

## **Help! My Students Don't Prepare for Class!**

In principles of accounting, the students always have homework. The knowledge base is cumulative, with mastery of earlier topics essential to learning later ones. Like in many subjects, reading assigned material is necessary, but not sufficient, to learn it; learning requires study and practice outside class. What's more, success is heavily dependent keeping up with assignments currently; cramming and trying to catch up don't work well.

Guess what? I can tell my students how important it is to prepare for every class, but without a daily system of carrots and sticks, many of them still won't. How human of them!

The daily system I use has 3 main parts:

1. Readiness Assessment Tests
2. Homework Credit
3. Answer Sheets: one per student for the whole semester

### Readiness Assessment Tests (RATs)

We begin each new chapter with a short RAT. The test consists of 3 objective questions (True/False or Multiple Choice) that I display using the overhead projector.

After students have answered the questions on their answer sheets, I permit them to compare their answers with their assigned group members. They may change their answers if they want to. They are not required to change or even share their answers.

I ask students to prepare for this test by studying the chapter before the first class meeting in which we discuss it. The questions are easy. They do not presume mastery of the chapter. I hope the students will be able to answer them correctly if they have studied the chapter. There are no makeups on RATs, but I do drop one.

### Homework Credit

Solutions to accounting homework assignments have numbers. Usually they have lots of numbers! I ask the students to look at their solution to a particular assigned problem and to copy on their answer sheets some number, such as the amount of interest expense they computed for the second year. They may not compare these answers with others. Students get one point of homework credit for each correct answer throughout the semester. There are no makeups on homework credit, but I do drop two.

### Answer Sheets

With, say, two sections of principles of accounting meeting 3 times/week, the RATs and Daily Homework Credit represent more than 1600 individual grades during the semester. Rather than record all the individual student scores, I create an answer sheet (copy attached). I distribute the answer sheets first thing (often before class begins each day) and collect them as soon as we have finished using them. I only record summary information in my regular gradebook. It takes only minutes to check these answer sheets after class.

What does this system accomplish?

1. Students suffer if they do not study a new chapter.
2. Students are rewarded if they do their homework and get it right.
3. Students are rewarded for attending class, and for being prompt; they must be on time to take a RAT or get homework credit.