

The Massage Educator

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675 The number of massage instructors taking part in *Teaching Massage* webinars each year!

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EXTRA CREDIT ASSIGNMENTS

TOOLS TO PROMOTE POSITIVE LEARNING BEHAVIORS

It seems that students are always asking for opportunities to obtain bonus points. This can frustrate instructors who, during a term, usually offer a variety of assignments through which students earn points that determine their grades. It may seem counterintuitive to offer extra assignments for extra credit when students are struggling just to complete required assignments. For some reason, many students seem to think that it is easier to obtain bonus points than to earn points through completed assignments.

Many instructors decide not to offer extra credit assignments in an effort to get students to focus on required homework. There is nothing wrong with this practice. But in some instances, extra credit assignments can actually be the carrot that helps instructors move students toward more positive learning behaviors.

GET THE BEHAVIORS YOU WANT

If you want to use extra credit as a way to move students toward more positive learning behaviors, you need to determine the behaviors you want students to demonstrate in the classroom. What behaviors do you want your students to demonstrate as learners? Make a list. Perhaps your list includes:

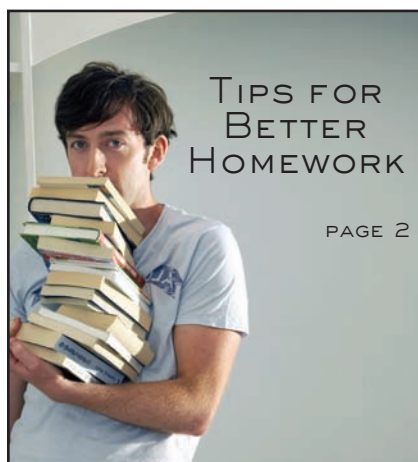
- Read textbook assignments.
- Turn in homework on time.
- Prepare effectively for exams.
- Attend classes regularly.

These behaviors become the criteria you use to decide if you will assign extra credit activities and give select students the opportunity to receive bonus points. For example, the textbook reading form created by ABMP (and described in the “Reading Systems” sidebar) provides structure for students during reading assignments. Instructors of ABMP member schools can download the form and pass it out to students. When a student turns

reading systems

Research shows that comprehension of textbook content drops after 10 pages of reading. To support student completion and comprehension of reading assignments, it is probably best to assign sections of chapters rather than whole chapters. Many educators also advocate the use of a structured reading system. In most systems there is a preview component, an active reading component, and a review component.

ABMP developed an Active Reading Form (http://www.abmp.com/img/members/student_success_resources/active_reading_form.pdf) to help students structure reading assignments effectively. Instructors of ABMP member schools can download the form and give it to students to complete for extra credit points.



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Effective Concentration

Help Your Students Improve Their Skills

Every instructor has probably heard a student say, “I can’t get through the reading assignments because I just can’t concentrate.” Students tend to view concentration as an unchangeable skill, but we can help them concentrate more effectively when we help them shift their thinking. With some training, all students can improve their concentration skills.

Teaching Concentration

In ABMP’s *Student Success Guide* (distributed to student members), Topic 9: Concentration explains that everyone can concentrate some of the time and that everyone experiences problems with concentration at other times. Concentration is often viewed as occurring in three levels:

- **Light concentration.** During the first five minutes of a task when you feel restless, lack motivation, or are easily distracted, little, if any, learning occurs.
- **Moderate concentration.** About 10 minutes into a task you may enter a state where you feel increased interest in the subject mater or activity. Your focus deepens. Limited amounts of information can be learned at this level.
- **Deep concentration.** About 15 minutes into a task you may enter a state of deep concentration where you become so engrossed in an activity that time passes quickly and it is difficult to distract you. Learning is optimized at this level. Instructors know that students may never reach deep levels of concentration on their own. That’s why it is especially important to teach some easy concentration-building skills.

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“IF WE TEACH TODAY AS WE TAUGHT YESTERDAY, WE ROB OUR STUDENTS OF A TOMORROW.”
—JOHN DEWEY

Unproductive Study Session		Productive Study Session	
5 Minutes	Light Concentration	5 Minutes	Light Concentration
5 Minutes	Moderate Concentration	5 Minutes	Moderate Concentration
5 Minutes	DISTRACTION!	40 Minutes	Deep Concentration
5 Minutes	Light Concentration		
10 Minutes	Moderate Concentration		
5 Minutes	DISTRACTION!		
5 Minutes	Light Concentration	10 Minutes	Study Break
5 Minutes	DISTRACTION!		

EXTRA CREDIT ASSIGNMENTS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

in three forms (from three different reading assignments), he or she receives an extra credit activity that can be completed for 3–5 bonus points.

If you want students to turn in homework on time, you might offer an extra credit activity that you trade for homework assignments on the homework due date. This might also encourage students to show up to classes on the days when homework is due. If the student misses the class, or turns in homework late, he or she does not have access to the extra credit activity.

