

***Grab-and-Go Writing Activity:
Hacking the Quiz: A Fact-Finding and Writing Reflection Activity in Lieu of a
Traditional Quiz***

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Timeframe: 20 minutes

Materials needed (including preparation):

- One short reading pertaining to the course or lesson topic, photocopied and cut into segments, with one segment per student (Each segment should be short, only 2-5 sentences long.)
- One set of reading comprehension questions
 - The questions should be devised such that each question relates to one reading segment.
 - With small classes, open-ended questions can be included.
 - With large classes, or to work within limited time constraints, use only multiple choice, true/false, and/or gap-fill questions.
- Photocopies of the reading comprehension questions, one full set per student
- Classroom space in which the students can freely move around

Objectives: After the activity, students will be able to

- answer correctly, in writing, comprehension questions related to the provided reading.
- articulate their thoughts, in writing, on the “big picture” issues from the reading.

Introduction: [2 minutes]

Preview the general topic of the reading that you have prepared, making a case for the relevance/importance of the topic in relation to the course. Tell students that instead of a standard quiz they will now engage in a short fact-finding and writing reflection activity pertaining to a reading on this topic.

Procedures: [15 minutes]

Step 1 [3 minutes]: Give each student one segment of the reading and one copy of the comprehension questions. Allow them a few minutes to read and understand their segment and to identify which comprehension question their segment pertains to. Have the students stand up. Tell them that they will now have five minutes to move freely around the classroom. Their task is to talk one-to-one to the other students, exchanging information and seeking answers to as many of the questions as possible.

Step 2 [5 minutes]: For this hands-on activity portion, students move freely around the classroom, talking to other students one-to-one. They should exchange information and move on. Their goal is to discover the answers to as many questions as possible in the time allowed.

Step 3 [4 minutes]: Call “time out” and have the students sit down again. Provide the answers to the quiz and have the students grade their own answers. The answers can be given orally, displayed on the overhead projector, or handed out as hardcopies – whatever works best within your time constraints.

Step 4 [3 minutes]: For this reflective writing exercise, have students flip the “quiz” over. On the back of the page, have them write their reflections on the “big picture” implications of the reading. Give them one guiding question to focus on, such as any of the following.

- What is the most important take-away from this reading and why?
- What surprised you/challenged you/piqued your interest about this material?
- How does this material relate to *[any reading or theme covered in the class]*?

Closure/Evaluation: [3 minutes]

Have one or two students share the gist of their reflective writing. Respond to students’ input by connecting their reflections back to the course material.

Activity Analysis:

This activity will get students physically moving around the classroom, and it will give them the opportunity to engage with their peers. It works especially well as an icebreaker and can be an effective way to introduce students to one another early on in the course. It would be difficult to do this activity in a confined space.

Note that this activity can be modified to fit any subject and/or class. Simply select a relevant reading and devise the comprehension questions accordingly.

Sample Reading

dotted lines indicate division into segments

“The Leadership Emotions”

OP-ED column by David Brooks, published in the *New York Times* on April 21, 2014

Throughout American history, most presidents had small personal staffs. They steered through political waters as amateurs, relying on experience, instinct and conversations with friends. Then candidates and presidents hired professionals to help them navigate public opinion. By the time Theodore White began his “Making of the President” series in 1960, the strategists, who had once been hidden, came into view.

Every successive administration has taken power away from cabinet agencies and centralized more of it with those political professionals who control messaging from within the White House. This trend is not just in politics. We have become a consultant society. Whether you are running a business or packaging yourself for a job or college admissions, people rely on the expertise of professional advice-givers.

Most important, certain faculties that were central to amateur decision making — experience, intuition, affection, moral sentiments, imagination and genuineness — have been shorn down for those traits that we associate with professional tactics and strategy — public opinion analysis, message control, media management and self-conscious positioning.

A nice illustration of this shift came in Sunday’s *New York Times Magazine* in the form of [Jo Becker’s book adaptation](#), “How the President Got to ‘I Do’ on Same-Sex Marriage.” It is the inside story of how the president’s advisers shifted the White House position on gay marriage, from one the president didn’t really believe in — opposition to same-sex unions — to one he did.

Not long ago, readers would have been shocked to see how openly everyone now talks about maneuvering a 180-degree turn on a major civil rights issue. It would have been embarrassing to acknowledge that you were running your moral convictions through the political process, arranging stagecraft. People might have maneuvered on moral matters, but they weren’t so unabashed about it.

