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Teaching Nuggets
is a publication of the Center for Excellence in Teaching, University of Southern California.
Design: Stetson Turner Design

Version 4.6
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Dear USC Instructor or Teaching Assistant:

Undergraduate teaching is central to the mission of the University of Southern California. Dedicated and effective teaching is fundamental to this mission as it affects the educational experience of all students. I hope that your work as a partner in our educational mission proves to be both insightful and rewarding.

The modules in this publication contain basic information about teaching in all of its multiple aspects. You will find them helpful as you teach this year.

I wish you every success.

Jean Morrison
Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Graduate Programs
A Message from CET’s Director:

“Teaching Nuggets” is intended for all who teach at USC, including faculty and teaching assistants. It is particularly relevant today given the university’s recent shift of emphasis toward a “learner-centered” form of teaching. The skills you have acquired as a teacher shall prove invaluable: presenting effectively a body of knowledge; providing constructive feedback; fielding questions astutely; evaluating student performance; communicating in a diverse environment. Teaching is a multifaceted activity. It is ever-changing and full of intrinsic rewards:

- collaborating with master teachers;
- meeting and resolving challenges; advancing students’ learning;
- finding joy both from your work and from learning about your students’ aspirations;
- motivating peers to advance the forefront of knowledge.

This list of rewards grows to include the many other rewards acknowledged by dedicated, successful teachers. Very likely, you will experience this phenomenon yourself, and the list will continue to grow.

Although effective teaching can always be challenging, the many teaching tips and procedures found in the modules included in this book should provide you with a guide to the many aspects of teaching.

Best wishes for a successful experience,

J. Lawford Anderson
Director, Center for Excellence in Teaching
An Education Paradigm Shift in University Teaching

Learner-centered education has roots in K-12 education in the 1990’s, where the term “student-centered” was more commonly used. After the usual iterative process of review and revision, the University’s 2004 Strategic Plan was adopted with learner-centered education as a significant part of USC’s new vision for increasing academic excellence.

What is Learner-centered Teaching?

The term, “learner-centered” describes a concept and a practice in which students and professors learn from one another. It proposes a global shift away from instruction that is fundamentally teacher-centered, at times glibly termed “sage on the stage,” focusing instead on learning outcomes. It is not intended to diminish the importance of the instructional side of the classroom experience. Instead, instruction is broadened to include other activities that produce desirable learning outcomes. Learner-centered teachers articulate what we expect our students to learn, design educational experiences to advance their learning, and provide opportunities for them to demonstrate their success in achieving those expectations.

A learner-centered environment grows out of curricular decisions and in-class strategies which encourage students’ interaction with the content, with one another and the teacher, and with the learning process. It encourages students’ reflection, dialogue, and engagement, and requires a reliable assessment of their content mastery.

Conventional wisdom has been that if faculty teach well and offer insightful, clear, rigorous, challenging, and even enjoyable lectures, our students will learn. Learner-centered pedagogy questions this assumption, given differences in how students learn. The emergence of learner-centered instruction arises from the quest to have all students achieve more success in their educational enterprise.

Interestingly some students and faculty have resisted the change. There are students who thrive in teacher-centered instruction and many claim to prefer the experience. Weimer (2002) suggests this is because as it makes less demands upon them, until the evening before an exam, whereas learner-centered pedagogy requires a more active role in the classroom experience. For faculty, it can mean a shift of some level of responsibility to students, which may feel like a loss of control.

Zemsky, Wegner, and Massy (2005) argue that students are not always motivated to maximize their learning; students choose schools on the basis of the “competitive advantage” they expect the school to provide after graduation. The fact that students bring other motivations to bear on their choice of educational environments presents other complications for a pedagogic strategy based on student-learning preferences.

To be effective, a change toward learner-centered teaching may require a re-centering of assessment practices to include more and different evaluations of the learning experience. In many cases, this may mean substantial revision of mid-semester and end-semester class evaluations to include questions regarding the learning experience.
Implementing Learner-centered Teaching

We are in an emerging era of “classrooms without walls” and the academic paradigm shift from teaching to learning, and thus, it becomes ever more important that faculty find new and creative ways to engage students. Moreover, as methods to teach and learn continue to expand into greater usage of varied forms of technology, it is imperative that students and teachers continue to connect, through currently successful and evolving means.

The shift toward learner-centered teaching is a change in emphasis that will cause faculty to rethink how we teach and assess our teaching toward the goal of realistic appraisal of student learning.

In his book, *What the Best College Teachers Do* (Harvard University Press, 2004), Ken Bain offers several characteristics of faculty who embrace learner-centered instruction. Included are, that they touch the lives of their students, including effect on career goals; they place a strong emphasis on student learning and outcomes through varied forms of assessment; and to achieve these goals, they may even plan their courses backward. Bain’s research also led to the conclusion that these faculty, regardless of university or college setting, know their subject material extremely well, are active and accomplished scholars, and value critical thinking, problem solving, and creativity. Bain further concluded that these faculty value teaching and consider it as demanding as their research and scholarship; that they seek to create a critical learning environment and aspire to challenge students to confront important problems. According to Bain, they have a strong trust in students, believe that students want to learn, systematically collect feedback on teaching, readily assess outcomes, and make appropriate changes. These faculty work to create a safe learning environment which allows students to try, fail, and try again. Bain’s findings also conclude that these faculty have a great faith in student ability and offer students ownership of class objectives. Perhaps the ultimate conclusion of Bain’s study is that learner-centered teachers view teaching as beginning with the student and appreciate the individual value of each student. In his words, “They don’t teach a class. They teach a student.”

Maryellen Weimer in her book *Learner-Centered Teaching* (Wiley Co., San Francisco, 2002) offers a parallel assessment but also one perhaps built for small college and university classes where the student is challenged to have ownership in the learning experience, including design of the curriculum, responsibility for some levels of instruction, and peer review. Her research indicates that the change is not always initially welcomed by students who often prefer passive learning (“sage on stage”) but who, in the end, find the experience far superior as a consequence of their ownership of the learning experience. Such does involve a reallocation of power in the classroom although it is clear that the ultimate control still remains with the faculty instructor. Her research concludes that student learning becomes even more effective when students are teaching students and involved in subsequent evaluation.

Barbara McCombs has also published extensively on the topic of learner-centered teaching (McCombs, 1997, 1999, 2000). Her work emphasizes the role of positive feedback between student and instructor and the importance of an encouraging climate of learning both in and outside the classroom. Her work also found significant value in our better understanding the individual student’s perspective on the learning experience and having diverse approaches that allow all students to be better invested in their learning experience.

Parker Palmer’s *The Courage to Teach* eloquently addresses the paradox of teaching- versus learning-centered education practices. His view is that if we separate teaching from learning, the result is “teachers who talk but do not listen and students who listen but do not talk”.
Role of New Technology in Learner-Centered Teaching

The opportunity to bring new technological advances into the classroom continues to expand and it offers many diverse and creative means to further our educational mission. This has led to a rapid era of change in the nature of classroom instruction. Mixed media forms of instruction (PowerPoint, jpeg images, mpg, mov, mp3 files, and the internet) have spread widely across the campus, as have the utilization of distributive- and distance-learning formats. As in any experiment in teaching, the results can go badly, but in turn, we can revise and seek new ways to gain the anticipated outcome of improved learning. For example, recent news articles have reported on situations where university class lectures, once posted on-line, led to significant loss of class attendance. The issue has become common in some universities and needs vital attention.

Many of us post our class materials on class websites and we should vigorously confront the issue if it leads to a loss of interaction between students and faculty at USC. Learner-centered education requires a focus on student learning, but we also know that not all learners are equally invested. Regardless of how we teach and what technology we bring into the classroom or outside the classroom, we need to be proactive in our quest to assess through various forms of feedback the extent to which our investment is working and meeting our goals.

Web-based instruction can be a powerful means of enhancing the learning experience, including the posting of on-line quizzes and links to other websites for further enrichment. It also provides a means for video streaming of lectures, pod-casting, and interactive (live) linking between classes at different and very distant institutions. A large number of classes at USC have experienced student-led creation of class blogs, wikis, and other websites allowing independent student interaction regarding varied aspects of class-related studies, including exam review. Likewise, the web-based Totale’s Blackboard learning system has been made available to all USC courses and provides a range of utilization, including maintenance of course grades and student access to grade scores, posting of student contributions (such as term papers and PowerPoint files), and a site for students to share their work, when it fits the goals of the class. Blackboard can be cumbersome to use but also provides considerable utility.

The widespread use of Microsoft’s PowerPoint is a good example of how new technology has successfully gained a widespread foothold in the classroom. For the same level of content, faculty have found that it provides a significant means of broadening the student’s exposure to a subject through incorporation of diverse visual information. A PowerPoint file can also be posted on-line so that students can return to a lecture for further review and students find that PowerPoint allows an excellent means of giving their class presentations. For those faculty who have chosen to use PowerPoint, it has usually replaced use of slides and overheads, but interestingly, it has not always replaced the chalkboard (or marker board). Depending on the nature of the course, many USC faculty continue to use the chalkboard, in concert with PowerPoint images and others forms of media, to slow the pace of the lecture and help students take notes, a time-earned means of keeping students engaged and aiding the learning process.

A growing number of classes at USC have taken advantage of public response systems (PRS or “Clickers”) to evaluate learning on a real-time basis. The utility of this new technology is addressed in the next section.
Death by PowerPoint

To echo a 2008 CET forum by the same title, when all information for a class lecture is available on-line, students may see no need to attend class. The PowerPoint and other forms of media used for a class should remain as an outline resource along with visuals to impart additional information. However, the basis for the lecture should continue to be the lecture prompting students to take notes and thus remain engaged. Finding ways to leave PowerPoint and other digital images are critical to engaging students, including time-honored use of the chalk blackboard and Socratic questions followed by the usual pause to gain response. Students need to realize that lecture materials provided on-line are only a part of the lecture and that most of the learning activity is interactive and in the classroom.

Assessment of Teaching and Learning

The national discourse on assessment is central to learner-centered education. We should ask how do we know our students are learning, what we think we are teaching them, and how to improve our educational programs so that they learn more, more effectively.

