding what he should do on stage to ensure he gives a powerful speech at the sales convention.

I have conducted this activity twice in the classroom and found it worked well to combine humor, media, and public speaking terms and their application for students during the last week of the semester. ✨

Quick Tip



Belonging is a powerful course motivator.

and on-the-job training. Although they don't spend as much time on campus as other students, I still like to show them that what they are doing is special.

I do this by taking a group picture during class and then posting it on my office wall. Using a digital or disposable 35mm camera, I take the photos and then get double prints. Each office picture is labeled with the name of the internship group and the semester.

When students come to my office, they notice their picture displayed on my office wall. Many recognize hometown friends or other acquaintances who have gone through previous internship classes.

Most are impressed that I have so many student pictures in my office. While the effort of taking group pictures requires very little time or expense, it gives students a sense of belonging, a sense of pride, and a sense that they will be remembered. Don't have an office? How about a web site? ✨

How to Quickly Create Learning Puzzles

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I have been teaching for more than a decade and have developed many teaching strategies to make my classes more interesting than traditional classes.

One of the teaching strategies I have developed is the frequent use of puzzles in the classroom right after a lecture or before a quiz, test, or exam. Puzzles are terrific for reinforcing important concepts and terms. This strategy helps students cognitively manipulate important concepts and definitions. In addition, puzzles help students to develop excellent problem-solving and logic skills.

There are three different ways to create puzzles: The first way is to use a puzzle software; the second is to use a word processor; and the third is to use a spreadsheet.

Creating a puzzle using puzzle software

There are many puzzle software applications on the market that can be purchased for a relatively low price, usually from \$10 to \$20.

Also, puzzle software can be downloaded online for free. However, you always have to check the copyright

information. Once you have procured the appropriate software, follow these general steps to create a puzzle:

First, type a list of important concepts, terminologies, and their description that were covered in a lecture or that will be on a quiz, test, or exam.

For example, during my foundation lecture I introduce the term beam pocket. I will type the description of beam pocket as, "BEAM POCKET: Opening in a foundation wall created for beam(s) to rest in."

Next, open the puzzle software and follow the directions.

Finally, the software will create a list of ACROSS and DOWN definitions, including spaces to fill in the names.

Creating a puzzle using a word processor

Begin by entering your list of important concepts, terminologies, and their descriptions.

Next, design the layout of the puzzle you want to create. Insert a table into your document containing the number of rows and columns you want to use. Then, enter the terms into the corresponding boxes.

Now fill all of the empty cells with pictures or colors. The black or gray color fill looks most professional. Or, instead of filling the empty cells, you can put your terms in bold text.

Help improve higher education teaching. Submit your ideas to Teaching For Success and be published!

Access Denied: Put Your Syllabus On The Web

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You hurry into the faculty lounge, or wherever your college or university keeps the faculty copy machine, to quickly get copies of your syllabus. A notice on the machine says that as of this date, you must use your CODE to access the machine. But you don't have a code, because:

- (A) all the codes have been given out for this machine.
- (B) you didn't know you had to have an individual code.

Finally, enter numbers corresponding to the terms.

Creating a puzzle using a spreadsheet

Start by entering your list of important concepts, terms, and their descriptions. Then, design the layout of the puzzle you want to create.

Next, adjust the length and width of each cell to make them look square. Enter the terms into the corresponding cells.

Make the cell terms bold. Fill the empty cells with a color or picture. Again, the black or gray fill looks the best in most cases.

Finally, enter numbers to correspond with the terms you choose for your puzzle. ✨

- (C) you meant to fill out the forms and get a code but you didn't know that there was a deadline.
- (D) All of the above.

To solve this crisis, you can create a Web site through your college, if it offers this electronic option, and post your syllabus on it prior to your first class. The students can go to the Web site and print off their own syllabi. It would be good to have them bring their syllabus to class so that you can check that they have a copy of this mandatory document.

If your students damage or misplace their paperwork at any time during the semester, they can print out additional copies themselves, which saves time for both you and the students. Web documents enable the students to replace their paperwork—even in the middle of the night.

Handouts and take-home tests or quizzes can also be posted on your course Web site and be available for download at any time as well. This saves you time and also gives you some much-needed flexibility.

In cases where one of your students does not have access to a computer or the Internet, he or she can either tap the Internet through computers in the college library or computer labs, or, if you now have a code to the copy machine, you can print off a few copies—rather than many, saving your department money on paper and copy machine supplies. ✨

Use Checklists to Ensure a Smooth Course Startup

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No matter whether this is your first class or your hundredth, you will be more successful when you ensure that you have completed a specific list of course startup tasks. At Teaching For Success, we depend on lists and checklists to keep us on track with our projects.

The checklists that follow are only suggestions, and you should modify them to fit your specific situation—or better yet, create your own checklists. Here are four sample checklists designed to help you track your progress during the first critical weeks of the term.

Syllabus

First check your syllabus, whether it has been provided to you or whether you have developed it from years of teaching experience. Check your syllabus for the following:

- ☐ An accurate course description, section, meeting times, and dates of holidays and the final exam.
- ☐ Your current contact information (phone, email, fax, etc.) and office hours.
- ☐ A list of required textbook(s), lab supplies, special tools, safety supplies, etc.
- ☐ A synopsis of major learning goals in terms of knowledge and skills students will gain.
- ☐ A class meeting and activity calendar showing the projected dates for assignments, quizzes, exams, portfolios, surveys, lab projects, etc.
- ☐ A statement of your right to change the course schedule and learning activities as needed.

