What Is the Jigsaw Method?

The jigsaw method is an active learning strategy that promotes concept mastery and peer-to-peer instruction. This method is useful when content can be divided into multiple parts (such as introducing students to a number of databases). The jigsaw method requires individual students to master content and provide peer instruction to other students, thus reinforcing content by virtue of the activity.

How to Use the Jigsaw Method

1. Prepare a handout with relevant information about each topic. For my class, I also included questions for consideration about the topics to encourage discussion. For example: The Google handout included information about how to perform advanced searches as well as the question, “When would limiting search terms to the title only be a bad idea?”
2. Divide students into multiple groups of three to six. If you have more students than groups of content, equally distribute the same content to multiple groups.
3. Provide groups with about ten to twelve minutes to master content.
4. While students meet in groups, circulate around the room, stopping at each group and asking questions about their topic. Ask questions they should be able to answer using the handout provided. Your role as the teacher is to clear misconceptions and to help to encourage critical thinking.
5. Reassign students to heterogeneous groups, where a representative from each original content group is represented.
6. Once in heterogeneous groups, students will teach each other about their mastered content.

By the end of the activity, each student should have an understanding of each area of content.

Why Use the Jigsaw Method?

As with all active learning methods, the jigsaw method is effective in helping students to store information in the long-term memory bank. High-complexity active learning methods such as the jigsaw method are instrumental when it comes to application of methods and information. While a passive teaching technique may facilitate rote memorization and immediate information retrieval, active learning strategies help students to hone practical application skills.