Current technology has also provided a new means of assessment of learning which can be accurately characterized as continuous and real time. The PRS (public response system), also termed “clickers”, is a real-time polling technology. For example, the instructor can post a question (such as multiple choice) on a slide during the lecture and each student has a “clicker” with which she/he submits a response. The results from the entire class are then collected in real time and displayed. The implications of this technology are huge. We, as faculty can guess what students are learning until exams. But with PRS we can judge learning during class time and make appropriate adjustments in how we teach and how our students learn. Students can also assess how well they are learning relative to their peers. There are many features of PRS-enabled teaching that are more learner-centered from a conventional lecture, including the following:

1. A Personal Response System provides continuous real-time assessment during class
2. Allows agility in teaching and immediate response to the needs of the class, as well as minimize wasted class time
3. Engages students in active learning during class – students become true participants in the learning process
4. In addition to assessment, questions can be used to provoke thinking, correct and challenge students’ misconceptions
5. Questions serve as launching pads for peer instructions
6. Facilitates a more concept-based rather than skill-based course

Engaging Students in Learner-Centered Instruction

Regardless of instructional format, faculty should continue to seek means to remain engaged with their students. This has always been important to classroom instruction, but in these times of pedagogical change, it is even more relevant. The means are well traveled and proven to be substantial to the learning experience of students. The following is a distillation from a recent workshop offered by USC’s Center for Excellence in Teaching, “Engaging Students in a Learner-Centered Classroom”, which is available on-line in both PowerPoint and video format:

1. Know your students. Depending on the size of the class, this could mean knowing their names, majors, and backgrounds. But foremost, it means that you know a student is in your class, and hopefully more. Most students relish this recognition and it empowers their engagement to learn.
2. Style of instruction. Faculty are encouraged to keep the class interactive. One aspect of learner-centered instruction is providing students the opportunity to teach their peers. It also serves to further student responsibility or ownership of class objectives, including the learning process. The time-honored Socratic method of teaching continues to be a vital means of engaging students.

3. Make the course relevant. Many students have clear educational and/or career goals or may simply ask, “Why learn this?” We are encouraged to relate the class to historical or societal issues where appropriate, or students’ future goals. The learning goals of the class need to be perceived as relevant to the student’s aspirations or experience. In some classes, this can mean the use of current topics or case studies extended to problem-based learning.

4. Active teaching. This is as important as ever, including the role of humor and even story telling. Faculty are encouraged share their passion regarding the subject and to feel free to get personal by offering their own anecdotes. The use of eye contact, variation in voice volume and tone, provocative questions, and the long entrusted pause to wait for answers continue to be important methods for drawing students into the learning process. In large classrooms, one can leave the podium and walk the aisles to further involve students in the new learning mode. Once they have it, let them explore. This is when we need to give full rein.

5. Faculty availability to students. In any research university such as USC, our work often competes with time devoted to students. All of us post “office hours,” which can often be underutilized by our students until the times of midterms and final exams. Some of us have office hours at redundant times during the week, which can be an impediment to student access. Faculty are encouraged to stagger posted times of availability. Many USC faculty have augmented office hours with stated times of “open door” availability. E-mail correspondence has also aided access and should continue to be encouraged.

References:

Bain, Ken. What the Best College Teachers Do (Harvard University Press, 2004).


McCombs, B. L. What do we know about learners and learning? The Learner-centered framework: Bringing the system into balance. (Educational Horizons, 2004).


Useful USC Links:
Center for Excellence in Teaching
http://www.usc.edu/programs/cet/resources/

Center for Scholarly Technology
http://www.usc.edu/programs/cst/tls/

http://www.usc.edu/clickers
Planning and Organizing your Course

When should I begin planning for my course?

How do I construct a syllabus?

What should I do on the first day of class?

Two of the most important elements in good teaching are: 1) planning and organization, and 2) a demonstrated sense of commitment to students’ learning. While the latter will be addressed in the next module, we will discuss planning and organizing a course here.

You may have heard some teachers say that they teach by staying one week ahead of the students. Yet if the teachers are successful, it is more likely that they have planned well in advance and are really just making adjustments each week to meet students’ needs. Careful preparation allows you to design a course that helps students learn and gives you a chance to handle the inevitable surprises that arise during the semester.

As you read this module, remember these basic principles:

- Your goals and objectives for student learning should guide how you structure the course. What do you believe students should learn and how will they achieve this?

- Share your goals and the course organization with the students so they can understand your rationale. It is easier for them to learn if they know where you are headed and why.

- Emphasize core concepts. Little details are quickly forgotten. Helping students grasp the big picture and broad concepts will give them a foundation in the discipline and a basis for future learning.

Preparing for a Course

If you are a TA in a “typical” situation, you are probably not responsible for designing an entire course. Therefore, working with the professor two to four weeks in advance (to define your role, learn his or her expectations, and begin to review the material) is sufficient.

However, if you are faculty and designing a course yourself, you should begin doing so two to three months ahead of time. This might seem early, but consider all you have to do:

- Learn from past examples. If others have taught the course before you, talk with them. What successes and troubles have they encountered? Where have students stumbled? Ask for copies of their syllabi, tests, textbooks, etc. If you have taught the course before, what have you learned? Review your materials and course evaluations to plan for the future. If it is a completely new course, talk to others and review texts to explore the major topics the course might address (Davis, 1993).
Module 2.1

Planning and Organizing Your Course

- Think about your situation. What knowledge will students already have and what prerequisites will your course require? How many classes will you have, how often will each class meet and for how long? How many students will be enrolled?

- Identify your goals. Think broadly at first, and ask yourself what you want students to learn. This can be related both to content (e.g. understanding specific equations) and non-content (e.g. learning to present an oral argument) (Davis, 1993). Then, think more realistically; the limited amount of time each semester means you can only cover so much. Assume you will have a diverse range of learners. What are reasonable goals?

Selecting Course Content

Even experienced teachers have difficulty narrowing down course content. We love our subject area and get excited to share it with students – this is what makes teaching fun – but organizing content is challenging. The points below may help you decide what your course will contain:

- Select content as you would pack for a trip. First ask: what do I want to bring? Then ask: what do I need to bring? Your course content should be the material and ideas that are most necessary and that can fit into your structure. Trying to pack too much information into a course can hinder students’ learning.

- You can differentiate between required (core), recommended and optional material in your syllabus, allowing students with varying levels of interest to explore the subject to different degrees.

- You may choose to build your course around core concepts that the students will use in many situations or highlight critical issues or ideas, such as those that attracted you to the field.

Organizing the Course

Once you have selected the main ideas and the content you want to cover in your course, you are faced with the challenge of organizing it into a coherent pattern. It is important to have a sense of how the term will go: what are the major holidays and breaks that will influence your plans? How many classes will you actually have to cover the material?

You can then begin to structure the content within the allotted time, including several possible ways to organize the content:

- Chronologically
- Topically/Categorically
- Theory to application (or vice versa)
- Easy to difficult
- Broad ideas to narrow examples (or vice versa)

As you chart the semester, you will have to decide just how much time to give individual topics (complex ones require more time), and should plan time to catch-up.
It may be helpful to refer to the goals you defined at the start as you consider how to organize the material. It is important to keep in mind that planning a course is a complex process. As you review material, you may elect to revise your goals; as you organize the course, you may realize that you have left out important concepts. You should be ready to make constant adjustments during your planning.

**Writing the Syllabus**

Once you are comfortable with what you have designed, it is time to translate content into the syllabus. A carefully crafted syllabus can create a sense of trust between the teacher and students and show that you care about your teaching. It gives students a basic “road map” of where the course will be heading and lays out course policies so that expectations are clear. It also serves as a written agreement, not unlike a contract, that offers what you expect of the student and what they can expect of you.

A sound syllabus contains many, if not all, of the following elements:

**Core information**
- Course name, title, location, and meeting times.
- Office hours and contact information for all of the instructors.
- The instructional goals of the course (you have already identified these in your planning).
- Required texts and additional course materials.
- Course prerequisites or special knowledge required.

**Policies**
- Will late assignments be accepted and what, if any, will be the penalty?
- Students with special needs should be invited to see the instructor to discuss necessary accommodations.
- Is a statement on conduct (respect of others, cultural sensitivity, etc.) necessary?
- Plagiarism, “fair use” and expectations about using electronic sources should be explained (see Module 5.1).
- How will students be evaluated? What is the formula for weighing particular assignments?
- Add a statement for students with disabilities, “Students requesting academic accommodation based on disability...”

**Content and Assignments**
- Provide a “course calendar.” Dates for discussing readings and material should be clearly laid out. Some teachers maintain a more flexible schedule by listing topics weekly, while others elect to outline content on a class-by-class basis.
- Outline each assignment, any particular expectations for that assignment, and due dates.
All students should receive a copy of the syllabus and you should do your best to stick to it during the semester. If you find it is necessary to make adjustments (perhaps you will find that students seem particularly taken by a topic and want to study it in-depth), explain your rationale for doing so. And, as you go through the semester, keep notes on the syllabus about what you would change or do differently if you taught the course in the future.

Sources


TIPS ON...

Organizing Your Course to Involve Students

• State on the first day that one of your goals for the course is to have students actively participate.

• Build in opportunities for students to get together in small groups for more intimate and safer discussions.

• Assign on-going group projects that allow students to work in teams.

• Set up a process for students to review and comment on each other’s papers and assignments before they turn them in for a grade.
If planning and organization are the first essential elements of effective, successful teaching, then commitment is a close second. In fact, the two are often related: if you are not committed, you probably will not plan; and if you do not plan, then your commitment might well be questioned.

But just what do we mean when we talk about commitment? Commitment to what? Here we are talking about a commitment to student learning. Note that we did not say a commitment to students or to teaching, though these things may be implied. Effective teachers are committed to making sure that students learn.

This module focuses on specific things you can do to let students see your commitment to their learning. As you read, keep the following points in mind:

• Showing your own commitment can be important in motivating students – if they see you as caring and putting forth effort, then perhaps they will do so, too.

• Every act as a teacher – the effort you put in to preparing assignments, including comments on test and papers – reflects on your commitment to student learning.

• One of the most important signs of your commitment as a teacher is your willingness to get to know your students as individual learners.

Course Organization and Structure
How you structure and organize your course goes a long way to show students your commitment. Consider the following points as you build your course:

• Construct your syllabus carefully. A well-crafted syllabus (see Module 2.1) gives students a firm roadmap for their learning experience. If assignments and timelines are well laid out, and if expectations are clear, students can plan accordingly and get a sense of how the course will progress. This framework gives students a structure around which to place the ideas they acquire during the semester, and is important in helping students learn.

