

Learning through Retrieval Practice

By Gary Beck Dallaghan, PhD

What is it?

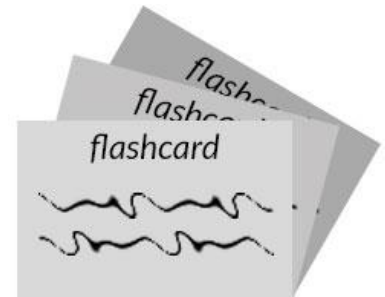
Retrieval practice is quite frankly quizzing. One of the reasons students request practice questions frequently is to test themselves. This has been proven to be an exceptional method for learning resulting in durable retention.^{1,2}

How do I teach using it?

1. By incorporating a question periodically in lectures, you begin the process of retrieval. This can be done using an audience response system or by asking students to raise their hand for the correct option. This also gives you a chance to clarify misconceptions over what you just taught! Not only are you helping students learn but you are developing yourself as an instructor...it's a two-fer!
2. Free recall can be used at the beginning of a lecture. Ask the students to read objectives for your lecture and respond with how what they have learned earlier relates to these objectives. This type of effortful retrieval may be uncomfortable, but it makes learning stronger.

How do I teach students how to do it?

1. Flashcards are the easiest way to do this. These aren't your basic flashcards. With online programs now, students can load images where they have to recall structures within the image. With them being electronic, students can have the flashcards sent via text message which allows them to do spaced retrieval of the material.
2. If you don't have practice questions readily available, students could be advised to use your lecture objectives as a quiz. If they can write out the answers to your objectives then they should have mastered the material. Right? Guess this shows how important it is to have well written objectives for your lecture.
3. The elaboration tip sheet suggests this technique as well. What's that? You haven't read that tip sheet. Okay. Here it is....1-minute papers. This is a quick and easy way to stimulate recall at the end of a lecture. Students can take a minute to write the key take-home points of the lecture. Knowing that they should do this at the end of a lecture may also facilitate paying attention during lecture.



Active recall is one of the most important activities students can do when studying, and not just rote facts but complex concepts. Retrieval practice should be a part of your teaching and teaching students to do this while studying.

More Information

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References

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2. Brown PC, Roediger III, HL, McDaniel MA. Make it stick: The science of successful learning. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014.