THE K. PATRICIA CROSS ACADEMY

INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE

Teaching Technique 30

IRAs

ACTIVITY TYPE	TEACHING PROBLEM ADDRESSED	LEARNING TAXONOMIC LEVEL
• Active/Engaged Learning • Writing	• Surface Learning	• Caring • Foundational Knowledge • Learning How to Learn

THE K. PATRICIA CROSS ACADEMY

IRAs

When using *IRAs*, students complete a written response to a content-rich assignment that includes three components: Insight, Resource, and Application.

1. **Clarify your teaching purpose and learning goals for the *IRA***
2. **Identify the learning task's underlying problem and craft the prompt**
3. **Set assignment parameters for completing IRA prompts**
4. **Develop a plan for learning assessment or grading**
5. **Communicate assignment instructions to students**
6. **Implement the technique**
7. **Reflect upon the activity and evaluate its effectiveness**

Step-By-Step Instructions

In this section we provide you with guidance on each of the seven steps involved as you consider this technique.

STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS

This technique challenges students to 1) reflect upon and identify what they have learned, 2) connect what they have learned to their personal experience, and 3) search out additional sources that deepen their knowledge or understanding of the content's themes or information. This is a flexible technique that can be used across many different disciplines and fields. It can be used in conjunction with a reading assignment, lecture, or other class activity.

This technique engages students by challenging them to reflect upon what they have learned. The activities can improve a student's level of caring about the topic. All of the tasks associated with this technique are deep learning strategies that help students not only to deepen their knowledge of the content provided but also to improve their meta-learning skills.

IRAs create a written record of student ability to make application of recently received material to new situations. This technique provides faculty with a document that they can scan relatively quickly in an attempt to determine how well students have internalized and can extend their learning. It is an alternative to longer and more extensive written responses to gathering information about student ability to apply knowledge to new situations. This technique is perhaps best used during a unit of instruction to help faculty ensure that students are understanding course readings so that faculty can target their instructional activities to the students' level of need. Alternately, it can be effective at the end of a unit to document that students have understood the information and can apply it to new and different situations.

STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT

Because the *IRA* technique has set prompts, the goal of this step is to identify appropriate content for the assignment.

STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS

Determine how students should respond to the prompt, whether a single bullet point or sentence or a fuller paragraph. Consider the following example:

- **Insight (I):** One-sentence bullet points that represent new understandings about the meaning or nature of the reading's topic.
- **Resource (R):** One additional resource such as a book, article, website, film, or news item that has similar thoughts, ideas, or themes that amplify the reading.
- **Application (A):** A sentence that relates the reading to an example from the student's current or past experience.

Step-By-Step Instructions (CON'T)

STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING

Create a system for scoring the responses to prompts, such as a simple tally (+/-) or a rubric. If the latter, you should choose what you want to assess the results for, whether quality of response, completeness of response, accuracy of response or other. You might use a rating scale (e.g., 4=very high; 3=high; 2=low; 1=very low) to assess categories such the following:

- **Insights:** Clarity of the perception or understanding.
- **Resources:** Quality of the resource (academic vs. popular source).
- **Application:** Appropriate Fit of the reading to the experience.

STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS

Create assignment instructions, perhaps on a handout or a presentation slide that asks students to write a brief response that specifies the three components:

- Insights (I), Resources (R), Application (A).

STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE

- Identify a unit of content that lends itself to learning activities required by this technique.
- Create directions that ask students to write a brief response to the prompts. For example:
    - **Insights (I):** Write three one-sentence bullet points that represent new understandings about the meaning or nature of the content.
    - **Resource (R):** List one additional resource such as a book, article, Web site, film, or news item that has similar thoughts, ideas, or themes that amplify the content.
    - **Application (A):** Write a paragraph that relates the content to an example from the student's current or past experience.
- Present the instructions, and provide students with time to work.
- Ask students to report out so that they can learn from each other.

Step-By-Step Instructions (CON'T)

STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS

When reflecting on the activity and how effective it was, consider the following questions:

- Did the technique match the course learning goals and objectives?
- Did it meet my goals for this learning module?
- Was it appropriate for the students?
- Did the technique keep the students engaged?
- Did it promote student learning?
- Did it provide me with information about student understanding?

If you answer yes to all or most of these questions, next consider how you might improve the activity for the next use.

Support Materials

The materials in this section are intended to help you with the process of implementing this technique.

SCORING CRITERIA

Consider the example below to how you can assess each student's IRA.

SAMPLE IRA SCORE SHEET To score, use a simple +/-		
	CRITERIA	**SCORE**
INSIGHTS	Clarity of the perception or understanding.	
RESOURCES	Quality of the resource.	
APPLICATION	Appropriate fit of the content to the experience.	

Alternately, use a more complex rating system, such as:

- 4 = very high
- 3 = high
- 2 = low
- 1 = very low

VARIATIONS AND EXTENSIONS

- Instead of using this SET in conjunction with a unit of content, use it to conclude a more general unit of study or for other kinds of learning activities such as discussion follow-up or video viewing.
- Use this technique within a face-to-face setting by having students bring their written assignments to class and then exchange them with a partner. Give students a few minutes to read their partner's assignment, and then ask them to compare and contrast their ideas.