• Hold regular, consistent office hours. There is nothing more frustrating than seeking out a teacher for help and finding that he or she is not there as promised. Even if attendance at office hours is sparse, it is important that students know they can find you if they need you. Another module provides ideas on how to help students get the most from office hours.

• Indicate ways for students to contact you. Your syllabus should provide students with various ways to reach you. For instance, what is your office phone number? Your e-mail address? Do you have a campus mailbox? Can students call you at home and, if so, how late?
Approachability

Most students like to know that their teacher is approachable. They want to be comfortable coming to him or her with a question, and they want to feel that the instructor has some interest in them as individuals. And, of course, knowing your students as individuals will help you as a teacher, since you'll have a better sense of their needs and interests – and can shape your classes accordingly.

- Learn your students’ names. Even in large courses, it is possible to know many, if not all, of your students by name. Simply making the effort to do so, even if you get it wrong at first, shows students you think they are important. See the “Tips” box in this module for suggestions on how to learn students’ names.

- Come to class early. The time right before class can be an excellent one to talk with students. Some students will come early, and they may have questions about the material. Talking with individuals about what they did over the weekend, or the latest campus news, can be just as useful in building a sense of approachability.

- Stay after class. If possible, linger after the class is over – shuffle papers, erase the board. This is another excellent opportunity for students to come up to you and raise questions about assignments, readings, or ideas discussed that day.

Your Teaching

In the end, your commitment to your work is most evident in your teaching. The following are some basic tips for how to teach in a way that shows you are committed to student learning.

- Prepare. Prepare. Prepare. You can, of course, over-prepare – new teachers do it all the time. However, nothing can undo all the hard work you do in building a course faster than arriving at just one class unprepared. Having a goal for the class, a plan on how to execute it, and the materials and knowledge to do so allows you to be relaxed and attend to the points below.

- Remember: you prepare to promote learning. We often get so caught up in preparing or organizing the “perfect” class, that we forget what we are really supposed to be doing. A wonderfully organized class may teach absolutely nothing. As you prepare, ask yourself whether you are organizing each class in a way that helps students learn the material (UCLA, 1997).

- Show enthusiasm for your subject. If you are not excited about what you are teaching, why should the students be? You do not need to crack jokes or put on a show to be enthusiastic – but students should be able to see that you actually like what you are teaching.

- Respect your students. In the end, it is difficult to teach effectively if we do not respect our students as individuals and learners. This means we must listen to them, even if we do not always grant what they ask for. And when we choose to deny their requests (for an extension, for less reading, etc.), we should be prepared with a sound rationale for why this is the case.

Source

TIPS FOR...

Getting to Know Your Students

- Devote parts of the first two or three classes to taking students’ pictures. Have them hold a sheet of paper with their name on it in front of them when you take the photo. Then, flip through the pictures regularly until you have mastered students’ names.

- Distribute an index card on the first day of class and have students fill it out with information, including an interesting fact about themselves.

- Schedule regular, informal lunches and invite five or six different students to lunch each time.

- Make appointments to talk with all students, perhaps about the first paper or exam. When you meet, ask them how they feel about the course and how their semester is going.
TIPS FOR...

Engaging Your Audience

- If you are nervous, write on 5” x 8” index cards, a very detailed outline of the first two or three minutes of the lecture; this will sustain you until you gain confidence.

- Focus attention early by using a quote, an anecdote, a puzzling problem, or other appropriate material relevant to the topic.

- Solve the same problem in two different ways (students’ interest will peak if you ask them to explain [and support] the assumptions underlying each solution).

- Watch the cues from the audience as you lecture: body language (do they appear attentive, bored, puzzled, distracted?); actions (are they taking notes, asking questions, or yawning?); reactions (do they react particularly positively or negatively?). Go over the lecture and your delivery afterwards, note the various cues, and bring an answer to the next class.

- Share your outline: emphasize your objectives and key points in the beginning, as you get to them, and as a summary at the end.

- Plan for diverse learners: integrate striking visuals, multimedia, movie clips, simulations, discussion and small group techniques.

- Link information to students’ prior knowledge (e.g. common or shared experiences, previous course work, a well-known historical event).

- Introduce questions which are “counterfactual”: “What if the atomic bomb had not been dropped in Japan in 1945?” – such an exercise helps students consider the “facts” in a new light.

- Recognize correct responses with verbal praise.

- Exhibit enthusiasm for the topic and information: remember you represent your discipline.
How effective we are as teachers has a great deal to do with how we communicate. We communicate ideas, information and expectations in a variety of ways – through speaking, through gestures and other body language, and through the written word, for example.

We need to be aware of how we communicate because:

- Communicating effectively can help instructors have a “presence” in the classroom that motivates students and facilitates learning;
- We may send unintentional messages if we are unaware of things such as our body language;
- New technologies present new opportunities for communicating with students.

In this module, we will consider how you can communicate as effectively as possible. Before we continue, it is worth noting the following points:

- Communicating effectively often means using a variety of modes (spoken, visual, etc.) to reach students who learn in different ways;
- Our body language and other non-verbal cues are important modes of communication, and we can harness these to promote a positive classroom environment;
- While technology can make communication easier and more convenient, students generally value the opportunity for personal contact and conversation with the instructor as well.

**Speaking and Presenting**

As teachers, we inevitably spend a fair amount of our time in front of class, presenting information or giving the students instructions for an exercise. Yet good speaking does not come easily. In fact, as most of us know, standing up to speak in front of a group, any group, even when we are the “authority,” generates fear and anxiety. Below are some tips for how you can become an effective speaker.

**Building Your Presentation Skills**

Solid public speaking skills are an important asset in whatever you do. The following points are intended to cover some of the basics of public speaking:

- Plan ahead. This cardinal rule has been repeated throughout the Teaching Nuggets, and you’ll continue to see it here in the future. To convey ideas or concepts effectively to your students, you need to have a clear goal for each class and a plan for how to reach that goal.
- Practice. Practice. Practice. You may feel awkward talking to yourself in front of the mirror or reciting your lecture in the shower. Yet the best presentations, those that seem unrehearsed, are the result of disciplined practice. Professors who have been teaching for 30 years still set aside two hours just before class to practice their lecture, mastering the ideas and the gestures before they enter the classroom.
• Observe and talk with teachers you respect. Typically, we learn to teach by watching those around us. We can make sure this is a positive fact by seeking out the teachers whose skills we admire. Watch carefully the instructors you regard as exemplary. What do they do that makes them so good? Seek them out and speak with them about how they prepare and the techniques that work best for them.

• Be observed or tape yourself. Feedback is essential to continuous improvement; even seasoned teachers benefit from having a colleague watch them teach and offer feedback. Particularly if you are new, it can be helpful to practice your presentation ahead of time with a trusted friend and get feedback from him or her. As you progress, have them come to your class, or tape yourself and analyze the results later.

**Engaging Your Audience**

Having basic presentation skills is one thing; actually engaging your audience in the learning experience is another. However, there are some things you can do to keep your presentation from being a monotonous presentation of facts that does little to promote learning.

• Plan mini-lectures rather than lecturing for the full class. The average student has an attention span of ten to twenty minutes (Davis, 1993). If you try to present for longer, you will almost certainly lose some of your students’ attention. Therefore, break up the class. Talk for a bit, then ask students to solve a problem based on the concepts you have presented. Have them work in small groups to discuss an issue. Ask them to respond to a question. Anything you can do to change the pace of the class will help keep their attention.

• Use multiple presentation techniques. Students learn in different ways: some need to hear the ideas; others need to see things written on the board; some need to discover concepts and applications while others prefer to be shown and to have the chance to practice. Communicating information in a variety of ways allows you to meet the needs of different learners.

• Know your audience. You would not begin a presentation to Nobel Prize-winning economists by teaching them about supply and demand. Likewise, you should know who your students are and what knowledge they have. Anticipate what they already know, what concepts will cause them particular troubles, and what examples will have meaning for them. Understanding your audience will help you get a sense of when you need to prepare multiple, diverse exercises or examples to make sure they understand a concept, and when you can simply state something and move on.

• Check-in with your audience from time to time. Take time to see what your students are learning. Even in large courses, the most distinguished teachers continuously obtain feedback from their students by asking questions and leaving space for students to ask questions. This helps to vary the pace of the class and allows you to see what students are struggling with so you can adjust accordingly.

• Avoid reading your presentation. The best talks are those that seem to be spontaneous but have been practiced in advance. Reading from your notes or PowerPoint bores the students, and it prevents you from making eye contact with them so that you can gauge their reactions to your words.
Developing a Classroom Presence

Speaking well is only part of effective teaching. How you say something can be more important than what you actually say. Some experts say that in a verbal exchange, the words we use are only seven percent effective, while the tone of our voice is forty-three percent effective and non-verbal cues are fifty percent effective.

Regardless of the percentages, the point is an important one: teaching is about more than simply saying the right words – it is about using your entire person to promote learning. Being aware of your motions, gestures and location in a classroom allows you to establish a presence.

- Create variations in your voice. Practice changing the tone, pitch, rhythm, loudness and inflections of your voice. Play with using pauses to punctuate points or recapture students’ attention. Whisper or repeat points for emphasis. Experienced speakers use these and other tools to make key points, emphasize ideas, and keep the audience engaged.

- Be aware of your body and its language. Do you stay behind a podium throughout the class? Are you always talking with your hands or are they continually stuffed in your pockets? Do you nod, smile and look at students when they are asking a question or making a point? Find ways to use your motions to help accent the message you are trying to convey. For instance, use your hands to highlight important points. Lean toward the students to emphasize an idea.

- Use the physical space of the classroom. Think of the classroom as a stage. While you are not putting on a show, you do wish to have a presence, and actors know how to use a stage to create this presence. Moving around the classroom can convey energy and enthusiasm on your part – and it brings you into contact with all parts of the room. It can also help keep students’ attention and even quiet students who are talking or restless. Be careful, however, since too much movement can be annoying.

- Keep a sense of humor. We are not talking about using jokes here – some instructors can do this quite well, and others simply find it is not for them. In this case, we mean you should keep your ability to laugh. Funny things happen in our classrooms, intentionally or not. Try to keep your ability to laugh at yourself and the situation, though not at your students. This kind of relaxed atmosphere is conducive to learning.

