

Teaching For Success

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Winning!

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Winning: Why You Should Care

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Consider the concept of winning and its relationship to teaching and learning. Why?

Winning is important in our society, and winning is often equated with the attainment of notable success. However, whenever I hear winner or winning, their counterparts, loser and losing, almost immediately demand equal attention.

Yet the instinct to marry winning with losing or to see winning only against a background of losing seems too artificial; it's too easy to accept the tendency to see only in black and white.

Losing can be valuable when it forces a recommitment to attaining a goal. But too often applying this label only polarizes, segregates, and diminishes self-esteem.

In its best sense, winning describes the endpoint of a long commitment to a set of heroic and persistent acts that move us from where we are to more desirable places in our lives.

Winning as a goal is most evident in sports, yet in teaching and learning it

certainly has its place too. Why should you care about winning? Certainly not because it's easy, fun, or popular, but because—as John F. Kennedy said about going to the moon—it's hard.

My own observation spanning half a century is that the intensity of the good feelings that winning generates is directly proportional to the difficulty of attaining the desired goal.

The desire to win is a huge motivator. Amazing and unbelievable things are accomplished by people intent on winning. So to disregard the power of winning in teaching and learning would be to discount a powerful tool for increasing academic achievement.

To learn a practical lesson on worthwhile winning, see the recent movie *Coach Carter*. He employs the following steps on the road to winning with meaning:

- Command respect.
- Define the goal.
- Get commitment in writing.
- Start by acting like a champion.
- Master the fundamentals.
- Use positive and negative rewards to change behavior.
- Build a support network.
- Emphasize sacrifice and long-term commitment until you achieve the goal.
- Celebrate the effort. ✨



Low Retention? What's Your Reward Ratio?

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Winning involves the use of positive and negative rewards. But have you ever stopped to observe and, better yet, record what your positive-to-negative reward ratio is for your class?

Try it for a class or two and you might be surprised. According to Aubrey G. Daniels, Ph.D., in her *Bringing Out the Best in People*, teachers and managers ought to strive for a minimum of a 4-to-1 positive-to-negative rewards ratio.

Rewards can be general and group-directed or personalized for each individual. For example, I'm taking an experiential class exploring energy systems in the human body. This class is offered by a private school and the teacher gets paid by each student after each class session.

During the first class session, I noticed the unusually high frequency of positive rewards offered to the entire class through comments such as:

"You guys are a great class!"

"Everyone did wonderfully on that exercise!"

"I'm impressed with how well each of you is getting this material!"

"Since the class is doing so well, the next class is really going to be fun and

interesting!" The effect of these reward statements is subtle but powerful. Of course, such statements must be sincere and stem from the instructor's actual beliefs and observations about the class.

Reward statements build trust and create a feeling in the student's mind of being a part of a successful experience—one that makes it appealing to return for the next session. This was made clear as the class actually grew the second session. The instructor actually achieved a 140-percent retention rate.

For classes that involve the completion of written assignments for formal evaluation and grading, you have the opportunity to provide written individualized reward statements.

Again, check your ratio. By habit you may find it easier to provide critical comments than to formulate positive ones. This was a mistake I made early on in my teaching career. At first, I didn't realize the value of over-balancing critical comments with success comments.

If you have students who are unsure of their abilities, feeling lost, or considering dropping your class, they will particularly benefit from receiving positive reward comments. Providing rewards is work; it means generating many emails, composing special comments on papers, or finding a time to meet with the students one on one. But the bottom line is that you and your students will feel like winners when you teach for success by increasing your reward ratio. ✨



"Small Steps, Ellie"

Jack H. Shrawder
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In the movie *Contact*, humans meet their galactic neighbors. We bring a slew of questions to be answered all at once. But the alien counsels the lead character, "Small steps, Ellie, small steps."

One of the problems with winning is that we try to accomplish it by large leaps instead of measured steps. We make sudden decisions to change a habit overnight: "this semester will be different; I'm going to study six hours a day everyday, no matter what!"

For some this giant-leap approach may work but for most of us, research

shows that we are better off working for change by small increments.

Improvement requires acquiring and internalizing new knowledge. Improvement means change, and change is work. It takes effort, clear vision, and attention. But this process is much easier when a path of bite-sized chunks of new material interposed with numerous small rewards is laid out for us.

