

## In the Classroom 143

# Using Guided Notes in the Classroom

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**Stan Skrabut:** Well, thanks ever so much for taking time to listen to this podcast. It certainly means a lot. I know you could be doing other things, but you're hanging out with me, and I really do appreciate it. Every tool has its time and place. Some tools such as lecturing are used far too often and lose their effect. However, in combination with other tools, lectures can be the perfect learning tool. One tool that can turn a lecture from a passive activity into an active one is guided notes. Also known as skeleton notes, guided notes can be used for grasping the essential content from videos and reading assignments, as well as lectures.

This week, we're going to take a closer look at developing guided to support lectures, reading, and consuming multimedia like videos in audio. According to William Heward, a professor at The Ohio State University guided notes are instructor-prepared handouts that provide all students with background information and standard cues with specific spaces to write key facts, concepts, and/or relationships during the lecture.

I'm sure you've seen these handouts. They have blanks where students can input key information based on what's happening in the lecture or other content that they're consuming such as seeing it on a PowerPoint presentation or in a video. The reasons that you would be wanting to use guided notes is they help improve the lecture in the classroom.

Guided notes help to combat prominent disadvantages of lectures to include-- they add clear organization to notes. Lectures, not always are they clear. Sometimes they just ramble around. They also turn students into active listeners. There's a goal behind what they're doing. They have a blank that they need to fill in. Students are more attentive. They help students take better notes. Students have not always been taught how to take the best notes. With guided notes, you can help them transition to better notetakers. Probably most importantly, it helps students stay on track. When you're you have a lecture that may be rambling on, sometimes students can get off track and not be paying attention. Guided notes help to improve the lecture in that way.

Lots of advantages for taking guided notes. Guided notes can help students stay on task while listening to a lecture, watching a video, reading a chapter. Here are some really specific additional advantages to take in mind. First of all, accurate and complete notes. The goal of a lecture is to pass key information onto the students. This will help to improve student performance. Note-taking, the research is shown that if you take good notes that your performance will be better, but students have not always been able to take good notes. The research is also showing that students

who use guided notes score higher on quizzes and exams. They're documenting and learning the essential information for a particular class. With guided notes, instructors can emphasize key elements of a lecture or reading that they want students to remember as they move forward in the class.

Another advantage is active engagement. To successfully complete a guided notes handout, students must actively engage with the lecture or the activity. That there are specific prompts that students must fill in in order to be successful with that particular activity. They must attend to what's going on that their active participants. Another advantage is they're capturing really the essence of the lecture. The guided notes will help students identify the key elements of a lecture, and the reason they can do that is because the instructor has put it together. The instructor has identified what they consider to be the key elements of that lecture.

Because students are filling in these guided notes and they're paying attention to what's going on, they're asking more questions. They'll stop a lecture and ask questions is for clarification so they can get that down in their guided notes. They know that certain information is key to their success, and they will ensure that they capture that information. This is not just focused on the students it also helps the instructor. Instructors who use guided notes are more organized and they stay on task better.

Because the instructor's creating those guided notes, it requires more thought and attention to the overall organization and structure of their class and their lecture instructors want to ensure that they're hitting all the key points so they tend to stay on task just a little more. It also forces the instructor to be more selective, what they include in their lecture, as well as they leave out. This forces them to get rid of the fluff and really focus on the learning objectives.

Less is more and because of COVID, we're finding this out that a lot of instruction that was moved from the classroom to online faculty started throwing out pieces and really just honing in on what was the essential pieces for the class. Same thing applies when putting together a guided notes handout. One of the other benefits of using a guided notes is that it can be repurposed, that you can take the elements from the guided notes and repurpose them into quiz and exam questions. This increases the usefulness when those elements are tied to learning objectives that are guiding the overall course design.

These guided notes also lead to more positive evaluation ratings, which has been shown in the research. Students recognize when instructors are helping them to get to the next level and they will reflect this in the course evaluation. They're also useful for developing note-taking skills. As I mentioned, students are not necessarily skilled in taking notes properly, and that can be a learned skill. You can use these guided notes to transition to a point where students are taking their own effective notes.

Your initial notes, your initial guided notes, may be very scripted. You're asking, you're leaving specific blanks, but over the course of the term, you can make them just a little more obscure where you're still indicating that maybe there's three essential elements that they need to capture, but you're not hand-feeding this as you

were earlier in the course. You finally can get to the point where you're not providing these guided notes and students have to take their own notes, but they have learned how to improve their note-taking.