Using Technology to Communicate

Technology provides opportunities to expand your interaction with students. As with any instructional choice, each option has trade-offs that you will need to consider in light of your goals and the needs of the class. Before you decide to use technology, you should ask yourself a simple question: If I use this technology, will it improve the quality of student learning?

Use e-mail to interact with students. E-mail is among the most basic of technologies used to communicate with students, and it has at least two benefits:

- Students may find it helpful to write carefully and think-through a question rather than ask you directly in class or office hours – and they can do so at any time of day or night.

- Written communications with students provide you with a record of interactions, something that can be useful if you are having problems with students.
Listservs are a useful forum for large-scale communication. Listservs are simply a compilation of all students’ e-mail addresses grouped under one address. When a message is sent to that one address, it goes to all students in the class. These can be useful when:

- You want students to be able to interact with one another as a group, outside of class. Students can post messages for all to see, debate topics, explore ideas or ask questions. Some instructors require students to post one or two “substantive” messages a week.

You need to remind your students of upcoming deadlines, changes in class location, or any special requests you have of them.

- Frequently asked questions arise. You can pose the most common questions (based on your experience) and write responses to them – reaching all students in the process. Students can discuss these, raising other questions to clarify the ideas (Laurillard, 1999).

Electronic Bulletin Boards and Discussion Groups. These tools are essentially more advanced listservs. They come as part of course management programs such as Blackboard, which are used by USC, and allow for on-going discussions on various topics, “threaded” (or organized) by theme. The benefits include:

- You and the students are able to follow discussions on various topics more easily because the conversations are organized by theme – something a listserv does not do.

- Students may be encouraged to participate in discussions on-line because they can choose those areas that are most interesting to them or most helpful to their learning.

Of course, technology does not address all communication needs. Students value opportunities to have personal interactions with their teachers. And to be an effective teacher, you must be skilled at communicating in many different ways. However, when used properly, technology can augment what you do in the classroom to enhance communication.

**Concluding Remarks**

Experiment with pauses, with the tone of your voice, with moving about the classroom. Create a range of methods for students to contact you. Even the most experienced teachers are always tinkering with how they communicate. They are always learning and changing because their students are always changing. By understanding this important fact, and having a commitment to continual improvement, you will go a long way to becoming an effective teacher.

Sources


Students arrive in our classrooms with the full-range of motivations – and sometimes with what we see as a remarkable lack of motivation. Motivating students is one of the most challenging things we do as educators, and some of us want to throw up our hands in frustration or proclaim that there is little we can do to motivate students to learn.

It is true that students carry with them many past experiences that contribute to their motivation in our classrooms. However, teachers can make a difference, for better or for worse, in motivating students to learn.

This module is written to give you a basic understanding of what motivates students and to provide some sense of how you can create this motivation. As you read, you will note that many of the ideas we have covered elsewhere are identified here as important to motivation. Keep the following points in mind:

- Our ideal goal as teachers is to help students develop the intrinsic motivation that will allow them to become life-long learners.
- While this module provides many tips you can use to motivate students, many of the ideas outlined here come under a simple rule: respect your students as learners.
- Teaching Assistants, because of their closeness to undergraduates, are often in an excellent position to show the respect, caring and concern as teachers that motivate students.
- Active learning – engaging students in the class and working with their peers – is an important contributor to student learning.

Extrinsic vs. Intrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic motivation is what we are most familiar with in education; it is motivation to act that comes from the external environment, outside of the person. When we are motivated extrinsically, we act with the anticipation of rewards – grades, praise, money, time off from work, or some other incentive. For instance, teachers motivate students to come to class regularly and join in discussions through the use of participation grades.

When used wisely and thoughtfully, extrinsic motivation can be quite helpful in furthering student learning. We can use extrinsic motivation to our advantage as educators if we know what motivates students, but we need to do so carefully. For example, many students are concerned about their grades, either because of a desire to continue on in school or due to pressure from their parents, and they will do what it takes to earn good grades.

So, if we know that grades are important, we can use tests and papers to motivate students to build the skills and knowledge we expect them to have. For instance, if students can succeed simply by memorizing, then they will memorize. However, if tests and papers require analysis and integration of ideas, then students will learn these higher-order skills.
Intrinsic Motivation

If extrinsic motivation comes from without, then intrinsic motivation comes from within. Intrinsically motivated learners want to learn because they are curious, they want to improve, they seek knowledge, and learning gives them satisfaction.

McKeachie (1999) notes that this form of motivation nurtures and encourages the habit of lifelong learning. As students leave school, external motivators for learning, such as grades and praise, are replaced by long-term goals and less immediate rewards. Intrinsic motivation encourages us to continue learning regardless of what rewards come our way.

How Do We Motivate Students?

Some students worry about grades; others need to satisfy a course prerequisite. Still others want to learn and explore ideas. In fact, many students are probably motivated to learn and to succeed by a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic elements. The key for us as teachers is to understand what we can do to build students’ motivation to learn in our classroom, and to nurture the intrinsic motivation that will guide future learning.

We know that students respond positively to three elements in most classes (Davis, 1993):

- A well-organized course;
- A teacher who is enthusiastic about the material and about teaching;
- A teacher who shows he or she cares about the students and their learning.

The first point is very important to motivation and is covered in other modules. The remainder of this module, then, will address the questions of enthusiasm (also discussed to some degree in the module on communication) and demonstrating care for students and student learning.

Below are some basic actions you can take to motivate students in your classroom. You will note, as you read, that these ideas are interconnected; they are part of a complete effort to build relationships with and motivate students.

- Communicate high but attainable expectations and goals. Most students want to be challenged and feel that they are directing their energies toward a worthwhile experience. This means that they will work to achieve challenging goals if they view the goals as within their reach. True, some students are motivated by the fear of the daunting “killer test,” but you will lose more students than you gain, and those you gain will not retain their motivation outside of the classroom.

- Give students the chance to succeed. High standards for student work are fine, but it is important to make those standards clear and give students a chance to discover and meet them.

You may want to consider the following suggestions to help students succeed:

- Give a test, quiz or paper early in the semester, return it to students, and give them a chance to retake or rewrite it. This lets them learn the standards and have a chance to improve.

- Rather than giving a few large tests and assignments, give smaller more frequent ones. This makes the material students must learn more manageable and gives them more chances to succeed.
• Increase the difficulty of tests and assignments over time. Tell students you are doing this to help them learn your expectations and develop knowledge and skills to draw upon.

• Give early, immediate and comprehensive feedback. The idea of giving feedback is closely related to giving students a chance to succeed. In order to learn, students need and want to know the standards and expectations you have for their performance. Thorough comments from you on tests and assignments show students what is needed to succeed.

But your comments do more than just this; they also show the students that you respect them and are committed to their learning. Students notice when a teacher does (or does not) put forth effort in making comments on student work, and they respond accordingly.

• Create a learning community in your classroom. McKeachie (1999) notes that interaction, particularly with peers, is an important motivator for many students. There are several easy steps you can take to create an environment where students see themselves as part of a community of learners rather than as isolated individuals.

• Reward success publicly. This does not need to be an elaborate effort. Thank students for their comments, compliment good points by saying “good point,” and refer back to individual students for their contributions when you can.

• Share exemplary work with students. Copy, distribute (without names and with permission) and discuss outstanding papers or assignments. This helps students see your standards and it recognizes students who do outstanding work.

• Use collaborative/cooperative learning groups. Students respond to interaction with their peers. Putting students in groups can therefore promote their learning.

• Know your students and their interests. If you know who your students are and what they are involved in, you can adjust your class to connect with their interests. This can help them see the relevance of the material and motivate them to engage in class.

For instance, one professor teaches a course on French culture in which most of the students are Business or International Relations majors. Upon learning this information, the professor created a project where students worked in groups of three to determine the feasibility of locating a major shopping store in various locations in France.

• Use a variety of teaching methods. No matter how gifted you are as a teacher, using the same method to teach each class can become monotonous – for you and for the students – causing the students to lose interest and motivation. When possible, vary your methods within and between classes. Break students into groups, give mini-lectures, have class discussions, use case studies, stage a debate, etc. This variety engages and motivates students.

• Avoid individual competition. Competition in and of itself is not necessarily a negative. Pitting groups against one another in games that help them learn the material can be a useful motivator. However, you should avoid creating a situation where students see themselves in direct competition with one another for grades.

• Try to prevent too much anxiety from developing among students. Most of us tend to work a little harder or a little longer when we are worried about an important test or a big event and want to make sure we succeed. However, too much anxiety can make us want to give up and not even try. This is why it is important to have reasonable goals and expectations and give students a chance to succeed.
The Unmotivated Student

If you have taught, you know what it feels like to look out at students’ faces and see some of them who just do not look engaged in class. We often want to look at them and say, “I give up. I can’t motivate you!”

When you feel this way (and you will), it is important to remember that, for students, our course is one small component of their lives (Luce, 1990). They are taking other courses, making friends, participating in activities, working to pay their way through school, and even taking care of families. In short, they are leading complex lives that affect how much energy and attention they can give to our classroom.

It is important to remember that there is a limit to just how much we can actually motivate students. But it is also important not to stop trying because you may find that, just as you become tired and frustrated, whatever pressures have been pulling the student down will eventually ease. And when this happens, they will appreciate the efforts you have made.

Sources


TIPS FOR...

Motivating and Supporting Students

• State clearly and explicitly what students need to do to receive an “A” in your course.

• Get to class early and talk with your students about what they are doing in school, what they hope to learn, and what they are really enjoying.

• Find simple ways (a comment to the class, a remark to a student after class, an e-mail) to recognize student contributions and excellent work.

• Give students examples of ways in which class concepts relate to “real world” matters.
A great deal of your effectiveness as a teacher has to do with your ability to design and implement instruction that promotes learning. A lesson plan, which is a (more or less) detailed plan of the goals and activities for a particular class, is an important part of this process. Creating a lesson plan is when you consider how to organize and achieve some of the goals and objectives you outlined as you planned the course.

While developing lesson plans for each class may seem like an onerous burden at first, doing so is important because:

- The process of planning each lesson forces you to reflect on what you want to accomplish in each class and how best to do so.
- Planning helps you control how class time is used and, as a result of reflection, use that time as productively as possible.
- Lesson plans can be used, with revisions and adaptations, each time you teach the class, and they can be put in your teaching portfolio, to be used when you apply for teaching positions.

