

## Enhancing Learning Using Concrete Examples

By Linda M. Love, EdD

### What is it Learning Using Concrete Examples?

As novices, students often gain a **false sense of confidence** in their abilities to memorize new material. Using concrete, relevant, real life examples can help students understand abstract ideas and extend information retention. This approach stimulates complex thinking patterns like those used by health care providers, practitioners and researchers.

### How do I teach using it?

- **Don't rely on students, as novices, to fill in the gaps in complex thinking:** Give them a road map for **real life application**. Pause your lecture for a focused case study or provide online resources (vetted by you--the expert) that extend learning for better long-term performance. **Think:** What do I want my students to be able to DO, in 3 hours, 3 days, 3 years, or 3 decades
- **Enrich learning "information" with details** creating more access points for memory retrieval. Bring learning to life by using images, test results, common patterns and other detailed examples
- **Set up scenarios where learners see these performance patterns:** A series of concrete examples can help learners digest, retain, and retrieve information needed to gain confidence and competence in performance—particularly common standards of practice (i.e., completing a history and physical).

### How do I teach students how to use it?

- Once you have demonstrated concrete examples, **instruct students to be alert** to similar situations that they encounter in life or clinical experience and compare their observations with your guided example. This is the ideal time for **student reflection**.
- Better understanding comes from critical thinking, not memorization. **Explain to students the benefit of this method.** Creating this “superhighway” for storage and retrieval aids performance and speed during exams or high-stake clinical situations.
- Use concrete examples as **question stems for decision-making**. Encourage learners to **write and share similar concrete examples** to help focus and challenge utilization of “facts.”



### More Information

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### Read More:

1. Ambrose, S. A., Bridges, M. W., DiPietro, M., Lovett, M. C., & Norman, M. K. (2010). *How learning works: Seven research-based principles for smart teaching*. John Wiley & Sons.
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3. Rawson, K. A., Thomas, R. C., & Jacoby, L. L. (2014). The power of examples: Illustrative examples enhance conceptual learning of declarative concepts. *Educational Psychology Review*, 27, 483-504
4. Weinstein, Y. & Smith, M (2017). *Learn to Study Using Concrete Examples*. Retrieved at [www.learningscientists.org](http://www.learningscientists.org).
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