GOING OLD SCHOOL: 
USING THE CHALKBOARD EFFECTIVELY FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

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Some reasons to use the chalkboard in your teaching 
- To plan, control, and pace the discussion 
- As a workspace for brainstorming, problem-solving, practice and discussion by the class 
- For visual representation of the course material 
- For material on which you want students to focus and react 
- To compare and contrast theories, analyses, etc. 
- To consolidate results or conclusions from a discussion 
- To record important information 

Some things that are good to put on the board 
- Class announcements 
- Outline of the plan for the day’s class 
- New terms and definitions 
- Statements of concrete proposals, hypotheses, formalism, principles, etc. 
- Examples, diagrams, formulae, easily sketched figures and tables 
- Concepts and ideas that advance the discussion, whether generated by yourself or elicited from students 
- Anything you want your students to see and pay attention to or that you want students to take down in their notes and think about
When not to use the chalkboard

- Use a handout instead when it is in the interests of time or available space on the board
- Do not write irrelevant or trivial information on the chalkboard
- Don’t set a bad example – for instance, if you don’t want students to give abbreviated diagrams in their homework, don’t do it on the board

Planning for your class

- Erase the whole board at the start of class
- Use zones on the board for particular purposes, for example,
  (i) use the left edge for the outline of the class plan,
  (ii) use the right edge for statements of established results or conclusions,
  (iii) use the middle area for development of new ideas or formulations.
  (iv) Moving something from the middle to the edge can signify its acceptance.
- Corner zones are good for noting observations or ideas that are interesting but need to be set aside, possibly to be examined later
- Use zones consistently for a class and erase in zones
- Think about when you will erase zones. Don’t erase a zone if you will need to use that material on the board again later
- Think ahead about where and when you will put particular things on the board, what will already be there and what will probably go up next
- Think about how you will need to add to a diagram, figure, formula or table and leave space accordingly
- If you have a board with sliding panels, think about what you want to put on the most forward board, which will be visible all the time

Mechanics of blackboard use

- Speak what you say on the board (pretend there is a blind person in the room). This will help students who learn in an auditory fashion, whereas the chalkboard will help those students who learn in a visual fashion
- Make sure you have a good supply of chalk
- Write just large enough that a person sitting at the back of classroom can clearly read it
- Write as fast as you can and still be acceptably legible, but keep in mind that you can use the speed of writing as a pacing technique
- How legible you have to be depends on how familiar the students are with the material written and your writing
- Use abbreviations after you have introduced them. Don’t use abbreviations for items not used frequently enough to be worth it. An abbreviation has to be established and that costs something
Some general dos and don’ts

- Do erase whole units and use separating lines to separate units
- Do leave material on the board as long as possible; ask students if they have finished taking it down before you erase it or cover it with a sliding panel
- Do use a part of the board to record an outline of the discussion
- Do leave space for material that you know you will need to put up later and use the side of the board for longer term items; leave the center as a workspace
- Don’t erase what is on the board too soon, but also don’t write over other material that hasn’t been erased
- Don’t stand in front of what you just wrote, and don’t talk while facing the board, unless you have a very strong voice and what you are saying is short