

Module 1 Learning Matters: Topic 3. Positive Classroom Learning

Video Transcript

Hi guys, Patrick Sherratt here. In this topic I want to offer a few suggestions that might be useful in the way you approach your class time. Learning is assessed, not when you are putting information in, but rather when you have to recall it, so I have organised this topic around three categories that focus on improving your retention: learning before class, during class and after class.

Learning Before Class:

If you are doing new subjects this year it is helpful to know that you are not going to be a master at them right from the start. As I explained in Topic 1, it takes time for your brain to begin building this new information into the information already stored in your long-term memory. In fact, deliberately examining your former knowledge on a topic, just before going into class is a useful strategy because it helps your brain build and attach new neural connections to the ones you already have as part of your long-term memory. It's like kick-starting your brain to fire before going into class and also helps you get into a more focused mind-set.

Before you go into class, it is also helpful to think about how your body feels. Are you hungry, thirsty, feeling tired? Because of the inseparable link between your body and mind, you will find it very difficult to focus and maintain mental alertness when you are feeling hungry or tired. Eat a snack, drink plenty of water, and take some deep energising breathes to pump some oxygen into your blood.

Learning During Class:

Your attitudes to the subject and your teacher play a major role in how effective your in-class learning will be. Consider the $L = I + A$ formula. L is Learning $L = \text{Learning}$ and requires both I and A. I stands for Intention and A is Attention. To switch your brain on to be more receptive to information, set an intention like a mini goal, of what you want to get out of this class. In-turn your intention helps maintain your attention. In fact, as I discussed in Topic 2, your brain is built with a device called the Reticular Activating System that directs your attention. It will prevent information getting through if your attention is not focused on the subject. Because your brain has to be selective from the huge amount of information coming through your senses, only what's important gets through. Your intention tells your brain, this is important which in turn directs your attention – what you notice.

Keeping this in mind during class also helps to reduce distractions. If your intention is strong, your attention will be focused on what is important. External distractions such as other people talking can be reduced when your intention and attention are strongly directed.

Understandably, it can also be difficult to focus in class when you have internal distractions like problems outside of school. One way to try to reduce internal distractions is to give yourself permission to feel the emotions. There is a saying: what you resist, persists. If you are trying hard not to let, for instance, losing your best friend, affect how you feel - the resisting often intensifies the emotion. What you can do is tell yourself that it is ok to feel angry or upset, but only when you are outside of class. Your emotions then have a chance to be expressed during interval, lunch or after school. If the problem continues, however, you're best to go and see the school guidance counsellor.

One of the best attitudes that help improve classroom learning is being accountable. This means that you are taking responsibility for your learning and if you aren't doing well, it is up to you to fix the problem. This means not blaming, or placing the cause of learning difficulties on other people. For instance, many students believe that the reason they don't do well in some subjects is because they don't get on with their teacher. This may be the case, but by being accountable and taking responsibility for your learning, there are things you can do to help yourself, despite the poor relationship.

You will see in Topic 6, how our perception of people is influenced by our attitudes. Attitudes can be changed by repeating to yourself what you would like to have happen. For instance, if you started saying to yourself, "I am learning to get on with Mr Jones" repeatedly, the way you see Mr Jones will start to change. Your behaviour towards Mr Jones is then likely to change and you may well find, Mr Jones's behaviour towards you changes too.

You may also find that you start to pay more attention in class because Mr Jones is not so bad. You may find you start arriving on time. You might find that you start asking questions and doing your written work... handing in assignments... all these things happen in your other classes right? So why not Mr Jones class too? With an attitude of accountability, you can take more control to help your learning improve, despite the difficulties you might have had.

After class:

I explore a number of after-class study tips in Topic 4: Approaches to Learning, however, one important point worth emphasising is that it pays to review your class notes, ideally within 24 hours, so that the information that is currently stored in your brain's short-term memory, which has insecure wiring, will pass through to your brain's long-term memory which has more secure wiring. Researchers suggest that 60 – 80% of what you covered in class could be lost if it is not reviewed soon after class which kind of makes most of your class time a waste of time if you are not reviewing it later.

So try to review each day's work for 20-30 minutes after school: five minutes per subject after school is all it takes. Then on the weekend, give an hour or two to review all your subjects during the week: say 20 – 30 minutes per subject on the weekend.

Finally, make time to review material again in a fortnight and again in a month. This way, when it comes to examination time, your brain would have reviewed it at least four times which means it would be firmly embedded in your memory. (Fade)

Here is a summary of the key ideas from this topic.

Overview

Before class examine your former knowledge on a subject.

Make sure you are feeling good - not hungry, thirsty or tired.

Set an intention of what you want to achieve in class.

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In class, your intention will help direct and hold your attention.

External distractions can be reduced by staying focused.

Internal distractions can be seen to outside of class-time.

Take responsibility for your learning by being more accountable.

Shift any limiting attitudes and watch how things improve.

After class, review your class notes within 24 hours.

Review again within a week, a fortnight and a month.