This module will outline the three main steps in lesson planning, as well as the main elements of a useful lesson plan. As you read, remember the following points:

- Your goals, objectives, teaching methods and assessment forms all come together in a lesson plan, which ideally facilitates student learning.
- An effective lesson plan applies different instructional methods to give the class variety and meet the needs of different learners.
- Once you have finished the class, you should take the time to evaluate how effective the plan was and make any additions or revisions for future use.

Before we continue, it is worth noting that lesson plans vary in degree of detail. Some instructors (typically the more experienced ones) are comfortable with a few notes scribbled on a cocktail napkin, while others carefully type and color-code each plan. As you develop experience, you will discover the system that works best for you.

**The Preplanning Stage**

As you begin to think about your lesson plan for a particular class, ask yourself these questions:

- What are my goals for this class? Goals are your statements of what you want students to learn. Your goals will most likely be the same, or close to, many of the ones you outlined when you planned the course. You may have changed some since then, and you may have some goals that are specific to the particular class session.

- What are my objectives for this class? Objectives take goal statements to the next level of specificity. They state exactly what students should be able to do, and under what conditions (in class, on a paper, in an exam, etc.) they should learn the material. For instance, if your goal is for students to understand the causes of racism, then an objective might read: “Students will be able to explain and discuss three main causes of racism in a small group.” Objectives are what you use to determine whether students are learning and meeting the goals.
Lesson Planning

- What is your rationale for these goals and objectives? Why is this material important? What is worthwhile about the skills or knowledge you are asking students to display, and how do they fit into the larger goals and context of the course? You should state this rationale and be ready to explain it to your students.

- What content will I cover in this class? Stating the rationale will also help you decide what content needs to be conveyed. What will students need to know to meet the goals and objectives you have laid out? What content is most essential for them to understand?

- What will the students already know? While each learner will have different knowledge, you must still try to assess, at a general level, what it is students already understand or are able to do. Having done this, you are in a better position to decide where to begin your class and how to help students learn.

- What materials will I need? You may find that you need special props, overheads, or equipment to accomplish your goals. Planning well in advance will allow you to be prepared.

Crafting a Lesson Plan

No two lesson plans are likely to be the same, and certainly no two teachers construct a lesson plan in the same way. However, there are three main elements to a lesson plan that most instructors use. While there is variation among these components, and not every class lends itself to all parts (in fact, some plans may be spread out over two or more classes), it is important to understand the basic premise behind them.

Introduction

When you sit down in a classroom, are you ready to receive information immediately? Probably not. The introduction is a way to warm up students, to ease them in to the class and to give them a context for what they are about to learn. Consider doing any of the following to start:

- Provide and review an outline of what you will be doing that day. Giving a structure helps students organize their thoughts and integrate new ideas.

- Summarize the previous class if the ideas are connected to this class. Helping students recall previous knowledge gives them something to relate new ideas to.

- Present an issue related to the topic and ask students to generate a list of concerns or questions. Connecting what you will teach with questions students have or experiences they are familiar with relates the topic to their lives. This shows that what you are teaching is relevant and elicits their attention.

Development

Once you have the basic idea on the table, you can then begin to work with students to explain and explore the idea. This is what people often mean when they talk about teaching, or “instructional methods” – lectures, discussions, labs, collaborative learning, etc.
Lesson Planning

Module 2.5

Strive to engage students as much as possible in the learning process. Active learning not only retains students’ attention but also helps them develop higher-level thinking skills.

Attempt to use a variety of methods in each class and across classes. Any single method can become monotonous and may not work for all students. A variety of methods keeps their attention and enhances learning.

Give students the chance to apply the skills you have taught or practice using the concepts. This helps them learn and gives you a chance to assess informally where you need to provide clarification and greater assistance.

Conclusion

This is your chance to tie it all together for the students, to remind them of what you hoped they would learn and why it is important to them. Consider the following activities in conclusion:

- Ask for questions. The last few minutes of class are an excellent time to have students raise questions after having had a chance to explore the ideas on their own.

- Summarize the main points and explain how they relate to the course. Students may not always see how everything fits together. You may need to link the activities of that one class to the larger course to help them develop a conceptual understanding.

- Talk about what the next class will cover. If the following class builds on what you have just done, then foreshadow what you will be doing in the next class. Again, this shows relevance and helps students develop a conceptual understanding.

- Have students write a one-minute paper. With one or two minutes remaining in class, ask students to take out a sheet of paper and, without putting their name on it, write what they believe was the main idea of the class and one question they have about the day’s content.

The Post-Planning Stage

Completing the class is not enough to say you are finished. How do you know that you were successful in helping students learn? Your lesson planning process should take into account the need to assess whether students learned and how effective your lesson was at promoting that learning.

This assessment does not need to be a complicated or difficult task; in fact, it can be fairly simple and informal. For instance, using part of the class to let students work on problems you have given them, or discuss issues and apply concepts, can give you a good sense of what and how much they have learned. The one-minute paper (above) or homework problems can be similarly helpful.

Source

Designing and Using Lesson Plans

- When you plan, plan for the mundane. Remember to allow time for things like handing back papers or homework, or making announcements.

- Be flexible. Do not adhere to your plan rigidly – it is simply a roadmap. If you fail to make adjustments based on how your class is going, you will miss valuable learning opportunities.

- Have alternative plans. Things will happen in class and you will want to make adjustments on the spot. As you plan, anticipate one or two possible scenarios and be ready with alternative plans. These can help you to be flexible.

- Find the format that works for you. Each teacher is different. Once you understand the basic elements of lesson planning, you can modify the process to reflect on whatever makes you comfortable.
Using all forms of media to teach and advance student learning?

When PowerPoint works and when it does not?

Role of the chalkboard ... its still helps students to take notes.

Methods of teaching to advance student learning is changing as fast the technology appears. You may not need to embrace new methods, but rather strive to consider all options to find your voice. Regardless, your use of various forms instructional media and technology in teaching, whether new or old, can have a profound impact on student learning. When done well, using a variety of media can enliven a class, encourage student participation, and help students grasp difficult concepts. When used poorly, these same tools can obscure your instructional objectives and make students confused, anxious and frustrated.

Tips for using different types of media and technology are discussed below. However, before moving on to specific methods, several general principles related to your use of media and technology should be kept in mind:

- Choose the media that best suits your instructional objectives. Decide what you want to accomplish and then employ the tools that are most likely to help you achieve results. Do not let the media that is available to you determine how or what you will teach.

- If possible, use a variety of tools. PowerPoint, mpeg/mov files, internet, and, yes, the chalkboard not only keeps students’ interest but also responds to the needs of those who receive information in different ways. Personal response systems (aka, “clickers”) also continue to make inroads into the classroom and are attractive as they create opportunities for a quantified form of student response and immediate assessment of learning, by both student and teacher.

- Check out your media or technology before class starts to be sure it is working properly. Nothing is more frustrating to you or the students than to find that your computer connection or ppt file is not working.

Consider Continuing to also use the Chalkboard

This mainstay must have something to offer teachers and students, for it has been around for quite some time. In fact, there are several good reasons for using a chalkboard while also using other forms of instruction, including PowerPoint, the internet, and other forms of media.

- Speed: we write on the board at about the same speed with which we comprehend information, so using a chalkboard helps set an effective pace for learning.

- Organization: you can outline the day’s agenda or summarize main points and refer back to these to integrate your ideas and give the class a sense of progress.

- Visuals: the board lends itself well to working on formulas, solving problems, drawing graphs, and diagramming sentences.

- Interaction: the board is also helpful in generating interaction with students, as you can use it to ask for ideas, make lists (and even laugh at your occasional spelling mistakes).
Module 2.6

Using Instructional Media and Technology

Of course, using the chalkboard effectively takes practice – it is not necessarily as easy as your best teachers made it seem. Here are some tips on using the chalkboard effectively:

- Always face the classroom when you use the board – even when you write. Rather than turning your back to the class while you write, and talking to the board, you should learn the skill of standing to the side and writing.

- Write clearly and legibly. Use large letters and be sure those in the back can see. Give your students time to take notes. Pause periodically to let them reflect, to ask questions, or simply to copy down what you have done.

- Plan how you will use the board. Students use your work to take notes (if you do not believe this, ask to see one or two notebooks after a class), so poor organization hurts them. Will you put your agenda to one side and then build an outline on the rest of the chalkboard? Can you erase details while leaving the main points visible?

- Structure your work. You can use headings, colored chalk, circles, underlining and different styles of writing (block letters, all caps, etc.) to help students see different sections and concepts.

- If, in working through a problem on the board, you make an error, do not just erase it. Stop, alert your students that you have made an error, and ask them to find and fix it.

- If you use the board to list students’ comments, do so verbatim; change a student’s words only with his or her permission.

Powerpoint and Other Forms of Computer Projection

PowerPoint, along with other forms of computer projections has quickly become the standard for classroom lecture presentation.

There are many benefits:

- Visual information: with Powerpoint, you can now greatly expand the visual content of lectures along the usual written information

- Clarity: all lectures can be prepared before class with attention to detail to areas more problematic

- Location: with the lecture on the computer projector screen, you are more free to face the class, note their perception, and engage their response

- Efficiency: lectures can be revised after a class for later use, easing the preparation for future classes on the same topic.

Here are some suggestions that will help you use PowerPoint files effectively to promote student learning:

- Use “bullet points” rather than full paragraphs. You will avoid falling into the trap of reading to your audience (a frustrating practice since we can all read) and will be reminded of what points you would like to expand upon.

- The PowerPoint should be just the outline of the lecture enhanced with visuals. The real content should come from the spoken lecture prompting students to take notes and remain engaged.
Avoid putting too much information on any single image. Each should be used to illustrate a basic concept, and if you have a more complicated concept you use multiple, simple images.

Avoid using too many images. Depending on text per image, a general rule is one to three images per minute of lecture. Using more can overwhelm students with information and force you to rush through the material rather than develop concepts.

With the text portion of a PowerPoint image, use headings, underlining, different typefaces, etc. Use color, background, and images to enhance student attention.

