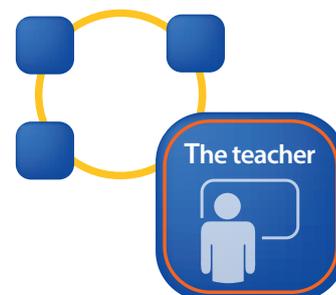


Students often learn about what it means to be academic by looking at how their supervisors, lecturers and tutors interact with the student group, and other academics. Students also see the links teachers make between their own knowledge and how they deliver their unit.

Why

A key feature of being academic is taking a critical approach to engaging with knowledge. This disciplined rigorous thinking and questioning approach to research, problems, issues, and ideas is the basis on which deep knowledge is gained and high achievement is fostered. There are many ways you can be a good role model and mentor, and help students to be academic in their approach to study and learning in your discipline area.



How

The academic approach to learning uses a range of higher order thinking skills, processes and dispositions or habits of mind (Vardi, 2013) and shows persistence and rigour. Model and make these as part of the everyday life of your face-to-face and online classes, learning activities and interactions. What you do and how you do this in class significantly impacts on the students' approach to and engagement with learning. Here are some ideas on how to be an effective role model.

Model the dispositions of a good critical thinker

Critical thinking is fundamental to taking an academic approach. Model the dispositions or habits of mind of a good critical thinker in your interactions with students by:

- Demonstrating diligence in seeking information and the best possible solution
- Clearly and honestly presenting your own and others positions or points of view
- Engaging with students ideas
- Showing that you are open and fair minded
- Listening carefully to understand others reasoning and fairly appraise
- Demonstrating your own inquisitiveness
- Showing your passion for knowledge and your desire to be well-informed
- Showing you are willing to re-consider your own views where it is warranted
- Demonstrating and talking through your orderly thinking processes when working through complex issues and problems

(Ennis, 1996; Facione, 1990; Vardi, 2013).

Demonstrating these dispositions in action and talking about them as they arise will help your students to see what academics do. It will help your students to understand what to do when you encourage them to be open, fair minded and knowledge-seeking about perspectives that are new to them, with knowledge that conflicts with what they currently believe, and any problems or issues.

Use intellectual language in your instruction

Use discipline specific language and words such as evidence, reasoning, logic, analysis, judgement and evaluation in your everyday conversation with students. Make this part of the way that everyone talks about knowledge, ideas, problems and issues in your class.

Weave an intellectual critical approach to learning into your classes by discussing with students:

- The theoretical contexts that information comes from
- Alternative theoretical concepts and perspectives that exist
- How disciplinary knowledge has emerged and developed

- Why the conclusions reached differ between different researchers
- The disagreements and tensions in the discipline
- How evidence was used to come to a particular conclusion
- How and why the particular form of analysis or approach was taken.

Through these discussions, help students to see how this language and approach works in your discipline. Show them what counts as evidence and analysis, and what makes for credible sources in your area.

Use the skills and processes of rigorous thinking in your daily instruction

Help students successfully use the higher order thinking skills typical of your discipline by modelling and expecting students to practice these skills. Mentor them in their efforts.

Demonstrate, talk through and encourage students to:

- Keep class time and discussions focussed on
 - The purpose of the question, problem or issue
 - The topic at hand
 - Relevant evidence and information
- Ask probing questions and provide comment on
 - Evidence
 - Context
 - Data
 - Methods and techniques
 - Assumptions
 - Implications
 - Interpretations
 - Theoretical frameworks, perspectives and view points
- Use a range of thinking skills appropriate to your discipline such as
 - Categorising
 - Comparing
 - Interpreting
 - Analysing
 - Evaluating
 - Inferring
 - Explaining.

When using these skills, demonstrate and talk about the need to:

- Avoid coming to a quick conclusion and sticking to that
- Consider the context they are thinking about
- Avoid giving more weight to information or conclusions that they already believe in
- Consider all information before coming to a conclusion.

Using these skills consistently in your face to face and online interactions with students raises the level of discussion and depth of engagement. By doing so the academic approach to knowledge, problems, issues and questions is demonstrated to students, and forms a natural part of your interactions and expectations.

In summary

Make the academic approach to thinking, learning and knowledge an everyday part of your interactions with students. In this way, students will see how to think, behave and react in academically sound and robust ways. Your modelling, mentoring and encouragement will help develop learners who truly engage with knowledge, problems, issues and questions in an academic way.

Find out more

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Paul, R., & Elder, L. (2001). *Critical thinking: Tools for taking charge of your learning and your life*. London: Prentice-Hall International (UK) Limited.

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Vardi, I. (2013). *Developing students' critical thinking in the higher education class*. Milperra, NSW: Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia.