

Kurt Overhiser
koverhiser@valenciac.edu

Instructional Success

For the past couple of semesters, I have been posting ten minute warm-up questions on the white board for my college algebra classes. Each day our class meets, I put a warm-up problem based on a previous homework assignment up on the board for students to work on the moment they enter class. I have found this to have many advantages. First, students know that some sort of work is expected of them right off the bat when they enter class. This expectation helps to minimize the time that is wasted at the beginning of class in excessive socializing among the students and allows them to focus. It also allows me the time to take attendance and to spend a few minutes circulating amongst the students to see how each one is working out the problem. This one-on-one time with each student has helped me to quickly assess how students are doing on the homework. It has also allowed me to pinpoint roadblocks early on so that I can take corrective action with the rest of the class.

To help foster collaborative learning during the warm-up exercise, I have paired students together whose answers were not the same. I then tell them to figure out who, if either of them, has the correct answer and come to a resolution. After ten minutes or so, I then convene the class to go over the problem together. We usually look at more than one method to solve the problem so that students can see connections in what is being learned. I take great care in what problems I choose to use as warm-up questions. I believe this is a contributing factor to its success as an instructional strategy. I either choose problems that serve as a segway into new material or questions that drive home a concept that is important enough to be put on a summative assessment. For the latter choice, some students catch on fast that they may see a similar question on a test.