Part of your job as an instructor is to enhance the potential for winning by breaking up long complicated topics into smaller pieces. For example, traditional chapter, mid-term, and final exams contain too much material to effect optimum learning. Small learning steps will make more students more successful. ✨



Winning with Grandma's Rule

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My grandmother was kind but strict and religiously followed many rules for successful living. Among these was, "Eat your vegetables, and then you get dessert." This rule actually is based on good human psychology and research adds to the credibility of this advice. Its application to winning in teaching and learning is this: For students, suggest (if they are not achieving the grade-point average they desire) that they rank-order their classes or assignments each term in terms of enjoyability. Then scrupulously work and study from the least- to most-liked class or assignment.

Taking care of that dreaded assignment first makes it easier to complete all tasks. Applied to teaching, rank-order by pleasantness a list of your teaching tasks. For example, perhaps your least favorite part of teaching is grading assignments and providing feedback indicating how the student can increase performance; or maybe it's writing new test questions. Whatever it is, commit to accomplishing this task first, and you'll become a better instructor overnight. ✨



New Strategy Means Big Win for Students

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The scientific method is no more than a strategy for doing universally acceptable scientific inquiry. The peer review system of evaluating scientific claims is part of a tacit strategic plan for ensuring quality science that convincingly supports or questions current paradigms.

If You Teach as Taught, There's More

Unfortunately, teaching does not always take place with a similar coherent strategic plan. It is usually performed using a method that is comfortable and familiar to the instructor. It is not trite to say that college instructors usually teach the way they were taught. There is ample literature supporting this statement.

In addition, strategic teaching is an instructional method that focuses on successful student learning. It is a student-centered process that cajoles students into becoming effective lifelong learners.

Finally, some of the most successful scientists had a strong aptitude for teaching themselves new ideas and technologies needed to advance their investigations.



Brian R. Shmaefsky

A Huge Focus on Learning and Learners

Strategic teaching finds ways to instill these successful learner characteristics into students.

There are two fundamental skill sets students need to be successful learners:

- Individual Learner Skill Set—information literacy skills, learning skills, and thinking skills.
- Group Learner Skill Set—group dynamics skills and teaming skills.

Leaving Rote Learning in the Dust

Information literacy does not equate to the standard rote memorization

education of the past. It means encouraging students to gain accurate information beyond what is available from the textbook and lecture.

Learning skills include any strategies that encourage students to understand and improve their current academic habits.

Thinking skills include a variety of strategies, including case study analysis, critical thinking, experiential learning, and problem-based learning. Individual learning must also be integrated with group learning activities to better reflect how real jobs truly operate.

Group dynamics skills help students understand the way groups work to resolve issues. Students need to learn how to equitably assign tasks based on



Basically, it is an individualized way of ensuring that students are taking away self-directed learning skills.

each group member's limitations and strengths. Teaming is a more global approach in which groups work with other groups on different parts of a large project, forming one big team.

Each group must then work out the details of resolving its part of the problem for the benefit of the whole team.

It's Not a Formula Approach

There is no one formula for carrying out a strategic teaching plan. Basically, it is an individualized way of ensuring that students are taking away self-directed learning skills.

Many times, academic success endeavors for students are relegated to one class session or to a handout accompanying the syllabus.

However, the strategy should be integrated consistently throughout coursework.

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*Characteristics of Strategic Learners

- Reads, writes, performs operations in a manner consistent with the scientific discipline.
- Listens and communicates appropriately for gaining information and solving tasks.
- Thinks creatively, makes decisions, solves problems, visualizes, knows how to learn, and reasons.
- Displays responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity and honesty.
- Identifies, organizes, plans, and allocates resources for solving problems.
- Works with others to gather information and resolve problems.
- Acquires and uses information.
- Understands complex interrelationships of facts.
- Works with a variety of technologies to gather accurate information and solve problems.

*From the 2005 U.S. Department of Labor Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS).

Strategic Teaching

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Fundamental to strategic teaching is recognizing that the student is a thinker and decision maker. It also instructs students to gather, assess, and use the appropriate knowledge base for a particular problem.

Specific Elements

You give up some of the traditional authority role to become a mediator and moderator of instruction.

Strategic teaching addresses the following elements within the structure of the course content to promote the creation of strategic learners:

Strategic Teaching Components

- Identifies and implements pedagogical practices that promote student learning.
- Enriches leaning and teaching using appropriate instructional and research technologies.
- Aligns the strategy with course outcomes identified in the course description and the syllabus.
- Accurately assesses student proficiency with content knowledge and lifelong learning skills.
- Uses self-analysis to evaluate success of strategic plan.