In the “Resources for Massage Schools and Instructors” section of www.abmp.com, instructors of ABMP member schools can log in and access ABMP’s Student Success Program and student resources. ABMP has created an exam preparation form that helps students structure study sessions before quizzes and written exams. Ask students to complete the form before the exam for one or two extra points. This way you can give students feedback on their plan for preparation. After they take the exam, ask them to jot down a brief self-evaluation on the back of the form to assess their execution of their plan and how it relates to their performance on the exam. When students turn in these

self-evaluations, they receive an additional two points. Over time, this activity can help students develop higher levels of emotional intelligence and a better understanding of how their test-taking behaviors directly impact their performance on quizzes and exams.

Developing Extra Credit Assignments

In general, most grading systems limit the impact of extra credit points to five percent of a student’s overall grade. If your goal is to use extra credit as a way to promote better learning behaviors in students, it works well to keep assignments small, straightforward, and fun. Before the term begins, determine how many total points you can give as extra credit and divide those points over a variety of assignments, such as the use of the textbook reading form and exam preparation form. Don’t list extra credit opportunities on the syllabus. Instead, give students the feeling that extra credit is given spontaneously and require students to be present at a particular class to obtain the opportunity to get bonus points. By thinking carefully about extra credit and planning ahead, you can use it to improve learning behaviors and help students achieve their academic goals.🍏

TIPS FOR BETTER HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS



2 ABMP.com

Think about it and be honest: are the homework assignments you’re asking students to complete boring, repetitive of classroom content, or massive? One way to keep students motivated is to adjust homework based on best practices for adult learners. Education researchers suggest that homework assignments for adults be:

- 1 **Rapid.** Adults are busy people with jam-packed lives. They simply don’t have time to complete large homework assignments or assignments from multiple classes. Shorten assignments to 30-minute activities or 10 total pages of reading. Review the curriculum to ensure that students don’t receive homework from numerous classes in the same time frame.

- 2 **Reinforcing.** Avoid teaching new concepts in homework assignments. If the concept or activity is important, make sure to teach it in a classroom setting so that students’ questions can be readily answered. Still, you want homework to put a new twist on classroom theory and practice and help students integrate concepts or practice new skills.
- 3 **Relevant.** Provide meaningful comment when grading homework assignments and return homework to students within two days of receipt. This ensures that the work they did and the feedback you give can be correlated easily. 🍏



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SAVE THE DATE: 15TH ANNUAL ABMP SCHOOL ISSUES FORUM

Time to take out your planning calendar and mark April 14–16, 2011, for ABMP’s annual School Issues Forum—the massage therapy profession’s longest-running symposium on education. We want you to join us in Denver, Colorado, as we celebrate the 15th annual gathering.

Designed specifically for massage therapy school owners, administrators, and instructors, the meeting provides an opportunity to network, educate, learn, inspire, and talk shop with peers about current issues and best practices in massage education. **Prepare to be inspired!**



Watch your inbox for specifics or visit www.abmp.com for additional details.

EFFECTIVE CONCENTRATION CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

ACTIVITIES THAT BUILD GOOD CONCENTRATION SKILLS

Good concentration skills include the ability to focus at will, to sustain concentration over a period of time, and to focus on one thing at a time. Here are some ideas to help students build these skills.

- **Focus at will.** Teach students to use verbal, physical, and combined prompts to develop the ability to focus at will. A great verbal prompt is, “I am clear, focused, and organized, and I pay attention now!” A great physical prompt is to stand up, inhale while lifting the arms over the head, and exhale while bending down and touching the toes. These prompts can be combined; have students repeat the verbal prompt at the completion of the physical prompt.

Students can develop their own prompts. Try having students practice prompts directly before a lecture, demonstration, quiz, or assignment.

- **Sustain concentration.** Lack of concentration is often due to external factors such as body temperature, competing interests, hunger, or noise distractions. Ask students to analyze their interruptions and to brainstorm solutions.

Have them try an easy concentration-improving exercise. Sit down and set a timer for 25 minutes. Commit to sticking with an activity until the timer beeps. Remind students to keep coming back to the task

until the timer beeps, even if they feel their attention wavering. When the timer beeps, reward students with a break or a snack. Eventually students will find that they get better at sticking with a task and can increase the allotted time to 40 minutes between breaks. The use of a timer helps students structure sessions and break study into manageable bite-size chunks.

- **Focus on one thing at a time.** Feeling overwhelmed by competing assignments can negatively influence students’ concentration. Teach students to structure study sessions (the 25-minute timer works well for this) and write a study list. Sometimes students need input on how to prioritize assignments and quizzes. Help them think strategically about what should take prominence in a study session. Have them work persistently at one study task until they can mark it off the list and move on.

Instructors from ABMP member schools have access to a variety of resources that can help students improve concentration skills. Check out the Concentration Evaluation on page 103 of the *Student Success Guide*, and time management resources on www.abmp.com. Can’t find something? Give ABMP a call at 800-458-2267 and ask for the education department. Our dedicated school liaisons will help you access the resources you need. 🍏