THE K. PATRICIA CROSS ACADEMY

INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE

Teaching Technique 22

Test-Taking Teams

ACTIVITY TYPE	TEACHING PROBLEM ADDRESSED	LEARNING TAXONOMIC LEVEL
• Active/Engaged Learning • Problem Solving	• Low Motivation/Engagement • Surface Learning	• Application: Analysis & Critical Thinking • Application: Problem Solving • Caring • Foundational Knowledge • Human Dimension • Integration & Synthesis • Learning How to Learn

Test-Taking Teams

In *Test-Taking Teams*, students work in groups to prepare for a test.
They then take the test, first individually and next as a group.

1 Clarify your teaching purpose and learning goals for *Test-Taking Teams*

2 Identify the learning task's underlying problem and craft the prompt

3 Set assignment parameters for completing the prompts

4 Develop a plan for learning assessment or grading

5 Communicate assignment instructions to students

6 Implement the technique

7 Reflect upon the activity and evaluate its effectiveness

Step-By-Step Instructions

In this section we provide you with guidance on each of the seven steps involved as you consider this technique.

STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS

This is a flexible technique that has students take tests as individuals and then again as a team. You can use the tests to cover almost any body of content in your course. It can be used for short quizzes within a single class period or for tests covering larger amounts of material. Students can study for the test out of class and then work on the test taking in class.

This technique can help students achieve several learning goals. *Test-Taking Teams* encourages both individual accountability and promotive interdependence among team members. Individuals are not only accountable for their own individual scores but they also benefit from the collective knowledge of the group. This technique is useful for demonstrating the value of collaborative learning. Students help each other deepen their understanding of the foundational knowledge. It also allows students to form strong bonds and to begin to feel responsible for each other's success.

This technique has clear benefits as an assessment of learning. Test results may be used to gauge both individual and group understanding of foundational knowledge. They may also be used to assess student understanding of important course concepts during the learning process. It provides individuals, groups, and the teacher with information about whether students are making adequate progress toward their goals of developing foundational knowledge. You can use this technique after a unit of content as a summative assessment of what students have learned.

STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT

The task is to demonstrate mastery of a given body of content, so your task in this step is to identify the unit of content for the quiz or test.

STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS

As part of the assignment parameters, you should determine what type of items you will use, whether true/false, fill in the blank, multiple choice, or other. You should also determine the number of items you will have. Construct your test as most appropriate for the content.

Consider also the timing. Depending on the size and complexity of the material to be mastered, the groups may meet for 15 minutes, a full class period, or longer.

One other assignment parameter to consider is how to form groups. Consider a method for forming groups that will ensure each team contains members with comparable levels of ability.

STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING

Consider averaging individual test grades and group test grades to determine individual grades. Weight scores, for example, two-thirds for individual plus one-third for group.

STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS

You should indicate the assignment parameters on the tests themselves, first the individual test and then the group test. You will also want to explain the assignment to students, likely as oral instructions prior to the tests themselves.

STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE

- Form groups of 4–6.

- Allow students time to study as individuals.

- Ask students to study content in their groups for a suitable amount of time.

- Administer the test for students to complete individually and to submit for grading.

- Ask students to rejoin their groups; re-administer the test to the groups, who should complete it and then submit a group response.

STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS

When reflecting on the activity and how effective it was, consider the following questions:

- Did the technique match the course learning goals and objectives?

- Did it meet my goals for this learning module?

- Was it appropriate for the students?

- Did the technique keep the students engaged?

- Did it promote student learning?

- Did it provide me with information about student understanding?

If you answer yes to all or most of these questions, next consider how you might improve the activity for the next use.

Support Materials

The materials in this section are intended to help you with the process of implementing this technique.

SCORING TIPS

- Do a simple statistical analysis of test scores to show differences between individual and group test scores. Use the averages of all individual and all group scores.

- If you believe your students would benefit from group-to-group competition, consider announcing the highest scoring group.

- Design a grade structure that integrates individual and group scores (e.g. average the individual and group scores, or assign two thirds for the individual score and one third for the group score).

- To encourage individuals to make a best effort and to assess progress over time, have individuals take quizzes to score against their own previous averages; award points for the degree to which they meet or exceed their own performances.