Mov/Mpg files
Digital video segments, whether imbedded in ppt files or shown separately, can show historical footage or re-created events, demonstrate processes or events that cannot easily be replicated in labs, or slow down and analyze motion. However, because students are often used to relaxing or “tuning out” when the TV comes on, it is important to do what you can to make sure that your use of videos facilitates student learning. Here are some tips:

• Know the video file ahead of time. You can then develop exercises and discussion questions based on the video, highlight key areas for the class, and know where to stop the video or fast-forward through it. Often you will only need a short segment to make your point or illustrate a concept.

• Prepare the class for the video. Let them know what they are about to see, how it connects to what they have been learning, and things to look for when viewing.

• Make the film important to students. Consider preparing a list of questions that let students know they will need to pay attention to the content of the video. You may want to stop the film at key points (though not too often) to focus students’ attention on particular issues or situations, and you may want to have a discussion about the video after it is over. Make sure students know that the material covered in the film will be on tests, or that they will need to address it in their papers.

Instructional issues with Current Technology
As more of our lectures become converted to digital form (i.e., ppt), the expectation of students is to have them available before lecture so that they can be downloaded. Students can either make paper copies of the lectures for making class notes or save the file so as to make computer-based notes while in classes. However, the availability of the digital form of lectures can lead to an negative impact on class attendance. Faculty need to find means to address this issue. The above mentioned PRS “cllicker” offers one solution.
The Internet

The internet offers seemingly unlimited potential to encourage learning. However, unless you plan carefully how you will use the web in your teaching, you may find that your students do little more than surf through your class. Using e-mail can help you stay in touch with students and to get discussions going on class topics. You will need to decide whether student participation will be mandatory. Some instructors require that all students send a specific number of messages a week, and factor this into the participation grade. Other instructors use e-mail listservs, but do not require students to participate. The Web can be a valuable research tool, helping students access resources in other universities or nations, and letting them learn about other cultures. However, many students fall into the trap of using the Web as their only research tool. There are several things you can do to avoid this problem:

- Set clear expectations for your students. You can encourage students to access resources on the Web, but also make it clear that students must have citations from other, more traditional sources such as books and print journals.

- Point your students in the right direction. Try not simply to send students off to do research on the Web. Instead, show them in class what you consider to be quality material gleaned from the Web. You can also point them to selected Web sites as places to start, leading them in the direction of good information.

USC supports a Web-based course management program called Blackboard. This program allows you to put assignments on-line, administer tests on the Web, and channel all student communications to one account.

Sources


As teachers, we are expected to have regular office hours where students can approach us and ask for help. However, while we are required to be there, we often find that students do not attend, and we are left alone with our thoughts. Why bother with this ritual?

There are several reasons why office hours can be worthwhile for both teacher and student:

- The personal interaction helps to break down the inevitable distance that exists between teachers and students in most classrooms.
- There is an opportunity to have a detailed discussion on topics or questions.
- Instructor and student get to know each other, something students value.
- The teacher has a chance to get a sense of how students are responding to the course.

This module will help you think about how to structure office hours, get students to come, and make the most of it when they do. Two points are important to keep in mind:

- For students to want to come to office hours, it is important that they view you as approachable, interested in them, and committed to their learning.
- During your office hours, it is important to create a welcoming atmosphere. Listen to your students, giving them your full attention, and asking thoughtful questions.

**Structuring Your Office Hours**

Planning your office hours wisely and creating the right atmosphere are important steps in reaching your goal of having students attend them. Here are some tips:

- Divide your “hours” into segments. For instance, if you are required to have three office hours, try breaking them into three, one-hour segments. Schedule these segments on different days, at various times, to accommodate students with busy schedules.

- Stagger your office hours across class times. If classes begin on the hour, have your office hours begin on the half-hour. That way, if classes begin at 3:00 and 4:00, and your hours start at 3:30, students who have a class at either time can see you.

- Hold office hours in a private location. If possible, meet with students in an office. If this is not possible, find a semi-private place such as a little-used lounge to talk with students.

- Keep the office door open, if you are in an office and no one is with you, the door should be open to indicate that you are available and there expressly for students. However, even if you are with a student, it is generally a good idea to keep the door open.
• Be encouraged to not sit behind a desk. When you talk with students, it is preferable not to place barriers between them and you. Try to sit out in the open, where they can see your full body, as this removes some of the formality from the situation.

• Relax and try to help the student do so as well. Yes, students can be intimidated coming to see the instructor, even if you are “just” the TA. If this is the student’s first time to your office hours, begin with some casual conversation about the weekend, how their semester is going, or something else to break the ice. Let them see that you are interested in them.

**Getting Students to Come to Office Hours**

More than likely, you will have at least one or two students who come to your office hours, especially if you are approachable and have structured them well. However, following are some suggestions for how to have even more students visit you:

• Publicize your hours and give periodic reminders. Your hours should be on the syllabus and on the office door. The time right before tests or assignments is an excellent opportunity to remind students about when you are available.

• Ask students who struggle to come see you. Writing “see me about this during office hours” on tests and papers gets a 75 percent response rate (Davis, 1993).

• Require students to meet with you once. Ask all students to arrange a ten or fifteen minute appointment to talk with you, perhaps about a paper, proposal, or project, and preferably early in the semester.

• Have “special topics” office hours. Announce that you will be using office hours to discuss topics of particular interest to you and the students. You might even have students suggest ideas. Then, announce in advance what the topic will be for that week. Students who have an interest in that topic will be happy to come.

• Stay late after class and come early. Students will feel more comfortable approaching you in your office if they feel like they already know you.

• Check with students about the most convenient times for office hours. We often set up our hours before the semester begins. You might decide to wait until you can poll students about the best times for them.

• Be consistent. Once you establish your hours, keep them. There is nothing more frustrating than to expect to find the instructor there and learn he or she is not present.
Making the Most of Office Hours

Once you’ve got the students coming, you must make the office hours worthwhile:

- Explain the purpose of office hours. Especially if you have new or international students, they may not be aware of what office hours are. Some even think they are mandatory. Explain that they are an option for students who want to meet with you for extra help or to explore ideas in greater depth.

- Have students sign-up for time slots. If you find that your hours are heavily attended, have students sign-up in advance. This helps them plan and reduces the time they must wait outside your door, but only if you keep to the schedule.

- Set guidelines for how office hours are used. You may find that students expect you to brief them on the class they missed or explain a reading in detail. If so, you should let students know you expect them to arrive with specific questions in mind, something for you to review, or some other evidence that they have made some effort to prepare.

- Solicit feedback on the course. If you are meeting with a student and no one is waiting, ask what he or she likes about the class and how it is going for him or her.

Sources


TIPS FOR...

Building Community

- Form small groups for getting acquainted; mix and form new groups several times.
- Solicit suggestions from students for outside resources and guest speakers on course topics.
- Utilize small group discussions whenever feasible.
Knowing who your students are, as a group and as individuals, is an important part of good teaching. In recent years, higher education in general, and USC in particular, have become increasingly diverse. The variety of students is far greater, and their needs are very different, than in the past.

This module will consider how to teach effectively in an environment of diverse learners. If you wish to facilitate the learning process of students with a variety of backgrounds and needs, the following points are important:

- Treat all students as individuals with unique strengths, weaknesses, and needs rather than as generalized representatives of particular racial, ethnic or cultural groups.
- Employ a variety of teaching styles to respond to the needs of diverse learners.
- Create an open classroom that values the experiences and perspectives of all students.

**Diversity: In Higher Education and at USC**

Colleges and universities have become, in recent years, increasingly diverse institutions. Van Note Chisom (1999) identifies the following trends to illustrate this point:

- Older students (those outside of the traditional 17- to 22-year-old age range) now make up more than half of student population in higher education.
- Nationally, women account for 54 percent of bachelor’s degree students.
- The presence of minority students is growing, led by Asian Americans and Hispanic Americans.
- Gay, lesbian and bisexual students are becoming more vocal about their presence and their needs.
- Students with learning or physical disabilities are being identified more frequently.

These national trends are reflected in the diversity of USC as well. Consider the following statistics on the 2007-2008 undergraduate population:

- 48 percent male, 52 percent female;
- >60 percent receive some form of financial aid;
- European Americans compose only 48 percent of the population; Hispanics/Latinos compose 13 percent, African Americans 5 percent, Asian and Asian American 24 percent, and American Indians/Alaskan Natives 2 percent;
- 7 percent of the undergraduate degree students are international students.
What these facts and figures show is that learners come to us with many different experiences, many different ways of seeing the world, and many different learning needs. Teaching in such an environment can be challenging. But if you understand yourself and your students, it also can be very rewarding.

Learning Styles in a Diverse Classroom

Eddy (1999) describes a learning style as the way in which we prefer to organize, classify and assimilate information about the environment. That is, how do we like to learn?

There is a great deal written on learning styles – and probably as many theories as there are writers on the subject. However, in their most basic form, there are three main learning styles (Eddy):

- **Auditory learners** prefer to receive ideas and information by hearing them. These students may struggle with reading and writing, but excel at memorizing spoken words such as song lyrics. They often benefit from discussion-based classes and the opportunity to give oral presentations.

- **Visual learners** prefer to receive information by seeing it. Typically these students pay much attention to detail. They are less likely to speak in class than their auditory peers, and generally use few words when they do. Outlines, graphs, maps and pictures are useful in helping these students learn.

- **Kinesthetic-Tactile learners** tend to learn best via movement and touch. These students are often labeled “hyperactive” because they tend to move around a great deal. Because they like movement, they may take many notes and learn best when allowed to explore and experience their environment.

It is important to note that the various styles are those preferred by learners. If we looked at complete descriptions of each style, we would probably see some of ourselves in each. But we could also probably identify our dominant style. The fact that we learn in many ways is further justification for utilizing variety of teaching approaches is so important.

Understanding learning styles can help you create more inclusive classrooms where everyone has a chance to succeed. For instance, a student from a culture that teaches children to listen quietly in a classroom (or a visual learner who is uncomfortable with speaking) can be at a disadvantage when a portion of the grade is based on participation in class. Sensitive teachers can allow for group work during class to create smaller, safer environments for these students to speak and for their classroom performance to be evaluated.