- *Attitude:* Offer learning experiences that build a positive attitude about learning the content. This does not mean making learning just fun and games. It's interpreted as giving them a reason to learn the information.
- *Concentration:* Create a learning environment that focuses on content-related tasks. This can be done using a variety of content application presentations and activities.
- *Information processing:* Nurture with effective applications, demonstrations, and explanations of concepts. Intersperse the traditional teaching with reasoning-skills activities that reinforce the knowledge. Students must be encouraged to seek the information they will need to work on an assignment.
- *Motivation:* Provide your students with learning experiences that make them responsible for building the skills needed for success in the class. Critical-thinking activities are good motivational tools.
- *Selecting main ideas:* Provide your students with time to prioritize lecture information. They should be given regular opportunities to evaluate the content knowledge that they found valuable.

- *Time*



General biology students at Kingwood College developed a plan to teach young children the basic principles of biotechnology. The strategic learning approach motivated the college students to learn and prioritize the principles of biology, chemistry, and physics they needed to explain biotechnology applications to the children.

Resource Management

Before approaching strategic teaching, you must pay attention to the following considerations:

- You must identify any limitations of resources that could have an impact on students' ability to conduct and organize the strategy. This means ensuring access to:
- *management:* Provide realistic schedules for course requirements and monitoring techniques that ensure the timely completion of course tasks. The timing of tasks should be paced so that students avoid procrastination on a particular project.
- *Test strategies:* Provide your students with formative evaluation experiences so they can gauge their studying efforts and study skills.
- *Study aids:* Provide ample resources, including charts, summary sheets, and other aids, to help students learn and retain the information.



Five-Star Instructor Interview

FSII

Name: Mary Gross
College: Mira Costa College, California
Years teaching: 18
Teaches: Traditional and Online ESL and Developmental English



What are the toughest teaching and learning challenges that you face? The Time Factor

As a full-time faculty, I have so many responsibilities outside the classroom, including abundant committee work related to college governance and program management.

I started my teaching career as a part-time faculty and did not realize the extent of the out-of-class demands on my time that I would inherit as a full-time instructor. Therefore, I've become a master organizer. I plan each week in detail.

I plan my daily tasks; I use my Franklin planner to stay on track, and I delegate tasks whenever I can. Today you have to be extremely organized to get things done and meet your teaching obligations too.

Under-prepared Students

They have such a wide range of skills in ESL classes. And given the 16-week course length, I sometimes

ask how in the world can I get these students from point A to B. It really takes a collaboration of many resources beyond me.

At my college, we have tutorial services, a writing center, and a language lab. I develop online supplements for the class that function as a mini review of lessons, and links to online sites for continued practice. In addition, I use a discussion board where they can post to or respond to each other.

Finally, I use technology to extend the classroom since I find the shy students in a traditional class tend to be much more communicative in an online environment.

Cultural Differences

Since international students tend to come for only a couple of years for a degree, overcoming or working with cultural nuances can be problematic—especially if you don't understand their views of classroom dynamics and the proper student-teacher relationship.

In some cultures students are not used to the types of critical thinking activities and participation in class discussions or other collaborative tasks.

But in the US education model, the student is expected to have a more equal relationship and ultimately a partnership with the instructor and fellow students in the learning process.

To help, you can model expected behaviors; develop tasks that reinforce participatory behaviors instead of just thinking the student doesn't care. I'm up front with my expectations, and I treat these behaviors as differences between cultures and not label them as good or bad—just different. My approach is to introduce expected student behaviors. I model them first, and then give students a task of role modeling helpful learning behaviors in small groups, and finally they demonstrate these behaviors independently.

What is the most helpful teaching advice you have ever received?

I can't pinpoint just one, but what keeps me going is that I'm my harshest critic. After every class period, I go over what happened, what went well, and what I can do better next time. Even if the students tell me it was a great class, I analyze what I could have done better and how can I improve.

Outstanding teachers spend a lot of time creating good lessons, but they never say, "That's it! I can't improve it any further."

No! I think maybe if I tweaked something I could reach one more student.

Getting regular feedback from students is just as important as



giving feedback to students. I will give a feedback-generating email assignment, asking students where they need help. Or at the end of the class period I will distribute a note card to each student and ask for the answer to these questions:

- "What was the one thing you learned today?"
- "What is one thing you need more work on or have a question about?"

This feedback can be very surprising and you find sometimes that the students really didn't grasp the lesson. As result, I may plan a special work session with a group that needs more help.

Good teaching means consistently questioning, learning, and trying new techniques and approaches.

Unfortunately, at the college level we often don't share enough; instructors need to help each other and collaborate about good teaching and learning.

Not everyone is super creative, and we need to share what is working for us in the classroom. Especially when you are an adjunct there can be great isolation.

Do you have any suggestions on improving retention?

Yes. I've seen the national statistics on retention—generally about 50 percent.

