

Instructor and Student Partnership for Encouraging Learning

During unplanned events that affect instruction, one of the simplest and most effective ways to keep learning happening in your classes is to speak openly with students about taking an active role in their own learning.

Ask your students to reflect and perhaps talk with each other or you about why they are in school, what their goals are in the course, and how they see their own agency in the teaching-learning dyad. Then link that reflection to a concrete plan for how they will go about accomplishing their goals in the event of unusual or even suspended teaching.

Simple techniques for supporting student learners:

- Introduce “check your learning” tools such as reading questions, short quizzes after watching lectures, and other low- or no-stakes ways for students to continuously assess their own learning.
- Provide information about exam structure, study guides, or future writing assignments early in the term so students can key their learning strategies to the eventual assessments.
- Provide students in advance with research-based learning support such as the fantastic free tools, videos, blogs, and other materials provided by [The Learning Scientists](#). These can help students learn how to study and take notes, prepare for examinations, and establish overall good learning practices.
- Provide students with suggested structures for how to best study or prepare for specific assignments in the class. These structures might include steps like reviewing your listed learning goals for a class meeting or class unit; reviewing class notes, slides, webcasts, readings, and other materials from that meeting or unit; doing an active task like applying that information to a new context such as by completing a set of provided practice questions associated with that unit; and checking their learning by answering “how to test yourself” questions that you provide for each class meeting or class unit. Providing these steps in advance can support students not only to study and prepare for assignments well, but also to know how to stay connected if they are unable to attend class.
- If you think students are suffering from isolation or if you just think a sense of collectivity and community could be helpful, provide structures for organizing students into actual or virtual [study groups](#), study pairs, teams, or mini learning communities. Sometimes it’s beneficial to let students self select into study groups, but often it is helpful to curate the group selection process to foster inclusivity and equity. You can give the groups specific tasks--work on a “check your learning” exercise together or debrief/peer assess--or give them a less focused purpose. In all cases, make sure students understand what is and is not allowable collaboration on assignments and quizzes.

- Talk with students about the importance of cultivating [self-efficacy](#) as a learner both for school and for life.
- Consider including student input at some level in difficult decisions you are making about the course. Poll them about options for taking quizzes or exams in person or online (say, in the event of planned protests), about changing the dates of submission of assignments, and about other hard choices you are making. You can collect this information and then tell students how you have used it to inform your decision making. You are still making the decisions, but you are allowing students to be partners in responding to unplanned events. This builds trust between instructors and students and allows students to practice using their agency to respond in difficult situations--a transferable skill if ever there was one.