Online Adaptation

This section is intended to help you with the process of implementing and assessing *IRAs* in your online class.

HOW TO START

The best approach is to create an assignment in your course's Learning Management System.

- Assign a reading that invites deep thinking, further research, and creates a personal connection.
- Next, have students write and submit a three-component response where they:
  - **One:** Identify insights from the reading.
  - **Two:** Share an additional online resource that addresses the reading's main theme.
  - **Three:** Describe how the reading applies to their personal experience.
- You can also have students post their *IRAs* in a Discussion Forum, allowing them to learn from each other.

In a Synchronous Videoconference: have students share and explain their *IRAs* either to the whole class or smaller groups in a breakout room.

Technique Template

Following are two templates to assist you as you think through how you might implement this technique in your own class. The first is a completed template, providing an example of how a Professor adapted *IRAs* in their course, *Public Health Nursing*. The second is a blank template for you to fill out to tailor this technique for your course.

Technique Template

Sample *IRAs* Completed Technique Template:

Content from *Learning Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*

Public Health Nursing

Course Name

COURSE CHARACTERISTICS

What are the situational factors that impact this course? For example, is it on campus or online? How many students? Is it lower division or graduate? Are there student attributes such as attitudes, prior knowledge, reasons for enrolling, and so forth that should be taken into account as you consider this technique?

This is an upper level course offered in a Nursing program at a large state university. Approximately 20 students typically enroll in the course.

STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS

Why are you choosing this technique? What do you hope to accomplish?

The Professor of this course was concerned that students were only memorizing information for quizzes and tests rather than learning at a deeper level to apply in their future careers. The Professor developed a learning goal that students would be able to apply basic theories and principles used in nursing administration to new situations. The Professor decided to implement IRAs to help students achieve this goal and to help her assess how well they had achieved it.

STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT

What is the question you want learners to address, or problem you want them to solve?

The Professor assigned an article about Lewin's Force Field Analysis. In brief, Lewin suggests that to understand what is needed for change, you examine the current state of affairs, the positive forces for change (driving forces), and the obstacles to change (restraining forces). She then lectured about non-compliance in reporting diseases. She talked about the two kinds of forces that influenced agencies' reporting, leading students through a force-field analysis of the situation.

STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS

What are the assignment logistics? For example, will this be assigned individually or is it group work? How long will the assignment take? Will students be submitting a product? What materials, resources, or additional information do you anticipate needing?

The Professor determined that she would ask students to complete the assignment individually using complete sentences. They would have time between class sessions to do the work.

STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING

If you decide to assess learning, how will you determine that learning has occurred? For example, will you use a simple +/check/- grading system? If you use a rubric, will you use an existing one or create one? What will be your criteria and standards?

She decided to use a simple plus or minus approach for assessing the learning and that it would count as part of the students' participation grade.

STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS

How will you communicate assignment parameters to students? For example, through a handout? A prompt on a presentation slide? Assignment instructions in your online course?

She created a handout that outlined the specifics of the IRA assignment, suggesting that they provide one sentence for each of the prompts:

- *New perceptions or understandings (Insights),*
- *A resource they have found that amplifies the reading's themes or information (Resources), and*
- *An example from the student's personal experience that relates to the reading (Application).*

STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE

How will you adapt steps/procedures for your students? Are there any additional logistical aspects to consider?

The Professor allowed students to complete their responses as homework. When they came to class the next day, she took up the responses and scored them.

STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS

Note: This step will be completed after you have implemented the technique.
Did this technique help you accomplish your goals? What worked well? What could have been improved? What might you change if you decide to implement the activity again?

She provided individuals with scores, but she also aggregated information across categories. When looking across categories, she found that most students were able to link the concept to additional articles. She found that some had trouble with application, but that most students had trouble with insights. She talked with the class about why this might be, and through discussion determined that students needed additional work on deep reading of materials. She planned future instructional activities that helped them focus on critical reading of texts.

Technique Template

This template is intended for use when planning to implement ***IRAs*** in your class. Fill in the blanks below, and use the information provided elsewhere in the Instructor's Guide to assist you in your thinking.

Course Name

COURSE CHARACTERISTICS

What are the situational factors that impact this course? For example, is it on campus or online? How many students? Is it lower division or graduate? Are there student attributes such as attitudes, prior knowledge, reasons for enrolling, and so forth that should be taken into account as you consider this technique?

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Why are you choosing this technique? What do you hope to accomplish?

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Note: This step will be completed after you have implemented the technique.
Did this technique help you accomplish your goals? What worked well? What could have been improved? What might you change if you decide to implement the activity again?

References and Resources

PRIMARY SOURCE

Content for this download was drawn primarily from "Student Engagement Technique 32: IRAs" in *Student Engagement Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty* (Barkley, 2010), pp. 287–288. It includes material that was adapted or reproduced with permission. For further information about this technique, including examples in both on campus and online courses, see the primary source:

Barkley, E. F. (2010). *Student Engagement Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

CITATIONS AND ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- Conrad, R., & Donaldson, J. A. (2004). *Engaging in the online learner.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, p. 80.

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