- If you are comfortable with the concept of bonus points, consider rewarding bonus points to the most improved or highest scoring teams.

VARIATIONS AND EXTENSIONS

- Have students work as pairs rather than in a group.

- Make two copies of the exam: one copy to distribute to the teams to use to review and the other copy to be submitted for grading.

- Ask groups to submit the materials that they created to prepare for the exam. For example, they can turn in a brief summary of each answer they formulated, a copy of the outline and material they used to organize their discussion, or a description of the procedures they adopted to prepare for the exam.

- Do a simple statistical analysis of test scores to show differences between individual and group test scores. Use the averages of all individual and all group scores, announcing to students, for example, *The average individual scored X and the average group scored Y*, or do this for each group.

Technique Template

Following are two templates to assist you as you think through how you might implement this technique in your own class. The first is a completed template, providing an example of how a Professor adapted *Test-Taking Teams* in their course, *English Poetry of the Romantic Period*. The second is a blank template for you to fill out to tailor this technique for your course.

Technique Template

Sample *Test-Taking Teams* Completed Technique Template: Content from
Learning Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty

English Poetry of the Romantic Period

Course Name

COURSE CHARACTERISTICS

What are the situational factors that impact this course? For example, is it on campus or online?
How many students? Is it lower division or graduate? Are there student attributes such as attitudes,
prior knowledge, reasons for enrolling, and so forth that should be taken into account as you
consider this technique?

> This is a graduate level course offered at a university that has both
> online and on-site graduate level degrees.

STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS

Why are you choosing this technique? What do you hope to accomplish?

> The Professor knew that students were anxious about the
> upcoming master's degree comprehensive examination. He believed
> that this anxiety was distracting them from focusing on what
> they needed to learn specifically in his course, which included a
> learning outcome of identifying the major Romantic Poets through
> a few lines of their writing. He decided to use Test-Taking Teams
> to address both issues: he used the content of his course to help
> prepare students for the type of questions they would be asked on
> the comprehensive exam.

STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT

What is the question you want learners to address, or problem you want them to solve?

The professor designed a sample test focusing on English Romantic poetry and explained to students that the test included quotation identification questions similar in style to the comprehensive exam.

STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS

What are the assignment logistics? For example, will this be assigned individually or is it group work? How long will the assignment take? Will students be submitting a product? What materials, resources, or additional information do you anticipate needing?

He explained the testing strategy to the students. He asked them to sign an honor code stating that they would work independently on the first test and collaboratively on the second practice exam.

STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING

If you decide to assess learning, how will you determine that learning has occurred? For example, will you use a simple +/check/- grading system? If you use a rubric, will you use an existing one or create one? What will be your criteria and standards?

> He decided to simply score the identification questions as correct or incorrect. He would do an average of individual and group scores.

STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS

How will you communicate assignment parameters to students? For example, through a handout? A prompt on a presentation slide? Assignment instructions in your online course?

> He communicated the assignment as content in the learning module. He asked students to work in online groups to share study strategies as they reviewed the material and prepared to take the sample test.

STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE

How will you adapt steps/procedures for your students? Are there any additional logistical aspects to consider?

He gave individual students the test first, through his institution's LMS. He asked each group to select a leader, and re-administered the test to the group leaders who were told to work together with their groups to answer the questions. He set up a chat room for each group that the members could use to discuss their answers.

STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS

Note: This step will be completed after you have implemented the technique.
Did this technique help you accomplish your goals? What worked well? What could have been improved? What might you change if you decide to implement the activity again?

By working in groups, students were able to fill in their knowledge gaps regarding his course while they learned additional passage identification techniques that prepared them for the comprehensive exam. He analyzed the individual test results by item. He was able to report to individual students where they appeared to need the most additional work in preparation for the exam (for example, Fred had difficulty recognizing Keats and Byron, while Atseena had trouble identifying Shelley and Byron). He also analyzed the test the groups completed. He noted that the groups, on average, scored higher than individuals.

Technique Template

This template is intended for use when planning to implement *Test-Taking Teams* in your class. Fill in the blanks below, and use the information provided elsewhere in the Instructor's Guide to assist you in your thinking.

