

Mastery Learning: Frequently Asked Questions



What is mastery learning?

Mastery Learning is an educational approach in which students must achieve mastery of a subject before moving forward to learn subsequent information about that subject; learning builds on established understanding. Students are given the time and support they need to reach mastery.

Why mastery learning?

We choose mastery learning because more students achieve higher and more enduring results.

How can more students achieve higher results?

We expect every student to be successful and we create the conditions for this success through:

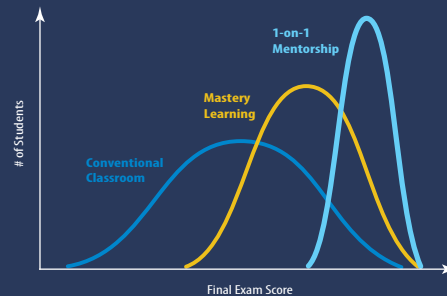
- ▶ Flexible placement in Reading, Writing, and Mathematics; students are placed in classes where they will be appropriately challenged.
- ▶ Instruction based on students' needs.
- ▶ Small class sizes.
- ▶ Teaching until mastery is demonstrated (low or inconsistent performance isn't good enough to move on to the next course).
- ▶ Giving students enough time to master new material so that more students demonstrate proficiency and achievement at higher levels throughout the year.
- ▶ Requiring more from students; they are challenged to achieve a deep level of understanding rather than passing a course with only a 70% understanding.



Why don't all schools teach to mastery?

It's hard.

- ▶ Placing students correctly requires time and talent.
- ▶ Mastery learning places a heavier burden on educators.



Bloom, Benjamin S (June–July 1984). "The 2 Sigma Problem: The Search for Methods of Group Instruction as Effective as One-to-One Tutoring" (PDF). *Educational Researcher*. 13 (6): 4–16. Retrieved 9 June 2018.

Why not provide one-on-one instruction to all students?

Learning in isolation does not offer the social and emotional development opportunities that are equally important to academic development.

How do you maintain rigor in the secondary, when "providing time for mastery" just means no deadlines for a teenager?

Due dates are, in fact, very much a part of mastery learning. Students are expected to meet deadlines. Rigor in schools is often interpreted as more work and a certain type of strictness. At QSI schools, the mastery learning model defines rigor through the quality of work, which means:

- ▶ Depth of material over breadth of material.
- ▶ Mastery of understanding as well as analytical thinking within specific competencies.
- ▶ High quality work on assignments that shows deep thinking and understanding.
- ▶ Homework that is specific, purposeful, and relevant to the competencies being mastered rather than busy work.
- ▶ Mastery of the competencies in the curriculum rather than choosing an arbitrary percentage cutoff, such as a 60% or 70% passing grade, as the standard for passing.

How do we know that students are being prepared for university and life in the real world?

QSI educators:

- ▶ Emphasize higher-order thinking skills.
- ▶ Design and implement a challenging curriculum.
- ▶ Place students in courses by achievement.
- ▶ Offer Advanced Placement (AP) courses.
- ▶ Ensure that students enjoy learning.

