

Perfect lesson notes

Do you sometimes think that if only your students would take better notes in class they would fare better in their assessments?

A typical scenario

- In a typical group of learners, there are good note takers, excellent note takers, those who feel they'll remember everything without taking notes, and those who struggle to write anything meaningful or legible.

Consequences

- Poor notes deprive many learners of a rich reflective resource that can help improve their performance in assessments.
- Unless tackled directly, note taking skills can remain poor.

Solution

At the outset of the course or topic, seek volunteers or nominate learners to be Lesson Note-Takers. Depending on the size of the group and the number of sessions in the topic, learners may only have to take on this role for one lesson.

Whilst all learners will take their usual notes, the Lesson Note-Taker will write a particularly comprehensive account of the lesson. [For the first few weeks, at least, it would be prudent to choose learners who are already competent note takers.]

Within 24 hours of the lesson, the Lesson Note-Taker must transfer his/her notes to both the Primary Notes and Refined Notes pages of the lesson wiki*. Once these are in place, the rest of the group must read and edit the Refined Notes until they are a polished record of the session.

Benefits

Before this wiki approach, it would be very difficult and time consuming to check on the quality and sufficiency of learners' note taking, learners can all too often be left to their own devices. But using the wiki changes everything.

Throughout the week following the lesson, the tutor can keep a watchful eye on the refining process, using appropriate communication channels to keep momentum going. All edits and contributions are author and date stamped, so it is relatively straight forward to identify any bystanders.

Learners can be encouraged not only to polish the Refined Notes, but to augment them with their own 'finds' to add extra depth to the subject. This could include additional written material, personal observations and reflections, or links to other illuminating subject matter.

If towards the end of the week, the notes are incomplete or inaccurate, despite the collective efforts of the group, the tutor may surmise that an element of the lesson may not have been sufficiently clear. In the pre-wiki approach, this

misunderstanding may not have come to light, but through use of the wiki, the tutor can address the issue in the following lesson before moving on.

As an incentive for all learners to participate in the wiki approach, you may wish to tell them at the outset that they will each receive a bound copy of the refined notes ahead of their assessments. With everyone revising from notes you know to be accurate, the potential for increased success rates is high.

Finally, those learners who find note taking difficult will have participated in something of a note-taking apprenticeship; not only reading the skilful contributions of others, but working on them – analysing, editing and adding their own thoughts. This may well be the first time they've ever seen note taking done well...

* In preparation for this approach, the teacher must set up a group wiki specifically for the topic. Within this wiki, there should be a page for each lesson, and within each lesson page, there should be a Primary Notes Page and a Refined Notes Page. All students should be given read and edit privileges to all pages.