



Teaching For Success®

Quick Answers

No. 810

Q: What Do I Need to Know about Testing?

A: Make-up Test Policies That Work

by Steven McNamara

When a student misses a scheduled test, what is your policy? If you're a part-time instructor, you probably have limited and imperfect choices. You may only teach one or two courses a term and you may not have official office hours, so what can you do that is fair to the student, but also manageable for you? Here is list of policy recommendations that may help.

Your must have a policy

- All important classroom policies should be written and distributed to students. Also, it's a good idea to include test make-up policies in your class syllabus.

Define legitimate

- Students who have a legitimate excuse for missing a test should not be punished for something that is beyond their control. You must define what is a legitimate excuse. I request students notify me in advance, if possible that a test will be missed.

Explain enforcement and give examples

- I clearly communicate that I rigidly enforce the makeup policy while I also mention that I have a heart and am willing to consider legitimate excuses. And I give specific examples of some irresponsible excuses that I have rejected in previous classes.

Define make-up requirement(s) and grading

- My policy states that if I accept an excuse, then the student is required to write a two-page paper based on topics from the missed test chapters. This paper is graded pass/fail. Assuming the paper earns a passing grade, the next test the student takes counts twice the normal value.

Time requirement

- Ideally, students who legitimately miss a scheduled test should take an equivalent test as soon as possible. This, however, has proven to be unrealistic for me to manage as a part-timer. Furthermore, it is not a workable solution to construct a second test for one or two students because I simply cannot find time to administer a second test.

As a part-time instructor, I'm expected to accomplish many of the same tasks as full-time teachers. This expectation does not always match reality, but what I can do is be fair and flexible.

