



Difficulty Converting New Material Into Learning/ Short-Term Memory Strategies

What is our ultimate goal as educators? We teach what we love so our students get exposure to our material, digest our teachings, show us that they have mastered what we have taught – for which they “earn” a grade and a credit. So when a concussion impacts a students’ ability to think and learn for up to 4 weeks, how will we be sure they have learned our material? And how can we give them a fair grade?

The research on concussion has shown that having a concussion does not automatically forecast a negative impact on long-term measurements like grades, transcripts and credits (Russell et al., 2015). However, in the short-term, during the recovery from a concussion, it is not at all uncommon to have many 0’s in the grade book. How do we fairly measure mastery for our students with a concussion? (View “Empty Grade Book” Tip Sheet.)

Differentiated Instruction Strategies:

- Embed new learning into meaningful past learning
- Focus on conceptualization of material instead of memorization for tests
- Consider “auditing” – allow for learning without pressure of work output or testing
- Allow multiple modes of exposure to learning – audio books, watching the movie, discussion, group projects

Testing: mastery and grades

“Fair Testing” – Fair testing is the concept that we can only assess students on material that they were exposed to and can retain. In the very beginning of a concussion, the symptom of short-term memory loss may be so pronounced that it would not be fair to test a student with a concussion. However, it is possible that a student with a concussion may be such a great student in your subject matter that they have no memory struggles for your particular content area at all! In order to determine if it is “fair” to test a student, consider these questions:

- How long ago was the concussion?
- How much recovery should we expect to have as weeks have gone by?
- Was the student physically and cognitively present enough to be exposed to your material?
- Does essential material need to be re-taught before it can be assessed?

“Alternative Appraisals” - If mastery of material must be assessed with a test, can an alternative to testing be considered (i.e. oral presentation, group presentation, open book, preview materials, testing over 2 days in smaller chunks, collage, video)?

If mastery has to be assessed via a test (final), consider the following:

- If testing is tried but did not go well, can the student have a “do-over”?
- If finals are a must, consider no more than 1 or 2 finals per day
- If 2 hard finals fall on the same day, consider moving finals around to allow for a hard final followed by an easier final

In general, it may be wise to decide not to test a student with a concussion in week 1 or 2 of recovery. However, it is acceptable to begin to consider attempting some testing, especially if supported by week 3 or 4.

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