

# Teaching Tips/Notes



## Achieving Engagement through Real-World Examples

### Introduction

Some of today's students have developed poor habits of "learning to forget" in an effort to maintain an acceptable grade, but not really learning the content. This "learning to forget" mentality includes learning content specifically for the test and then immediately disposing of the information. These students are apathetic and our current classroom structure of lessons, reading book chapters and an eventual test, only feeds and encourages their apathy. For students to be engaged, they need a reason, a purpose. Some gain purpose through experiential learning activities and projects, but we believe even that system can be improved. Instructors should motivate their students with a solid learning plan, an end-game. Students want to graduate and get jobs (intrinsic motivation), so extrinsic motivation by the instructor(s) using real-world scenarios is necessary for students to see application for their future careers. This tactic was employed in a senior level graphic design course for agricultural communications and apparel studies undergraduates at the University of Arkansas. The course is traditionally a skill and project-based course. Students attend weekly lectures that focus on program competencies and create projects based on the specific competency covered in class. The instructors added design examples to daily lessons to foster discussion and motivate students to learn the material.

### Procedure

The procedure is simple — find examples that directly reinforce lesson content. For each lesson in the graphic design course, a design example that pertained to the lesson was shown and discussed. In the beginning of the course, basic principles of design were taught. These principles are reinforced throughout the course by having students identify principles in each design example. Additionally, depending on the material, students were asked how they would make the design example themselves. What program would they use? What tools would they employ to achieve that effect? Finally, students were often given an example of how the product might be used in industry. Some examples were easy like an event flier or invitation. Other examples were more challenging to help students visualize the competencies and programs on a deeper level, which also helped reinforce the broad scope of knowledge they must have in order to be prepared for the workforce. Design examples were retrieved from various outlets. The instructors used Pinterest, design blogs, Google searches and their own personal work to pull examples. This strategy was effective for a graphic design course because it produced a wide variety of examples that incorporated traditional and modern design trends. Finally, throughout each lesson, the instructors pulled from personal industry experience to create relevant examples.

### Assessment

Students throughout the semester became increasingly engaged in the course. More students participated in the design example discussion as the course progressed and by the end of the semester they were sharing their opinions freely. Many showed a more complete understanding of design principles and industry techniques than in previous semesters. Granted, there were still students who remained quiet and, at times, disengaged, but on average students seemed to pay more attention when lesson competencies were explained using industry examples. They were able to more easily visualize how the lesson pertained to their future career aspirations. The design examples also provided an introduction for each lesson, allowing the instructor to preview competencies through discussion. Finally, this course is skill-based in nature. Students traditionally follow the instructor along through various programs and competencies. So, by adding design examples with discussion, the instructors were able to appeal to the three types of learners—tactile, visual and auditory; thus, providing a more complete opportunity for learning. The design examples improved the students' overall design aesthetics and professionalism. Industry examples should be integrated into all courses, if possible, to improve student understanding and increase student motivation to learn through application of real-world examples. This teaching tip should

be used as a reminder for each of us to work to bring industry (even if in examples) into the classroom. This provides a better opportunity for us to make sure our students are workforce ready upon graduation.

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