

The Fess Up

A Classroom Routine from Katie Hern

All teachers have to confront the challenge of students not doing the reading. I've found this classroom routine helpful in creating a classroom environment where we can spend our time talking about the reading, because the majority of students come to class actually having done it.

The fess up is simple. When we start the semester, I talk about how this is a class where the main thing we'll be doing is working with the reading together -- a lot of small group work, speed dating, whole group debates, etc -- and this requires that they come to class with the reading completed, so that they can contribute. I tell them I'll never lecture the book, they have to actually read it.

Then, before each class where we're discussing a reading, we have a "fess up." Before students get into groups or whatever the activity is for the day, I ask people who haven't read to raise their hand and fess up. I make a note of this in my gradebook and then organize the ones who *did* read to do the activity. Because they have nothing to contribute to their fellow students' conversations, students who didn't read move over to one corner to read quietly and catch up while everyone else has fun. As the class session moves forward, we usually come back together for whole group activities or discussion, and the fess up folks get back into the mix at that point.

If students appear on the fess up list several times, I pull them aside for a one-on-one conversation about what's going on, letting them know I'm concerned that they're sabotaging their chances to be successful in the class. Everything in my class is connected to their doing the readings -- the quizzes, the essays -- you just can't pass if you don't do the reading.

Overall, students generally *do* read. They like to participate, and they know they're accountable. It's actually the exception for a student to keep being on the fess up list over an extended period of time. (Though some students with shaky academic habits might slip in there several times over the semester and need a conversation from me.)