

New (and Fun) Ways to Review Course Materials and Content

By Lynn Havens

It's the beginning of a new school year and, to start it off in an appropriately CRISS fashion, you know you should bring out students' background knowledge about your course content, set purposes for the year, and help students get acquainted with their textbooks. Chapters one through three of the Project CRISS training manual provide the rationale for why this is important and illustrate several strategies for helping students identify the author's craft. While reading one of my online journals earlier this month, I came across a powerful article by Karen Garber-Miller (2006-7) that had some additional (and fun) strategies for reaching these same goals.

The following strategies are designed to help students become familiar with *textbooks*, but can be modified to work with other classroom materials as well. Although the purpose is to get students into their classroom materials, notice how most of these strategies also guide students to make connections to what they already know or have experienced in school, to predict course content and purposes, and to pull together course ideas and concepts to get the flow of a full semester or year of content.

What's Old and What's New

In small groups, students review a chapter in the book, discuss the major concepts, and determine whether the concepts are new or ones with which they are already familiar.

1. Divide students into small groups. Assign each group one chapter of their text to review. As they skim the chapter, they will identify main ideas and evaluate whether they are "old" or "new."
2. Model with the first chapter by picking out major topics—let students know you are being guided by headings and sub-headings, graphics, introductory and concluding paragraphs, and/or text features that might even mention key concepts from the chapter.
3. Create a chart similar to the following:

What's Old			What's New	
Concept	BK	Sch	Concept	?

As you come across an important concept, record it in either the "What's Old" or "What's New" column. For ideas placed in the *Old* column, indicate if they are things already in your background knowledge (BK)—things you experienced, saw, read about, etc.—or if they are things you learned in school (Sch), e.g., last year's math or American history class. For items classified as *New*, check the "?" column if the topic is so new you have never seen it before.

4. Next, have student groups create and complete similar charts for their chapters. Group members might not all agree on the classification of the topics, but see if they can come to a consensus.
5. When groups are done, have each group "walk" through its chapter pointing out the main ideas and sharing how and why they classified the ideas as they did. Encourage questions and class discussions relating to the ideas.



Name That Feature

Students will work independently and then in teams to discover important and recurrent features used by the author to help them learn.

1. Model by “walking” through the whole book and then one chapter of your text. Identify several whole book features and several chapter features (NOT all). Some examples you might share are:
 - a. Whole book: Table of contents, glossary, index
 - b. Chapter: Marginal notes showing connections to other content areas, questions at the end of each section, words or phrases highlighted within the text.
2. Have each student look through the book to discover both whole book and chapter features. Some books may have unit or section features as well. On scratch paper, have them record the page numbers and feature descriptions.
3. Group students together to share their lists and to come up with one master list for their group.
4. Have each group report on the features it found while you develop a class list that can be displayed for all to see. If some important features are missing, you may add to the list.
5. Assign several features to each team. Their task will be to describe how each feature can be used to help them learn and remember information. Model one or two descriptions using the features you identified during your initial modeling. Collect the team descriptions.
6. Play “name that feature.” Read one of the descriptions (if you have done this with more than one class, use the descriptions from another class). The teams may discuss the answer and look at the list you posted in the room. When the team has an answer, a spokesperson stands up. Call on students in the order in which each spokesperson stands. The first correct answer results in a point awarded to that team. The team with the most points at the end of the game wins.

Textbook Timeline

1. The class creates a Pictures Notes timeline of topics covered over the course of the year.
2. Develop a timeline for the school year or semester, which lists course topics (themes or chapters) to be covered each month, and post it in the classroom.
3. Divide students into groups according to their birth months. Each group is assigned the topics that will be covered during its month. For students born during summer months, assign auxiliary materials or resources in the classroom or have them pair with another month.
4. Groups skim through their sections of the text, create Picture Notes representing the main ideas, and present the information to the whole class while the class follows along with the text.
5. Attach the visuals to your timeline, and start each unit by reviewing the visual.
6. At the end of the unit, have the students who created the visual revise it or explain to the class how they would change their Picture Notes to represent a more in-depth understanding of the content.

Textbook Picture Walk

1. With this activity, students try to match visuals from their textbook with the chapters in which they are found.
2. Ask students to open their books to the table of contents and then read and quickly discuss the topics and themes that will be covered throughout the year.
3. Divide students into pairs or small groups and provide each team with one key visual (illustration, graph, chart, example, photo, etc.) from each chapter. Have students predict which visual goes with which chapter—no looking through the book. They may use only the table of contents. Have them write on the back of the picture (or use a sticky note) why they think the picture belongs to that chapter.
4. When a group is done with their matching, they may look through the book to find the correct picture/chapter pairings.
5. Conclude with a whole group discussion where students share their correct and incorrect matches. Could a visual be placed in more than one chapter? This discussion will provide insight into the students’ background knowledge.



Sticky Note Votes

1. Students identify text features and then rank them according to how important they are in the learning process.
2. Have students leaf through their textbook—cover-to-cover—to identify and mark with sticky notes all features they think will help them learn. (Note: if sticky notes are not available, students can write page numbers and feature descriptions on scratch paper.)
3. Develop a class list of these features.
4. Place students in small groups to rank order the various features according to how important they are for learning. Encourage students to vote on the features to determine the ranking. The outcome isn't as important as the collaborative discussions that occur while students talk about how, when, where, and why various features are used.
5. Discuss the various rankings with the whole class.

Hopefully, you and your students will find at least one of the five strategies shared here to be a new and fun way to start the school year. Because each involves small group discussions, students will not only learn about the course materials, but they will have the opportunity to get to know other students in their class. In addition, all of these strategies provide a quick overview of a full year's (or semester's) course content. This is your opportunity to let students know which parts of their text will be omitted and what other topics you will be adding through the use of supplementary materials. Knowledge of course materials and content plus getting acquainted with their peers will help students start the school year more comfortably and confidently—important steps toward school success!

Garber-Miller, K. (2006-7). Playful textbook previews: Letting go of familiar mustache monologues. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*. 50:4. Pages 284-288.