There were two sorts of strategists described in Becker’s piece. One group, including the former Republican Party leader Ken Mehlman, has ardent supporters of same-sex marriage who tried to craft the right messaging. Mehlman told Obama to talk about his daughters when he announced

his new position. The other strategists were in charge of the president's political prospects. Under their influence, the substance of the issue was submerged under the calculus of coalition management: who would be pleased and displeased by a shift. As usual, these strategists were overly timid, afraid of public backlash from this or that demographic.

Becker describes a process in which there were strategy sessions but no conclusion. The strategists were good at trivial things, like picking a TV interviewer for the scripted announcement, but they were not good at propelling a decision. The person who finally got the administration to move just went with his heart. Vice President Joe Biden met the children of a gay couple and blurted out that same-sex marriage is only fair. He went on "Meet the Press" and said the same thing.

Biden violated every strategist rule. He got ahead of the White House message. He was unscripted. He went with his moral sense. But his comments shifted the policy. The president was compelled to catch up.

Edmund Burke once wrote, "The true lawgiver ought to have a heart full of sensibility. He ought to love and respect his kind, and to fear himself." Burke was emphasizing that leadership is a passionate activity. It begins with a warm gratitude toward that which you have inherited and a fervent wish to steward it well. It is propelled by an ardent moral imagination, a vision of a good society that can't be realized in one lifetime. It is informed by seasoned affections, a love of the way certain people concretely are and a desire to give all a chance to live at their highest level.

Burke's kind of leader is warm-blooded and leads with full humanity. In every White House, and in many private offices, there seems to be a tug of war between those who want to express this messy amateur humanism and those calculators who emphasize message discipline, preventing leaks and maximum control. In most of the offices, there's a fear of natural messiness, a fear of uncertainty, a distrust of that which is not scientific. The calculators are given too much control.

The leadership emotions, which should propel things, get amputated. The shrewd tacticians end up timidly and defensively running the expedition.

Sample Comprehension Questions

1. Most U.S presidents have hired professional PR consultants since the early 19th century. True or False?
2. The trend of putting decision-making power in the hands of messaging professionals can be seen in a wide variety of industries today. True or False?
3. What types of qualities are important in decision-making? Are these the same qualities that go along with professional communication strategizing?
4. What is one recent example of the trend of putting decision-making power in the hands of messaging professionals?
5. How does the author characterize historical attitudes towards political leaders radically changing their minds on major moral issues?
6. What were the two separate goals of the strategists in Becker's article?
7. According to Becker's article, what were the strategists good at? What were they bad at?
8. Who ultimately shifted the same-sex marriage policy, and how?
9. How does Burke characterize leadership activities?
10. According to this op-ed writer, today's political leadership is too focused on message control, which results in a less decisive and less empathetic approach to decision-making. True or False?

Sample Comprehension Questions with Answers

1. Most U.S presidents have hired professional PR consultants since the early 19th century. True or False?

false

2. The trend of putting decision-making power in the hands of messaging professionals can be seen in a wide variety of industries today. True or False?

true

3. What types of qualities are important in decision-making? Are these the same qualities that go along with professional communication strategizing?

The qualities are experience, intuition, affection, moral sentiments, imagination and genuineness. No, they are not the same qualities.

4. What is one recent example of the trend of putting decision-making power in the hands of messaging professionals?

One example is Obama's handling of the same-sex marriage issue.

5. How does the author characterize historical attitudes toward political leaders radically changing their minds on major moral issues?

He characterizes the attitudes as shame and embarrassment.

6. What were the two separate goals of the strategists in Becker's article?

The two goals were to craft the right messaging and to manage the president's political prospects

7. According to Becker's article, what were the strategists good at? What were they bad at?

They were good at organizing strategic communication activities (TV interviews, announcements) but bad at decision making.

8. Who ultimately shifted the same-sex marriage policy, and how?

Joe Biden shifted same-sex marriage policy by making an unscripted public statement.

9. How does Burke characterize leadership activities?

He characterizes them as passionate, visionary, empathetic, and not calculated.

10. According to this op-ed writer, today's political leadership is too focused on message control, which results in a less decisive and less empathetic approach to decision-making. True or False?

true