

# Prior Knowledge Check

No student is a blank slate when they enter the classroom. They may know a lot about your content field before entering the class, or walk in with false knowledge or biases that place some barriers in their learning. Beyond the traditional ice-breaker, prep students and yourself by checking their prior knowledge on class content.

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|  | <b>What do you know about<br/>(Insert your field here)?</b>   |
|  | <b>Why do this?</b>   |
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|  | <b>1. It activates prior knowledge, requiring students to see how they might apply their experiences to class material (Pressley et al., 1992).</b> |
|  |   |
|  | <b>2. It demonstrates that you value what they may already know about the field.</b>  |
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|  | <b>3. It puts the responsibility on the students and illustrates that this class will require active participation.</b>                             |
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For more on this strategy,  
including how to use it at the end of the semester, visit  
[oakland.edu/teachingtips](http://oakland.edu/teachingtips)

## Prior Knowledge Check

Favorite Teaching Quote: "A teacher is one who makes himself progressively unnecessary." - Thomas Carruthers

Contributed Activity: On the first day of class, I like to ask students to write a 1-page response to the following question: "What do you know about (Insert your field here)?" I do this for multiple reasons:

- It activates prior knowledge, requiring students to pull from their experiences and see how they might apply those experiences to class material (Pressley et al., 1992).
- It demonstrates that I value what they may already know about the field.
- It puts the responsibility on the students and illustrates that this class will require active participation.

Near the end of the semester, I return these papers to the students, and have them respond to what they wrote previously. Students are usually surprised by their initial writings and by their ability to respond with what they have learned. This activity shows how much a student's conceptualization of a field can change in just 15 weeks. It also reminds me of the quotation above—and how quickly I become unnecessary, if I do my job well.

Good luck & happy teaching!

### Resources:

Pressley, M., Wood, E., Woloshyn, V., Martin, V., King, A., and Menke, D. (1992). Encouraging mindful use of prior knowledge: Attempting to construct explanatory answers facilitates learning. *Educational Psychologist* 27(1), 91-109.

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