Course Name

COURSE CHARACTERISTICS

What are the situational factors that impact this course? For example, is it on campus or online? How many students? Is it lower division or graduate? Are there student attributes such as attitudes, prior knowledge, reasons for enrolling, and so forth that should be taken into account as you consider this technique?

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STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT

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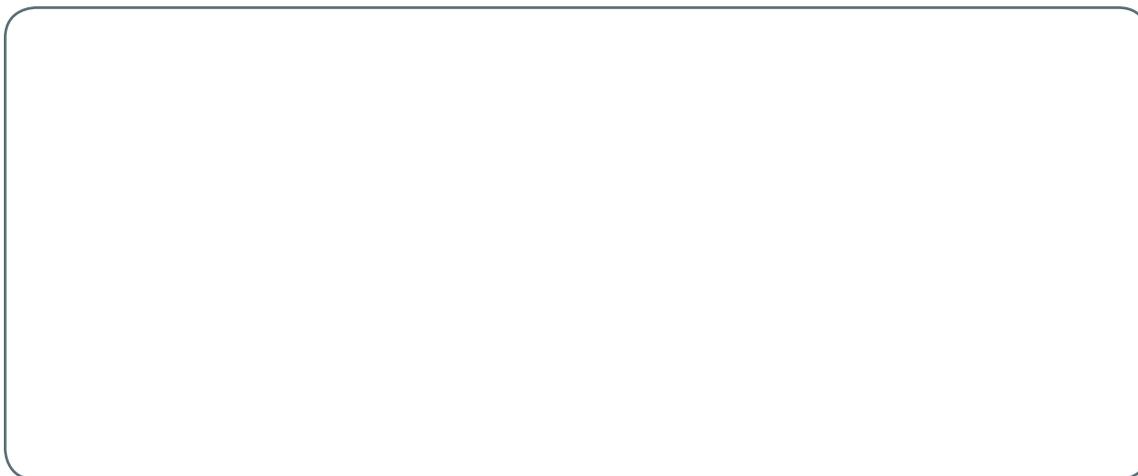
