

Bite Size Pieces Taste Betterⁱ

The following teaching strategies are designed for non-economics major students. My experimental online courses in the Principles of Micro and Macroeconomics can be modified for a face-to-face or hybrid classroom. Remodernism refers to a practical approach to reinforce student self-study discipline.

From Postmodernism to Remodernismⁱⁱ

Background: Along with my first online teaching assignment for Fall 2008, I was informed that most of my students were adult learners with families, full-time jobs, and years away from school, and that the course design should consider self-paced content and moderate assignments.

Postmodernism: The approach focused on a study plan, a step-by-step plan to study and self-assess through quizzes and exercises in preparation for homework assignments. The process helped prepare student readiness for economic analyses and applications in topical discussions, writing assignments, and ultimately timed examinations.

As anticipated, several students thought that an online class was an easily completed course, given the open-book policy. They assumed that all answers could be found in their textbooks and that their assignments could be muddled through the last minute. As student personal and professional experiences were valued, they earned points despite large portions of affective socioeconomic sentiments in their discussions and small course related contents. Students also had three attempts on each homework questions, with one hint; and only the highest scores were counted. They were complacent in their habits despite my study encouragement and suggestions. The reality hit during the first timed exam when they realized that the answers surfaced only when they have basic knowledge. They were stressed, anxious, frozen, and ran out of time. An inquiry for extra credit came afterward. I assigned them to study their errors and discuss ways to improve them. I also asked them to do some self-assessed quizzes which suggested areas of improvement. Students then realized the value of the study plan and resources available. They suggested however that credits be given as incentives to perform the supplementary exercises. I appreciated their honesty.

Remodernism: The course structure has evolved since then. Assignments have become more rigorous, frequent, but small. Of course, every action counts, as the key is incentive. Each week, there is an assigned gradable group discussion board for students to share their successful study strategies and/or struggling issues to draw further interaction and helpful tips. They are also required to discuss weekly case studies from the textbook. Chatting is allowed in a non-gradable discussion board. While they still have three attempts on each homework question, the score is an average of the three. Each exam has been given in a series of small timed-tests within a four-day span. Each category of assignment makes up 20% or 10% of the course grade. Students have accumulated 80% of the course grade before the final week.

Outcomes

Students are responsive to the reoriented course structure. They see each assignment as do-able and experience a sense of accomplishment and are thus inspired to study more. Weekly discussions create intellectual social interactions that help students gain confidence in their learning ability, especially anything that involves mathematics. Peer feedback also helps students discern their circumstances and focus more on meeting the course learning requirements. They like, in particular, the series of small tests on an exam. The practice helps them overcome the economic test-taking anxiety. There of course are some resistant students who prefer self-paced assignments and resent weekly small assignments. They usually became appreciative and cooperative after their first-exam self-assessment activity. I also explain to students that the economic materials are built on from one week to the next. Thus, weekly assignments help keep them on track. I also asked students from class to class to write their testimonials of how to be successful in this class and post them for the incoming class to help mentally prepare students from the beginning. The testimonials also help set course expectations for students.

When asked in a course survey: “What part of the course structure would you like to see different?” most students responded “none” as they felt that the structure had already encouraged their learning process. Students also reported feeling satisfied with increasing level of comfort when engaging in economic discussions with family, friends, and colleagues. They also learned time management and study efficiency and effectiveness that they would be able to apply to other classes and work.

Our program coordinator required that we collect student performance data in three categories across campus for accreditation purposes. The table below shows the statistics of student performance improvement in percentages when comparing the Principles of Microeconomics class of Fall 2008 (Postmodernism approach) to that of Fall 2009 (Remodernism approach) in the second column and of Fall 2010 in the third column when I started implementing mock exams.

# of students scoring at least 70% or better on the problem-solving portion	25.00% ↑	113.89% ↑
# of students scoring 70% or better on a written portfolio assignment	31.25% ↑	29.86% ↑
# of students demonstrating an improvement of at least 25% on the pre-test/post-test measurement of economic understanding	150.00% ↑	144.44% ↑

Strategic Implementations

The structure is workable in conjunction with the following effective course management:

- Detailed syllabusⁱⁱⁱ which provides students with the entire course schedule, requirements, objectives, expectations and policies. Students can plan their time management from day 1.
- Enforcement of course policies are transparent, thus creating cooperation and a trusting bond to students.
- Communication is such that students see benefits in their interaction.
- Be visible and available.
- Maintain professionalism and openness.
- Promote self-efficacy in students.
- Express empathy to students in all circumstances as they bring themselves up, and gently encourage them in their study.
- Fast feedback so that students can move on to the next assignments.
- Utilize most of available online resources that the textbook publisher provides to save time building the course and free up more time for facilitating.
- No-late-work policy is implemented to keep students on tracks.
- Made it clear from beginning that technical difficulty is an invalid ground for emergency.

I have witnessed more informed and confident students as they have graduated from the class.

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ⁱ Main points stated throughout this proposal will be reformatted to bulleted phrases or sentences on a poster board for easy perusal.

ⁱⁱ I borrowed the terms as explained in Wikipedia.

ⁱⁱⁱ Students also are required by the college to sign acknowledgments and abide by the syllabus.