

## Expert Insights

**Narrator** [00:00:01] No responsible track coach would ask their runners to complete a marathon at the start of a season. Few would make it to the finish line. It takes training and practice. Yet at the start of a semester, without the right guidance, many students are asked to do just that. Research shows that many students haven't learned to manage and direct their own studies, leaving them feeling overwhelmed by course requirements. But, like a good coach, you can help them become self-directed learners and acquire the skills they need to excel in class and beyond.

**Stephen Brookfield, PhD, John Ireland Endowed Chair, University of St. Thomas, Minnesota** [00:00:34] I think the process of learning absolutely is learned. Learning how to learn should be a major subtext of, of any college education.

**Narrator** [00:00:43] Learning cues are the equivalent of your pregame pep talk. They introduce material in ways that generate interest. For example, share that what you're about to learn is new or surprising, will help explain concepts already learned or still to come, is challenging and will push their level of comprehension, or will answer a lingering question. These kinds of cues signal novelty, surprise, utility, challenge, and closure, and help to establish that the material matters, prompting motivation. Even motivated students may let deadlines linger, rushing at the end to complete their work. Much like a runner's training plan, you can help students avoid last-minute sprints with a better strategy: slow and steady progress toward the due date. Divide large assignments into smaller parts, with deadlines for each. A structured series of drafts and revisions reinforces that learning is developmental and creates motivating mile markers.

**Stephen Brookfield, PhD** [00:01:45] One of the things that students consistently say is that we need full disclosure of exactly what your expectations are. We want to know the criteria that you're using to judge our learning. We want examples of what constitutes successful learning and less-than-successful learning. So I think it's important to give students some direction on that.

**Narrator** [00:02:08] Provide model work plans with time estimates for each assignment for students to use or create their own. These plans are also a good reality check to help you ensure that assignments aren't too onerous or simplistic. Provide examples of prior student work to clarify your expectations. They'll help students visualize the goal, like imagining that finish line. Runners time their runs and strive for personal bests. Students, too, should track their progress and refine their technique. Create opportunities for self- and peer review of both in-progress and finished work using grading guides, rubrics, and exam wrappers to guide their own evaluations.

**Stephen Brookfield, PhD** [00:02:49] So if you have some knowledge about the way that you learn, if you're able essentially to identify your strengths and your weaknesses, the habitual ways of learning that makes sense for you, the ways that don't, I think that gives you, puts you in a better position to make decisions as a learner.

**Narrator** [00:03:09] After an exam, ask students, how did they prepare? Are there patterns to their errors? How would they prepare differently next time? These responses to these questions will help you adjust your teaching and develop students' ability to analyze their strengths, weaknesses, and approach to studying. Return these responses before the next exam so they can follow their own advice. Everyone knows athletes improve their skills over time through warm-ups, drills, and practice. Show your students that they can develop their academic abilities in the same way, that intelligence isn't innate and effort pays off. For example, help students recognize and change unproductive thought patterns like, "I can't learn this." Give students the opportunity to understand how they learn best by having them respond to a set of questions regarding the types of teaching techniques you've been using in the classroom.

Point out that more time on task or a new approach to studies often improves understanding, and emphasize areas where they've already improved. Research finds that students work harder and try new study strategies when they believe in their own ability to learn. Even though the semester seems to fly by, students will have more success in your course and in their future academic endeavors when we help them develop their academic skills.

**Stephen Brookfield, PhD** [00:04:37] The content obviously is important, but I would say that most content that students learn in college is forgotten almost as soon as the semester is over, let alone as soon as they exit with their diploma. What they take with them, as marketable skills, is self-insight, the ability to know how to learn because they will constantly be required to engage in new learning.

**Narrator** [00:05:01] Just like marathon runners develop their skills by planning their work, setting goals, evaluating progress, and making adjustments along the way in order to reach the finish line.