- ☐ A description of student behaviors that are considered inappropriate at your institution, or referral to the institutional document covering student behaviors and processes for dealing with infractions.
- ☐ A detailed list of your expected and prohibited classroom behaviors. (Make particularly explicit details regarding attendance issues.)
- ☐ A course grading system description, along with your personal, institutional, or departmental policies for making up exams, in-class work, or late assignments. (This is a very, very important part of any syllabus.)
- ☐ A section contrasting acceptable with unacceptable academic behaviors regarding homework, term papers, lab reports, small group participation, team tests, etc.

First Class Meeting Preparation Steps

To reduce the chances of something going wrong during the first class, meeting check off these items:

- ☐ My syllabus has been carefully checked for accuracy and completeness.
- ☐ I have printed 10 to 15 percent more copies than initial registration information shows.
- ☐ I have a student syllabus-acceptance form that students will sign and date upon receipt of a syllabus.
- ☐ I have checked the classroom and labs for seating arrangement, equipment, and negative environmental situations such as noise, poor lighting, inadequate ventilation, etc.
- ☐ I have obtained samples of required supplies, tools, and safety equipment, as well as copies of textbooks, lab manuals, handouts, etc.
- ☐ I have created a class calendar or timeline and denoted all learning activities, exams, etc.

- ☐ I have read my institution's catalog sections on required student behaviors and grading system options and deadlines.

First-Day Tasks

The first class meeting is extremely important for retaining students and making sure they understand exactly what the course will be like in terms of prerequisite knowledge and skills, content to be learned, and anticipated speed and depth of learning. They must understand your grading system and what the term projects will be, and, finally, how you plan to teach. For example, do you lecture, promote group learning, demand class participation, etc? Make sure you:

- ☐ Come early to class and welcome students.
- ☐ Introduce yourself; start to learn names. (See photo idea on page 5.)
- ☐ Use an icebreaker introduction to acquaint learners with each other.
- ☐ Distribute your course syllabus.
- ☐ Explain contents of each syllabus section as needed.
- ☐ Have students sign statement of understanding and compliance with course grading policies, class behavior standards, etc.
- ☐ Survey students for more information on their course subject knowledge and experience levels.

Two-to-Three Week Benchmark Tasks

- ☐ I have learned students' names and completed at least one measurement of learning, such as a quiz, case study, assignment review, group problem report, etc.
- ☐ I've asked for written feedback on my teaching style and techniques.
- ☐ I've encouraged and given learning quality feedback to my students. ✨

Best of TFS: The Master Builder Makes the Grade

Karen Shramm, PhD,
SuperIdea Winner, *TFS* August 1997

Students know that their grade is important, but all too often they see a course and a grade as something that happens to them, something over which they have little control.

The effective teacher understands student psychology and works with it to help the students achieve success. Sometimes students need to be reminded of their role in earning a grade. How practical it is to make this truth palpable by designating them the architect!

At the term's start, introduce the analogy of the master-builder:

- The syllabus serves as the blueprint.
- The assigned papers and projects form the essential building blocks.
- The student's time and talent function as his or her tools.
- Class participation serves as the mortar.
- Tests provide structural supports.
- Students' overall effort erects the edifice, the final semester grade.

You Provide the Blueprint

Framed in this vivid manner, the students' responsibilities become clear and tangible. You provide the basic blueprints, and they construct the grade, shaping it as they deem worthy. The cornerstone of this project is their ambition, and it is manifested in their grade-proposal/portfolio, wherein they record their goals and their achievements throughout the course.

The proposal itself may be as elaborate or as simple as they like, but it should contain a declaration of intent, such as the following: "I, _____, will attempt to earn a/an ____ for the course, based upon the judicious selection and use of building materials and my timely completion of this project. As I build my grade, I will submit interim progress reports to you."

Options Fuel the Process

Building materials? Sure: As you teach, simply offer some grade-building options along the way.

For instance, in my English Composition II class, when we discuss the components of the term paper, I explain that the students need to include a Works Cited page; that's a standard requirement. However, if they want to demonstrate their ambition, they can annotate the Works Cited page, drafting three to six sentences per entry, describing the book or article, its

intended audience, and its strong and weak points. Those who take the initiative to construct an annotation generally earn a superior grade. It depends upon the choice of building materials.

To continue the analogy, the ordinary Works Cited page is perhaps a brick wall, sturdy and trim to be sure, but the annotated one is smooth marble—a higher grade!

Similarly, when decorating the term paper, if they want to rely on the standard, they can use ordinary typing sheets, but if they want to decorate a deluxe work, they'll select 20-pound, 25-percent cotton fiber bond. They make the decision based upon their level of ambition, their pride of craftsmanship.

Student Responsibilities

As the term progresses, the students record the grades they have earned with:

- Materials used
- Effort expended (labor)
- Troubleshooting procedures they've been following to improve their design (review of industry documents, i.e. pertinent books and class notes)
- Dates and times of visits to your office for advice (consultation with the senior architect/building inspector)

At mid-term, they will give their progress report to you for review. This

submission is ideally timed to precede your own submission of mid-term grade reports to the registrar; it gives you a firm basis for determining their exact midpoint grade.

At Course's End

As final-exam time approaches, the students turn in their now-complete portfolio, accompanied by a typed assessment of and rationale for their projected course grade.

Because they know exactly what they've earned and why, they will approach the final exam with greater confidence and determination, and thus most likely produce fine results, the capstone of their success. Hence, no more post-test panic, no more anxious office-storming. It's a win-win situation!

Benefits Are Substantial

The architectonic grade proposal/portfolio is fun, creative, and effective. It provides the students with a framework, a solid sense of responsibility for and progress toward a goal. Now, psychologically, the locus of power resides within them.

With a goal comes a heightened sense of commitment, a motivation to excel. The edifying progress reports ensure no unseemly surprises at the end. This grading model is easily adapted to the specific requirements of your course, so whether you teach English or agronomy, business or math, you will find it pedagogically sound. ✨

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