**TIPS FOR...**

Understanding Diverse Students

Students from different cultures, backgrounds and educational environments learn in distinctly different ways. Be aware that the way you learned best might not be the way that other students will learn -- or that all students learn in the manner(s) you did. For more information on specific differences in student learning and development, a number of fine summaries of different ways students learn and develop during their collegiate experiences are available, including Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito, 1998; Moore, 1990; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991.
Students’ Special Needs

Some students will have unique challenges that make learning in a traditional classroom difficult. Examples include visual or hearing impairments, Attention Deficit Disorder, mobility challenges, chronic illness (such as that brought about by chemotherapy), and learning disabilities.

There are many possible accommodations that help to create a productive learning environment for these students. It may be necessary for a student with a hearing impairment to have an interpreter present, for instance. A student with a chronic illness may need you to be flexible about the due dates for assignments.

Below are suggestions to consider when you work with students with special needs:

• Even though two students may have the same disability, their needs for accommodation may be quite different. Treat each student as an individual.

• Keep in mind that disabilities are not always visible to us. You are not required to assess a student’s health; you should accept authorized documentation concerning an individual student’s needs.

• Using many modes (written, verbal, video/slide, etc.) to present information is one way to help some learners with special needs learn more effectively.

It is important to remember that you are not responsible for identifying the disability or deciding on the accommodations. The Office of Disability Services and Programs (DSP) at USC provides students with a letter authenticating their needs, and the students should be able to present this letter to you upon request. DSP will help you identify and make the necessary accommodations.

If the student is not able to provide you with this documentation, you should politely explain that, before you can make the accommodations, the student needs to have registered with DSP. You will then work with DSP to determine the accommodations.

Tips on Teaching in a Diverse Classroom

Our students are diverse in their cultures and ethnicity, their experiences, their learning styles, and many other dimensions. And all of these dimensions shape who they are and how they learn. Effective teachers understand this and use a variety of teaching methods to promote student learning. Below are some basic tips on how to teach effectively in a diverse learning environment:

• Having a “color-blind” classroom is probably neither possible nor a good idea. Trying to do so inevitably privileges a particular perspective (usually that of the teacher) and fails to recognize the experiences and needs of the learners. It is preferable to use strategies that recognize and capitalize on this diversity.

• Appreciating the individuality of each student is important. While generalizations sensitize us to important differences between groups, each individual student has unique values, perspectives, experiences and needs.

• Articulate early in the course that you are committed to meeting the needs of all students and that you are open to conversations about how to help them learn.
As teachers, it is important that we recognize our own learning styles and cultural assumptions, because these styles and assumptions influence how we teach and what we expect from our students. Being aware of them allows us to develop a more inclusive teaching style.

As you plan your course, and each class, prepare multiple examples to illustrate your points. Try to have these examples reflect different cultures, experiences, sexual orientations, genders, etc., to include all students in learning.

Help students move between abstract, theoretical knowledge and concrete, specific experiences, to expand everyone’s learning.

Use different teaching methods (lectures, small groups, discussions, collaborative learning) to meet the variety of learning needs.

Sources


What are my responsibilities as a USC Teaching Assistant?

How does “acting as a professional” improve my classroom?

Working as a teaching assistant is a significant part of the professional development of many graduate students. Often, it is your first chance to polish skills that will be essential to your work as members of the professorate. However, the position is not merely an opportunity to learn the details of your field; it is also an opportunity to become familiar with the roles, expectations, obligations, and canon of ethics that are associated with the profession of teaching in general. In short, you will learn about “acting as a professional” as a teaching assistant.

There are many aspects to this professionalism, involving appropriate conduct and attitude both in the classroom and as a mentor to individual students. Five points will be emphasized here:

1. Preparing for Your Class;
2. Clarifying Your Expectations;
3. Minding Your Various Responsibilities;
4. Treating Students with Respect; and
5. Battling the “Friendship” Temptation.

Preparing for Your Class

Teaching requires hard work and careful preparation. It is unprofessional to believe that one can simply walk into a classroom setting and simply “wing” a lecture, discussion, or lab. Translating one’s knowledge of a subject into a framework that stimulates student interest and promotes understanding requires an instructor to think about familiar issues from a new point of view:

- What key concepts are likely to be unfamiliar to students?
- What order of presentation will be most effective in making complicated material more coherent?
- What examples will best illustrate important points?
- What questions will stimulate actual critical thinking (rather than mindless recitation of facts)?
- What handouts might be useful to students?
- How can I use PowerPoint and other forms of media as well as the blackboard effectively as part of my presentation?
Module 2.9

Professional teachers always walk into a teaching setting with a well-considered pedagogical plan, and that plan must be more substantial than simply a belief that one will just start talking about a topic or will solicit questions from students. We all expect students to come to class prepared; but even more important is that teachers do the same. It is not uncommon for teaching assistants to spend upwards of 15-20 hours a week mastering course material and preparing lesson plans. Your preparation – and your willingness to adjust your teaching strategies in light of your ongoing experiences with particular classes – is central to your success as a professional. Moreover, students can tell when their teachers are working hard to help them understand (or not working hard), and your efforts will have an important effect on their willingness to do their share.

Clarifying Your Expectations

As you prepare your teaching strategy, please keep in mind that students must be very well informed about your expectations of them. This includes expectations about:

- subject matter mastery,
- graded assignments,
- class policies, and
- standards of evaluation.

It is part of your professional obligation to keep students apprised of these issues through every element of your work. Among other things, this often means:

- handing out your general expectations in writing whenever possible, but especially at the beginning of a class (in the form of a thorough, clear, and reliable syllabus or some equivalent document appropriate for your assignment);
- referring to these issues as you present and discuss new material in class; and
- helping students achieve a more specific understanding as you evaluate and provide feedback on their work.

Remember, it is their responsibility to work in accordance with your expectations, but it is your responsibility to make sure that they understand what exactly is expected of them. Always err on the side of being more clear and thorough, on syllabi, in classroom presentations, and in grading student work.

Minding Your Various Responsibilities

Being a professional also means attending to a variety of everyday tasks and obligations. Among them are the following:

- coming to class on time (and allowing some opportunity for students to approach you before or after class);
- holding scheduled office hours and accommodating students who cannot attend those hours; responding to student messages within a reasonable period of time;
- filling out paperwork on student attendance; cooperating with disabled students who are going through proper channels to arrange for appropriate accommodations; being mindful of academic integrity and (when necessary) reporting student misconduct.
Treating Students with Respect

The normal exchanges that go on in the classroom (and in one-on-one meetings) can evoke many different responses from teachers. But it is extremely important to realize that teachers cannot interact with students in the same way they would interact with friends or colleagues in other settings. The teacher-student relationship is professional and formal, not (primarily) personal and informal. It exists in an environment that is purposefully diverse. Students of all backgrounds and circumstances have a right to be treated with respect and to be evaluated in accordance with the prevailing norms of your discipline. This means that teachers must be both dedicated to their students and professionally detached – sufficiently detached, anyway, to be able to carry out one’s responsibilities in a manner that is consistent with the highest standards of professional ethics.

Respecting students means making every effort to get to know them as students:

- What are their names?
- What are their strengths and weaknesses as they relate to their abilities to master the course material?
- What kind of individualized assistance will best help them be successful?

It also means that teachers must be extremely mindful to avoid any conduct or comments that might be interpreted as disrespectful or even outright hostile. The classroom is no place for certain forms of sarcasm, incautious statements, or playful comments that are inconsistent with your position of authority and your professional responsibilities.

One of the more egregious mistakes in this regard involves behavior or commentary that are reasonably viewed as forms of sexual harassment. Obviously, purposeful harassment is inexcusable, but also be careful to consider whether comments that you believe to be innocent (such as compliments on someone’s appearance) are inconsistent with your position. You encounter these students because you have a job to do. Focus your demeanor on that goal.

Battling the “Friendship” Temptation

Finally, and relatedly, it is tempting for teaching assistants to try to win students over by making friends (or acting as a friend). In part this is due to the natural inclination of teachers to want to be liked by students, and being friendly is an obvious element of that strategy. The temptation also arises in cases where teaching assistants feel as though they are part of the same peer group as undergraduates (or at least not far removed) – not much different in age; sharing similar interests; etc. It is not uncommon to think that, in other settings, many of one’s students could instead be one’s friends.

It should be clear by now how important it is to maintain a sharp distinction between being a friendly professional and treating students like your friend. The teacher-student relationship is, inevitably, a structure of authority, and includes an evaluative component that absolutely requires a teacher to be able to offer fair, objective assessments of student work. One’s position as a teaching assistant is dramatically undermined when one sacrifices professional detachment for more personal and informal relationships; and students quickly lose respect for instructors who seem more interested in making friends than doing their jobs. Obviously, the most egregious and unforgivable case of this mistake would be the temptation to pursue more romantic relationships.
The converse of the temptation to treat some students as friends is the situation where a teaching assistant develops a personal dislike for a particular student. Needless to say, the demand that one maintains some professional detachment in such circumstances is the same as in the previous situations.

The bottom line: being a teaching assistant can be an extraordinarily satisfying part of one’s academic training, but it is also a job, and you must treat it as such.

Questions for Establishing Teaching Objectives...

A key to professionalism is the ability to set (and then successfully meet) teaching objectives. The questions below should help you determine how objectives can help you:

1. What are the course’s instructional objectives? How do you want students to be changed as a result of this class? What will they perceive, or be able to do, that they cannot do now?

2. What assessment(s) of student learning is (are) being used in the course? How are the learning changes measured? By what criteria of performances by students will you evaluate their progress?

3. What content/materials are used to achieve your objectives from questions (1) and (2)? What subject matter will be covered to help students meet the expectations in (1) and (2)?

4. What teaching strategies are you using? What sorts of formats or activities will you use to help students practice the abilities needed to meet (1) and (2)?

5. How are your expectations communicated to students? What is their picture of the objectives they will need to meet?
What does it mean to be in a partnership with a faculty member?

What are my roles and responsibilities in this partnership?

In preparing for a TA assignment, keep in mind that you are working in partnership with another instructor (or with many other instructors) and – most importantly – you are not the senior partner in the relationship! Working with faculty means understanding the role that your supervising faculty member expects you to play in the class. You must think about your assignment as part of a team effort and then ask yourself:

• What are my responsibilities in this team?
• How do I make sure that I perform these responsibilities in a way that serves the interests of other members of the team?
• What can I do to make the overall team effort effective?

Answering these questions requires you to make three important commitments:

1. Early coordination;
2. On-going communication; and
3. Presenting a united front.

These commitments can lead to a successful classroom experience.