Those are some of the advantages to using guided notes in your classroom. Here's some tips for constructing some guided notes that will help to make a positive difference. Naturally, I've done my research. I pulled a lot of information from a lot of different sources. I've included those sources in the show notes. Please go check them out. Here are some guidelines that will help you. First of all, the guided notes need to follow your like lecture in the same sequence. When you're building your notes, use your lecture as a guide for building those guided notes. If students have to jump around from one part of the worksheet to another, it will be harder for them to identify the key points. The idea is that it should cleanly follow your lecture.

You should use an outlining format when you are creating your guided notes. This will also aid in organization for students. When you're building these guided notes, you're going to start with your exam notes that has all the information in it. Then you're going to extract the key points that you want students to remember. Once you have added those key points, now you start deleting key facts from those notes and instead put spaces for students to write a term, a phrase, or a concept that you want them to remember.

Use lines or bullets to show the students which and how many notes that you want them to take. Try to make it as clean as possible. When you are actually giving your lecture, support your presentation with slides and these slides should be also in line with the guided notes handout that you have. You're projecting slides with the key information that is associated with those guided notes.

In addition to when you have your guided notes, just make sure that you have enough space where students can write down everything that they need for those particular notes. It's also important that you're providing ample space, but you want to make sure that students keep their responses as brief as possible. You're really focusing on keywords, concepts, maybe formulas, things like that. You're not trying to have your students write down paragraphs of the information because capturing too much information can slow the process and defeat the whole purpose of what you're trying to achieve.

According to the research, short responses work as well as long detailed responses in terms of understanding. Furthermore, there is an increased likelihood that students will actually complete the notes if the responses are short. If you're asking them to compose essays while they're trying to take notes, they're just probably not going to do it. Because the notes are brief, students can then focus on what's being said, so they jot this down and then they can really listen to you as a lecturer elaborate on more information.

Another strategy for when you build your notes is you can use diagrams, illustrations, other visuals that maybe the student has to label. For example, concept maps, which I talked about in episode ITC 43, are a useful tool to include in guided note handouts because they allow students to label things and show relationships, or you could

have an illustration where they have to label the parts, the nomenclature of an item or identify parts of a cell that that could be all part of that.

When possible, make sure that you distribute your guided note handouts ahead of time through your learning management system, that's a great platform for doing that, or you pass them out at the beginning of class. Ideally, you want students to become familiar with it before they jump into a lecture. This will help move things forward. They may also benefit from reading the chapters they're supposed to read and maybe glean some information that way.

Naturally, if you are having students watch a video or do some reading, you want the notes in their hands to aid with that particular assignment. Make sure that you have that in their hands. At the end of class, save time to do a review of the handout to make sure students have completed it fully. This can be used as a recall exercise. Just asking questions around the room to ensure everybody's got the right answer when they're filling out the class notes.

I would say even before that, the first time that you're using these guided notes in your classroom, you actually need to provide some instruction on to the students on how to use them. Even though you have provided them with these handouts that have fill-in-the-blank prompts, students may not know how to use them well. Inform them about the purpose of the guided notes, why are you using them always. Why is it an important an aspect of your class and also how to use them in the class as a study tool?

If you want to ensure students are using these, you may collect them, and mark them as for a participation grade. You don't have to do this for every class. If you randomly pull it in, tell them, "Hey, today we're collecting those handouts," that'll keep them a little bit on their toes. Do this randomly, and if you don't want to assign participation points, you can assign bonus points, for example, but it will ensure that students are completing these things because it's actually for their benefit.

Then as soon as possible, assess students on what they have captured. This could be done at the end of the class, maybe as a review. It can be done at the beginning of class, it could be a memory recall exercise. I talked about those in ITC 81. You can do this with clickers, there's a lot of different ways that you can do it but assess them. It could be just a simple quiz that you hand out to have them make sure that they know the content that was associated with those guided notes.

Then finally, you can create a guided-notes assignment. You don't have to be the one creating guiding notes worksheets. You can have students develop these handouts. Assign a chapter to each of your students for the purpose of creating a guided notes handout that you can then review and then distribute it out to the rest of the students. This is a way that you can do that.

Guided notes, that takes the lecture to a whole different level, lots of advantages. Really helps students grab the essence of a lecture, or if they're watching a video, gets the information you want them to grasp as well as a reading exercise. It can be used in a lot of different ways. As far as building it, lots of different strategies that you can

use to build the best guided notes possible. That is what I have for you. Oh, in addition, I have something else. Here's a quick plug for my book.