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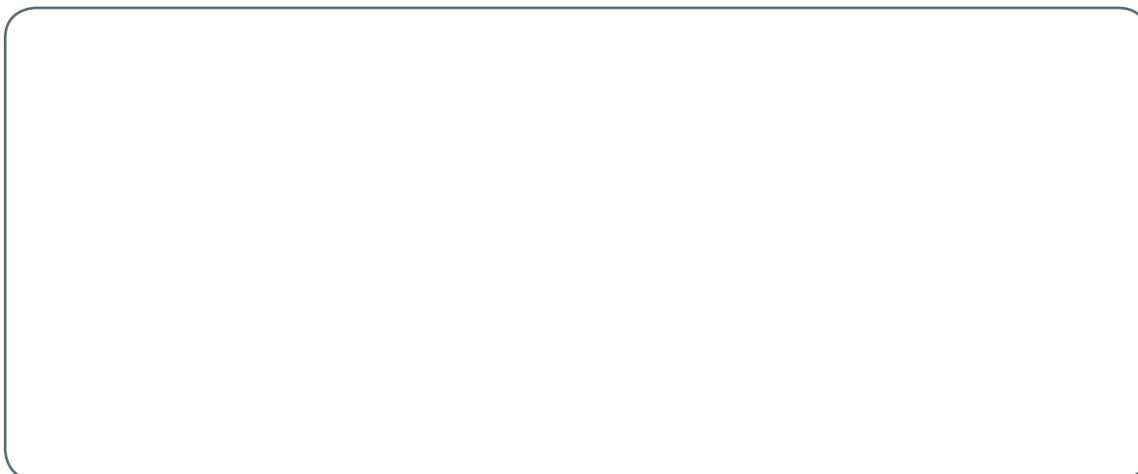
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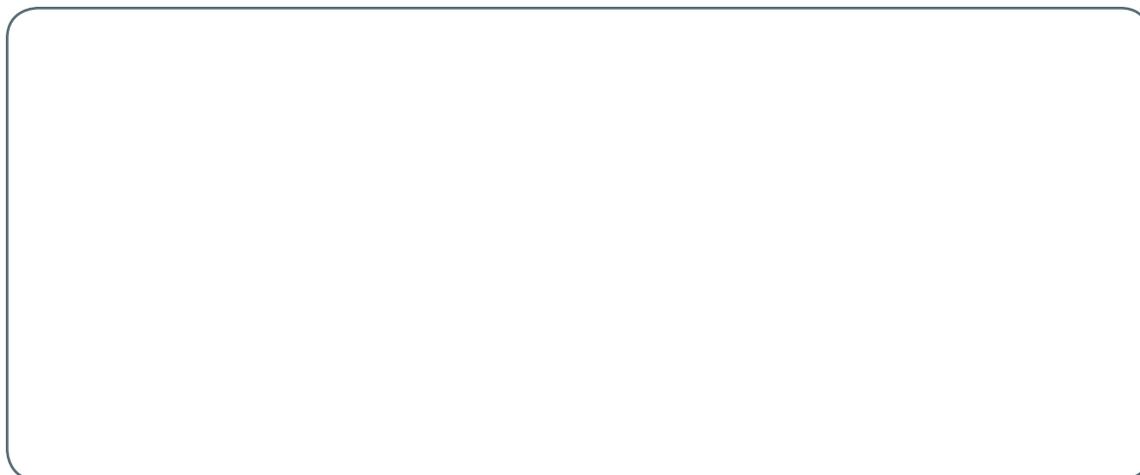
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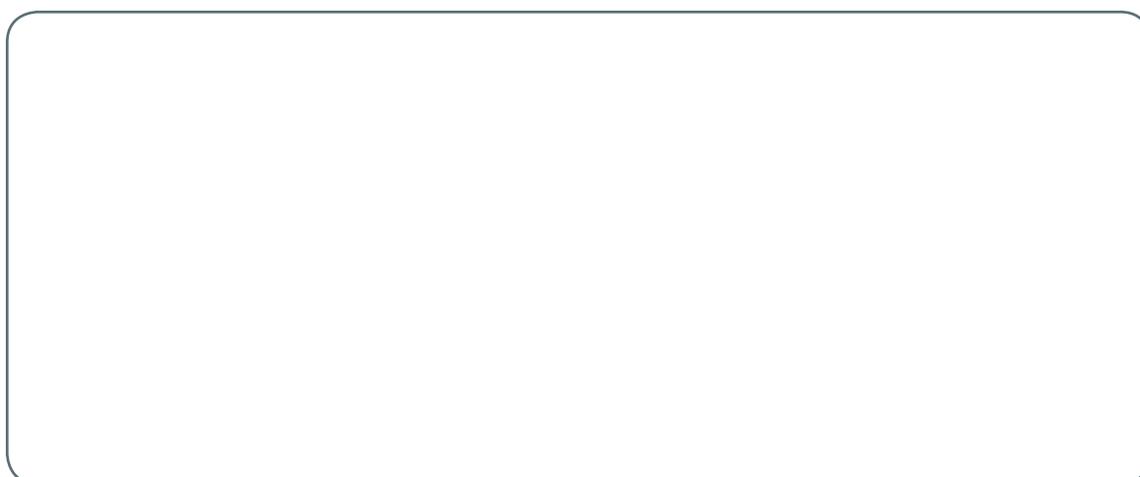
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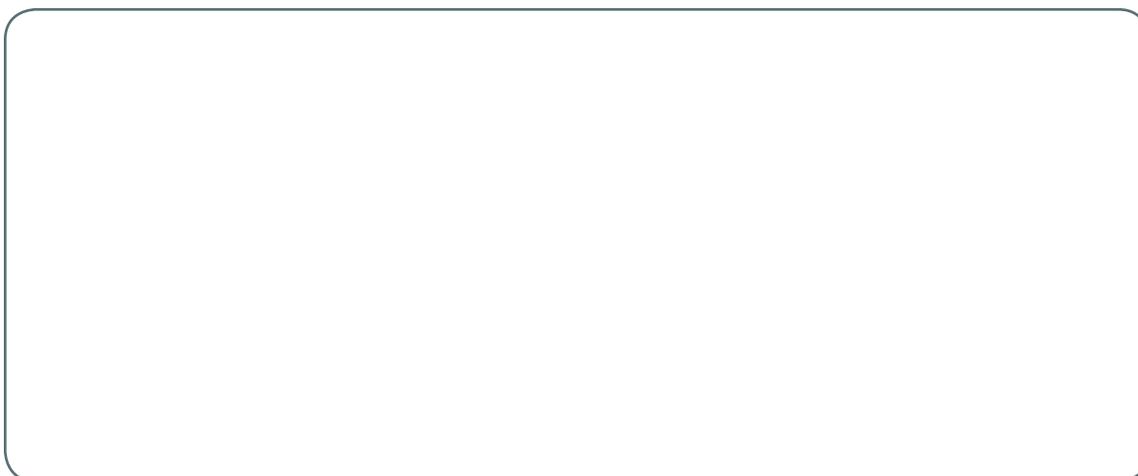
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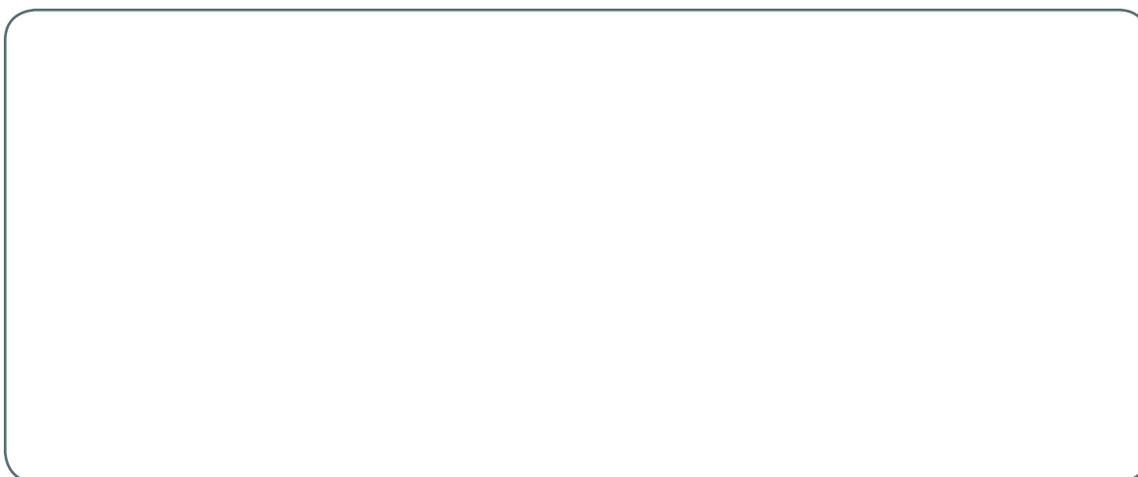
References and Resources