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Winners' Secrets of Successful Presentations

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Do you require your students to write papers or give presentations to the class illuminating a section of the material they are studying?

If you're new to teaching and teach a class other than a speech communication class, you've probably discovered that your students may not have mastered the making and delivering of a successful presentation or paper. Here is a simple structure you can teach your students to enhance their ability to share what they are learning in a coherent, interesting, and professional way.

Why go through the trouble? Because success in today's world largely depends on students' ability to communicate clearly both verbally and in writing.

So I find it imperative to provide my students with an opportunity to practice these worthwhile skills. Here is a simple, concise set of guidelines that you can share (or modify) to help your students write higher-quality papers and deliver more effective presentations.

Guidelines

First, give students an outline of what you want included. Normally the preferred structure simply consists of a beginning, middle, and end. Define and clarify your expectations for structure, format, and credibility.

Be sure to specify and enforce time limits. Otherwise you and your students will suffer through many short, underprepared or long-winded, time-wasting presentations.

Next, require visual aids that at least portray and visually clarify the main points. Finally, insist your students cite their sources and follow ethical codes.

Suggested Outline

Even though the basic structure of a presentation or paper should be known at the college level, it pays to ensure all students are on board with this knowledge. The organization of a presentation is similar to that of a research paper, so these recommendations work well for both types of assignments. A simple, basic outline conveys the sections, sequence, and format to be used; they are:

- Title
- Introduction
- Body
- Conclusion
- Bibliography

Title

First, challenge your students to be creative and compose a title that will command audience attention and arouse curiosity. Suggest students write their presentation title on the board or introduce with a PowerPoint slide or overhead transparency.

Introduction

- *Attention-grabber*: Explain the importance of beginning with some exciting quote, problem description, or question that refers to the class material and will grab the audience's attention.
- *Credibility*: Students should let the class know where they got their material and information. If PowerPoint slides or overhead transparencies are used during the presentation, ask students to cite their sources on the slides when they are presenting information they took from research. Effective communicators need to establish their credibility.
- *Preview of Points*: Students will want to give the audience a heads up as to what the main points will be. A Preview of Points slide always makes for a good visual aid so the audience can become quickly oriented to the scope of the talk.



Body

I recommend presenters have between three and five main points:

- First main point
- Second main point
- Etc.

Conclusion

- *Summary*—Students should wrap up the presentation by summarizing the main points.
- *The Close*—Just as students began their presentation with an intriguing piece of information, encourage them to close their presentation on a high note by offering something exciting, startling, or thought-provoking about what they have learned.

Bibliography

Require students to cite their sources, including books, journal articles, interviews, and websites on a PowerPoint slide or overhead transparency. Adherence to this practice improves the student's credibility in the eyes and ears of the audience, and it lets you determine how well your students have researched the subject area.

Evaluation

After students have completed their individual or group presentations, take class time to obtain audience feedback concerning what they liked and disliked.

Finally, wrap up by asking the presenter to share what he or she would do differently with future presentations.

End Notes

Encourage students to take communication classes and improve their ability to speak and write. Set the quality bar high, and you'll be pleasantly surprised with the improvements they make. Excellence in communication means winning big for students and teachers in all aspects of life. ✨



Five-Star Instructor Interview

FSII

Name: René C. Izquierdo, Ph.D.

College: Miami-Dade Community College, Miami, Florida

Experience: 17 years at MDC

Teaches: Spanish
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How do you use technology to enhance teaching and learning?

With the aid of WebCT, I have managed to boost student learning outside the classroom, while freeing class time for the development of speech and listening-comprehension skills.

Through the use of WebCT, I have increased my in-class teaching time by approximately 15 to 20 hours in each course.

Frequent Feedback and Performance Measurement

I quiz and test frequently with WebCT, and my students are required to complete assignments online. Assignments are released selectively: upon successful completion of the first assignment, the computer automatically opens up the next one.

I have also created online web support for each course I teach. This support includes grammar explanations and practice sheets for every lesson, handouts, syllabi, office hours, progress sheets, web resources, and instructions for compositions and oral presentations.

I have spearheaded the use of computer-based testing in my department because I believe that teaching computer skills is essential, not only in the field of languages, but across all disciplines.

Technological Literacy

All institutions of higher learning need to enhance the technological skills of their students, and prepare them for a job market that takes such skills for granted.

Collaboration is Key

In all projects related to technology, I have been very fortunate to count on the support, encouragement and training of Judith García, chairperson of ESL & Foreign Languages for the Kendall Campus of Miami Dade College.

Ms. García is committed to delivering the finest education available today to our students and has afforded the latest in educational technology. Her efforts are a constant source of inspiration to her faculty.

