



CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Dear Geology 101 Student,

Welcome. The goal of this course is to introduce you to many new and exciting ideas dealing with science, geology, and our beloved state of Washington. If all goes well, you will be able to use this class for decades. I'm here to inspire you and to help you realize that a science class like this can actually be fun.

However, reality usually rears its ugly head during the academic quarter. Grades! A poor test grade is very efficient at dismantling your positive energy. As an instructor of an introductory science class (with grades to report to the Registrar) I'm faced with a decision. Do I teach our class formally, complete with routine listings of definitions of strange scientific terms? Or do I present these ideas in a creative way with humor and visual aids?

The difference from your standpoint is one of enjoyment and work. With the traditional format, studying for exams is pretty obvious. With all of those dry facts and figures, it boils down to sheer will on your part. However, my style of storytelling, slides, and concepts is a little different. Sure we had a little fun while you learned the stuff, but now how do you prepare for the test? The old notebook is looking a bit sparse.

"I don't have much down in my notebook, but I was with that guy (Zentner) every step of the way. I'll just kind of feel my through the test. Let's go downtown." Bad mistake. Not the downtown part (fine merchants down there), but the lack of test preparation. Big Z is expecting you to not only know all of the details that escaped your notebook, he's going to ask you to apply the stuff in a way that was not done in class.

What's a model Geology 101 student to do then, you ask?

1) Don't miss a class. Not one. Reading the text is not a sufficient substitute. If you can't make a class, get the notes from a classmate and have that person try to recreate the events of the lecture. Then come and see me so that we can fill any gaps that are left.

2) Read before class. I'll stay true to our lecture schedule. Visit the textbook material for the following day. Check out the diagrams. What do you understand? What looks completely alien? What kinds of questions do you have? If you can anticipate the ideas and solutions that I present, then you're on the right track. Being a passive listener (hearing, writing down a few words, maybe thinking about it before the exam) will spell trouble the end of the quarter when your grade is determined.



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3) Take notes like an animal. When I write a test, I assume that you know the major points that were covered. There will be a few questions to confirm this, but most of the test will involve smaller ideas. Where do those ideas fit with the major ones? As a note taker, you must be aggressive. Write down the stuff on the board, but don't stop there! Write down the point of the story I just told. I wouldn't waste class time with a story that doesn't help you learn. You can never have too much in your notebook. It's not easy to take good notes. Successful Geology 101 students of the past usually have had terrific notebooks.

4) Prepare for tests differently. Learning scientific terms, definitions, and ages are part of the game here. That's life with a science class. However, that's not going to be enough. Reorganize your notes with priority given to the major ideas. Can you pick out the big ideas? Do your notes spell out where Nick said, "This is a big idea"? Now try to fit the small ideas into the big ones. Maybe a separate sheet of paper for each big idea. Got some geographic examples for each of the features discussed? Organization. Organization. Organization. Finally, can you sit down with some blank pages and sketch the important figures, diagrams, and maps? You get the idea. Going into the test, you should be sick of the material. The stuff should just spill out of your head and on to the test page.

5) Tread carefully during the tests. I'm looking for specifics. Double check your answers. Reread the instructions. Did you address all that I ask for? Ask during the test for clarification regarding questions that confuse you. Don't lose points because you didn't understand the question.

I'm trying to give you the feeling here that this class will probably be different than others that you've taken. I like to have fun in class - but don't be misled. I'm very serious about testing your comprehension of the science that I'm teaching. Preparing for these tests require hard work on your part. This letter should help you do the right kind of hard work.

Enjoy the Class....

Nick Zentner