PRIMARY SOURCE

Content for this download was drawn primarily from "Collaborative Learning Technique 12: Test-Taking Teams" in *Collaborative Learning Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty* (Barkley, Major, & Cross, 2014), pp. 219–223 and "Learning Assessment Technique 9: Team Tests" in *Learning Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty* (Barkley & Major, 2016), pp. 122–127. It includes material that was adapted or reproduced with permission. For further information about this technique, including examples in both on campus and online courses, see the primary source:

Barkley, E. F., Major, C. H. (2016). *Learning Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Barkley, E. F., Major, C. H., & Cross, K. P. (2014). *Collaborative Learning Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

CITATIONS AND ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- Michaelsen, L. K., & Black, R. H. (1994). Building learning trams: The key to harnessing the power of small groups in higher education. In S. Kadel & J. Keehner (Eds.), *Collaborative learning: A sourcebook for higher education,* 2 (pp. 65–81). State College, PA: National Center for Teaching, Learning and Assessment.

- Michaelsen, L. K., Fink, L. D., & Knight, A. (1997). Designing effective group activities: Lessons for classroom teaching and faculty development. In D. DeZure (Ed.), *To improve the academy: Recourses for faculty. Instructional and organizational development, 16* (pp.373–397). Stillwater, OK: New Forums Press Co.

- Gooblar, D. (2014). Want to take group work to the next level? Give team tests. *ChronicleVitae.* https://chroniclevitae.com/news/656-want-to-take-group-work-to-the-next-level-give-teamtests

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