What is the most helpful teaching advice you have ever received?

My best advice came from visits to other colleagues' classes. I've adopted teaching strategies that I consider successful, and I've incorporated in my classes, for example, oral presentations and compositions.

These techniques contribute significantly to further develop student proficiency in oral, aural, and written skills.

Do you have any suggestions on how instructors can improve retention?

I see retention in two ways: preventing students from dropping a course and making sure they continue their studies next term.

Prevention

How do I prevent students from dropping the course they are currently taking with me? It's easy. I insist students should never drop a course without talking to their instructor first. Many times, you can find a work-around solution to the problems your students face.

Another key principle is being flexible with my own rules. For example, even when I make it clear at the beginning of the semester that, as a policy, I do not give make-up exams, I am always willing to be flexible if it means I can retain the student. (Students are required to furnish proof of the problem that prevented them from attending the test.)

Continuation

To further increase enrollment and retention, I have a lab assistant pre-register my students for the



next sequential level. I stress to students the convenience of being registered automatically and, since the same book is used for multiple levels, I emphasize the advantage of not incurring additional text expenses. The results are very encouraging, and it's a great retention strategy.

What are some of the best assignments you have given in terms of student interest, participation, and achievement of learning outcomes?

I would say oral presentations at the end of the semester.

These presentations create a sense of community among students since they have to work together, outside of class, in order to write and rehearse their oral presentations.

I also take my Spanish classes to a Spanish restaurant at the end of each term. This activity affords students a fun, first-hand cultural experience.

As students order food and talk to waiters in the language they are learning, they come to realize the relevance and purpose of their studies. ✨

The New Strategic Teaching

- Teaching technology
- Funds for a large volume of handouts
- Access to student reference materials
- Sources of information for students
- Access to faculty reference material—sources of information for you
- You also need to make critical decisions about how the course will be organized and conducted within the scope of the curriculum and current course outcomes. You should:
 - Create flexibility of topical coverage and the content within a topic.

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- Find a balance between lecture and student-centered learning.
- Ensure students gain at least the same outcomes as those in traditional classes.

Quantitative feedback is needed for improving this strategy, so remember to collect and assess feedback on course-appropriate student learning.

Some strategy is also needed to measure its strengths and weaknesses. Develop a priority for what is most important to do for students.

The bottom line? Strategic teaching spawns strategic learning and learners. Your students will never walk away at the end of the semester forgetting much of what they learned.

Using this strategy you avoid the undesirable consequence of poor retention of prerequisite course material, thus sabotaging their future. Students

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I've worked hard to reach a high retention, typically 85 to sometimes above 90 percent. It's more of a challenge with online classes. It seems students don't understand the commitment required in terms of hours, or they don't have the preparation necessary for online learning. In my own experience, I see about a 75-percent retention in online classes but I'm never satisfied. I want to achieve even higher numbers.

The secret of retention online is building a highly active learning community that communicates extensively through email and discussion boards, etc. For higher retention, strive to build an engaging, friendly learning environment in your classroom whether online or on ground. If your students are bored or not grasping the material, they will more likely drop. Intervention is key.

In addition, connect students to the support services available. Sometimes even when students are working hard, they don't pass the class, but in the positive learning environment I create, the students tell me, "It's OK that I didn't pass this time, I know it's not your fault." They know I care so they tend to stay in my classes.

Each term, I strive immediately to build a collaborative, supportive learning environment. I start off on

day one with activities that help students to get to know each other and develop classroom expectations.

I work on the introduction web page and place the class photos that I mentioned before. In addition, I get students up and active in the class.

Also, I give students regular, meaningful feedback. I find they want this feedback and more often than just at midterm or final time.

Therefore, the more I can personalize feedback the better the learning experience becomes. I call each student at least once during a semester and just chat for a few minutes and inquire about how it's going. The online students are really surprised when I do this. When the students connect with the teacher and vice versa, it's meaningful to the students so you're more than half way there to better retention. ✨



Call for Ideas

Would you like to be published? Have your ideas noted by thousands of faculty? Why not share your best teaching improvement idea? Contact TFS and let us review it today. Click for info.

Web References for Academic Skills

- Academic Success: <http://www.uni.edu/walsh/linda7.html>
- Lifelong Learning Skills: http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/lifelong_learning_skills.html
- Study Skills: <http://www.loyola.edu/studycenter/studyskills.html>
- Team Building: <http://research.uiowa.edu/pimgr/?get=team>
- Team Building Self-Assessment: <http://www.sba.gov/test/wbc/docs/manage/team.html>

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