Teaching in a Career and Technical Education area, my discipline has no shortage of technical vocabulary and acronyms that students must learn in order to be successful. There is a similarly endless number of pedagogical methods that can be used to help teach such terminology. While we all know that repetition is important in order to help students retain information, I would also argue that most of us would prefer to avoid “drill and kill” methods that are sure to deplete the motivation of our students. Instead, I prefer to provide repetition through a variety of means and assignments in order to keep things interesting and keep students engaged.

Simultaneously, I find that many students have under-developed study skills and don’t know how best to study information in a way that will not only help them retain it, but also keep them sufficiently engaged with the material in order to be successful. One method that I’ve found to be successful is to create crossword puzzles and word searches with key terminology. This provides a simple means of gamification to aid students in retention of key terms rather than just rote practice. These puzzles can be assigned for credit, offered up simply as a study tool, or even used as an extra credit assignment depending on how you wish to structure them into your course. There are plenty of free websites available to aid in creating such puzzles, but I’m personally a fan of ArmoredPenguin.com. Their site provides a no-frills interface, allows puzzles to be saved in multiple formats, and provides a clean result without any logos or watermarks. Answer keys are also automatically generated. While these are a fairly simple exercise, I’ve found that students enjoy them and appreciate using them to help master terminology. While not all disciplines are equally inundated with technical jargon and acronyms, I’m confident that there is vocabulary that you find essential within your courses that could be adapted to cross word puzzles or word searches, and I encourage you to try them with your students!

To see a sample crossword puzzle I’ve used in AMT 322: Engine Repair, or to read previous GIFTS, please visit Faculty Resources located on the Center for Professional Development website: https://www.crc.losrios.edu/facstaff/pd/resources/faculty.