**Real World Answers**

Coming into your lesson/course …

- RW-A: What background knowledge do you think students will *actually possess* upon entering your course?
- RW-B: What learning skills do you think students will *actually possess* upon entering your course?
- RW-C: What attitudes do you think students will *actually possess* upon entering your course?

3. Now, compare the answers you have written. Usually there are some mismatches. After all, we all don’t usually teach our ideal students. We teach our real students. The mismatches or gaps between these sets of answers are the student learning factors that will limit the potential learning for your students in your lesson or course.

- **Gaps in Students’ Knowledge:** The gap(s) between the background knowledge I want students to know coming into my course and the students I will actually have is/are:
- **Gaps in Students’ Skills:** The gap(s) between the learning skills I want students to know coming into my course and the students I will actually have is/are:
- **Gaps in Students’ Attitudes:** The gap(s) between the attitudes I want students to know coming into my course and the students I will actually have is/are:

In order for student learning to be optimized in your lesson or course, these gaps will need to be intentionally addressed in the lessons or in homework of the course.

And now that some of your assumptions about your students are written down, use them to ask your students questions once they actually become part of your course. Consider knowledge probes or skill-trying-out lessons early on in the semester. The approach of faculty mentioned in the Ken Bain book *What the Best College Teachers Do* of try, fail, receive feedback, and try again works wonderfully to find out what skills your students have or need work on. Finally, and most importantly, respond to what you find out by adapting your lessons and course to the actual students in your course. This ability to respond to what you find out will go a long way toward making your students feel included in the learning process and will allow you to meet your high expectations for them.

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