Faculty Matter Tip #31: Help students make the most of your review sessions and study guides.

As finals approach, you may soon be offering review sessions or distributing study guides to help your students prepare for your exams. The purpose of this Faculty Matter Teaching Tip is to help you think through what to do and how those kinds of support will likely contribute to your students’ learning. In what follows, we draw upon learning sciences research and recommendations summarized in two excellent books: How Learning Works (Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, Lovett & Norman, 2010) and Teach Students How to Learn (McGuire, 2015).

Review Sessions are most fruitful when...

- **students come prepared**, having already spent time and effort organizing and studying the material, and identified what they still find unclear or that they would like to review
- **students engage in the session actively** (e.g., think, talk, solve sample problems) rather than sitting passively (e.g., write down answers you provide)
- you provide a few minutes to talk about the kinds of study strategies and self-assessments you think are best suited to the upcoming test. (“Be prepared to define/apply/connect/solve/prove...”; “It won’t be enough to just memorize terms...”)

To make the best use of limited time, consider handing out index cards at the start of the session, and giving students a few minutes to review their notes and write down topics they would like addressed. (This can be done electronically, ahead of time, as well.) Peruse the questions, look for patterns, and draw from them as you structure the session. This allows you to gage how you want to allocate session time, and it provides everyone (even shy students) with the chance to ask questions.

Study Guides are most beneficial when ...

- they help **students focus** on the material you want them to focus upon, and when they are specific about what students should be able to do with that material (e.g., be able to compare... apply... solve... explain...)
- they help **students create meaningful organization to the material they are learning**, connecting it to and building upon their own knowledge. (See “learning artifacts”, below)

If you are providing students with essay prompts which you will select from on the test, consider whether a take-home essay format might be more appropriate, lest students resort of spitting back memorized prepared answers under the stressful conditions of an in-class final.

“Learning Artifacts” can be very powerful learning tools ...

- **Concept maps, charts, tables, timelines, and other sorts of graphic organizers** which students create can be very useful in assisting them to understand, to learn, and to recall course material.
- Such tools allow students to connect what might otherwise remain isolated facts into a coherent – and more memorable and interesting – whole.

If you have encouraged students to create their own learning artifacts, consider including a question on the exam where they can use an artifact they constructed as part of their answer.

You can read all previous tips on the [Faculty Matter Tips](https://www.cfd.sjsu.edu/faculty-matter-tips) page of the CFD website, and share your own thoughts and ideas on the [Provost’s Academic Spotlight blog](https://provost.sjsu.edu/news-category) under the category “Faculty Matter”. Please add your own strategies using the comment link on the Provost’s Academic Spotlight blog under the category “Faculty Matter”. 