Early Coordination

As early as possible – preferably well-before the first day of class – you must meet with your supervising faculty to discuss and clarify your role and responsibilities in the class. In many fields the basic responsibilities of TAs are familiar and consistent across classes; for example, in social science classes that have discussion sections, TAs are expected to lead discussion sections and participate in grading papers and exams. But do not assume that these generic descriptions of your responsibilities are enough to understand the role you will play in a particular professor’s class. These responsibilities can be expanded or contracted depending on the teaching style and philosophy of an individual professor and so it is vital that these issues are explicitly clarified as soon as possible. You do not want to find out at the last minute that you are expected to give a lecture to the entire class.

Keep in mind that, while professors always have particular understandings of your role, they are not always good about clarifying this question. Left to their own, some professors will not think about setting up initial meetings to coordinate responsibilities. If the professor is not taking the initiative, you need to be prepared to take whatever steps are necessary to get your questions answered.
Finally, it is important that you also understand what responsibilities are considered an acceptable part of your job description and what are not. Professors have the right to clarify your role as it relates to your teaching responsibilities in class, but you are not to be treated as their personal assistants on a variety of unrelated matters. If you have questions or concerns about your role in a class, please ask your Chair, Director, or Graduate Adviser, or contact CET at usccet@usc.edu.

On-Going Communication

After responsibilities are clarified and you start carrying them out, it is vital that you keep in touch with your supervising faculty in order to assess the class and share important information.

Two issues in particular deserve regular discussion. The first involves the pedagogical goals of the course. How are the students reacting to class and are they benefiting from your efforts? Because you and the professor are working as a team, you should make it a point to keep the professor informed about your work and its effectiveness; and, of course, you should also seek input or guidance as you continue to think about the best strategies to use in the classroom. Also keep in mind that your supervising faculty member may not have as much contact with students as you have, and you may be his or her best source of feedback from students about the overall goals of the course.

The second issue involves your work with individual students. It is inevitable that particular questions, problems, or challenges might arise in the course of the one-on-one work that you do with particular students, and every effort should be made to coordinate your strategies with the supervising faculty. You may know how best to proceed, but in many cases the greater experience of a supervising faculty member can come in very handy, and you should take advantage of that by bringing to her or his attention the special cases you encounter.

United Front

Finally, it is very important to act as a team when teaching a course. There may be some disagreements among faculty and teaching assistants about the meaning of the course material or about the most effective way to deal with a particular student. It is fair for you to share your thoughts with your supervising faculty member, but once a decision is made it is also vital to put on a united front. Students want to know that professors and TAs are working together, and it can be very frustrating and demoralizing for students if they have the impression that a TA and a professor are at odds. In this regard you must act as a professional and do your best to make the approach and policies of the supervising faculty work. This means, for example, not sharing with students your critical views of the professor’s approach to the material and not telling students that you think the grade assigned by the professor is inappropriate.

Of course, no one expects you to sit idly by if you believe that a professor’s conduct is unethical. In that case you have other avenues to pursue. But disagreements about matters of discretion must be resolved in favor of the professor. After all, as you recall, you are not the senior partner on this team.
Working with Faculty: The Teaching Assistant’s Checklist

- Do I know who is my direct supervisor?

- Have I exchanged telephone numbers and email addresses with the professor and the department’s administrative staff?

- Do I understand what I am supposed to do and how to do it?

- Have I become familiar with the daily classroom schedule?

- Do I know for which activities outside the classroom I am responsible (e.g., grading, discussion leading)?

- Do I understand the professor’s methods for the course?

- Do I know where the instructional materials for the course are kept?

- Do I know how to operate classroom equipment?

- Do I know where to get equipment?

- Do I know where supplies for the department are kept?

- Do I understand how I am to divide my time among tasks?

- Do I know whom to notify if I am going to be late or absent?

- Do I know what to do if the professor with whom I work is absent?

- Do I know how to take initiative and be a self starter?
Questions for Understanding Teaching Assistant Responsibilities

Teaching assistants in different departments may be assigned widely differing roles. Some may only grade, duplicate materials, or take care of equipment. Others may hold office hours, meet with students individually, or answer questions in laboratories under supervision of professors or “Head TAs”. Still others may be in charge of labs or recitation sessions or may substitute for professors as lecturers. Some TAs (also called Assistant Lecturers) may take complete charge of a course and be held responsible for all aspects of teaching the course. Remember, it is your responsibility as a TA to ensure you understand fully what is expected of you. The following sets of questions should help you.

A. Tasks to Be Done

What types of tasks am I expected to do:

___ Type or duplicate course material
___ Set up or maintain lab equipment
___ Create lab or homework assignments
___ Answer questions in lab
___ Help individual students during the lab or class
___ Lead lab sessions
___ Run recitations
___ Lead students in discussions
___ Plan and give short presentations
___ Help students solve problems
___ Administer tests or quizzes
___ Create tests or quizzes
___ Grade papers
___ Make decisions about grading
___ Take full responsibility for a course and prepare the syllabus
___ Hold office hours or tutorials
___ Other tasks not included above. What are they?

B. Support Given by the Department

What kind of support do TAs in the department receive to help them perform those tasks:

Mentoring:
___ Regular (weekly?) meetings for professor’s feedback after teaching has started
___ Regular communication with TA coordinator

Evaluation:
___ Class or lab observation by professor or Head TA?
___ Discussion of mid-semester student evaluations of TAs?
___ Written constructive feedback to help TAs do their job well?
___ Semester-long TA training program offered by department to encourage TAs to develop their teaching skills?
___ Other forms of help: what exactly are they for this department?
Here is a helpful checklist for USC professors working with teaching assistants.

- Give Teaching Assistants a copy of the course syllabus and readings at least a week before class begins.
- Recommend additional readings on course topics unfamiliar to the TAs so that they feel comfortable with the material.
- Get TAs together with those who have been TAs for the course in previous semesters to discuss their experiences, particularly the best ways of spending time in sections, chief problems students may experience, ways of stimulating discussions, etc.
- Let TAs know that resources are available to support and guide them as novice teachers (e.g., CET, departmental orientations, workshops, colloquia).
- Share anecdotes with TAs about the problems you had when you began to teach and offer tips so they do not think their anxieties are unique.
- Require TAs to attend course lectures, so they know what material has been covered and how, and so they may be better prepared in their sections to fill gaps, correct misunderstandings, etc.
- Schedule your office hours at different times than TAs’ to maximize students’ opportunities to consult with course staff.
- Meet with TAs once a week to discuss how the course is going, and what improvements could be made based on their observations.
- Ask TAs to give you brief written reports on any problems students may be having in the course (e.g., “List the 1 or 2 things that caused students the most difficulty in class last week.”).
- Ask TAs weekly to help identify students having difficulty and to give additional help where possible, referring more difficult problems to you.
- Meet with TAs to design course assignments and exams and to develop grading criteria, both to improve the course and to give guidance and practical experience to the TAs.
- Review TAs’ comments and/or grades on at least the first set of essays, problem sets, quizzes or lab reports and discuss criteria for grading and the best ways to give students feedback.
2 Professor’s Responsibilities with TAs

- Inform TAs about campus resources for referring students who need tutorial assistance, advice or counsel beyond that which TAs are qualified to give.

- Encourage TAs to give you constructive feedback on ways of improving your lecture presentation (e.g., explanations, summaries, speed and tone of voice, use of blackboard or PowerPoint, etc.).

- Give TAs an opportunity to prepare and deliver a lecture or mini-lecture on a course topic they know well, and then give them constructive feedback on their presentation (e.g., organization, explanation, examples, speed and tone of voice, use of blackboard or PowerPoint, handling of questions, etc.).

- Arrange for TAs to be evaluated by their students (in the middle and end of the semester) and discuss the results of the evaluations in ways that will help TAs improve their teaching. Give them concrete suggestions.

- Visit TA sections at least once during the term, talk with each TA constructively about his or her strengths, and make suggestions for improvement based on your own teaching experience.

- Set up schedule of classroom visits so that each TA is visited by the other TAs to give feedback based on their own experiences.

- Treat the TAs as junior colleagues who are hired to help undergraduates get the best possible education, as well as to improve their own teaching skills.

- Find and use your TAs’ strengths. Encourage initiative.

- If there are concerns regarding a TA, discuss them openly and honestly in a one-on-one situation.

- Contact CET and arrange to have your TA sections videotaped.

Source
There are many elements involved in orienting new tenure-track faculty to a university like USC. We want to make sure that they understand expectations for research and publishing. We want them to consider the ways in which they may contribute to the strategic plan of the University and their department or school. We are sometimes eager to share our thoughts on the culture of our units, the personalities of our colleagues, and structures of authority at the University.

Do we do as good a job mentoring our new faculty in teaching excellence?

There are reasons to think that we may be less attentive to this issue than to others. Some may be deterred by lingering questions about the relative importance of teaching in the ultimate tenure decision, or by a sense that a basic level of competence is all that should be expected. Others may feel that teaching is more a matter of personality than teachable technique and thus is more difficult to improve with mentoring. If a faculty member seems to be performing at a basically competent level there may be a feeling that the classroom is his or her private domain and that stronger mentoring might amount to inappropriate intrusion.

Before succumbing to these arguments it would be appropriate to think more about what mentoring teaching excellence at USC might involve. In this brief module, let me raise three issues –

1. evaluating classroom competency
2. devising strategies for improvement
3. discussing special teaching opportunities

– in the hope that they help open up a larger conversation about other ways in which we can orient new faculty to our expectations about their responsibilities as teachers.

**Evaluating Classroom Competency**

Even those who are inclined to pay less attention to teaching excellence agree that we have an obligation to evaluate the level of competency demonstrated by new faculty in the classroom. There are of course many ways to conduct such evaluation. For example, it is the practice within the Department of Political Science for the Chair to assign a mentor to a new faculty member, and among the many responsibilities of this mentor is the obligation to review course syllabi and student evaluations, visit classrooms, and provide feedback on the structure of the class and the effectiveness of teaching style.

While new faculty often receive written information about such things as the elements of an acceptable syllabus or grading policies, it usually comes amidst a flood of other written information. Therefore, there is no substitute for a specific review of their actual practices.
Moreover, when new faculty members are required to talk about their classroom effectiveness, they will have a unique opportunity to reflect on their teaching and how it might be improved. The mere act of setting up the conversation can trigger productive self-evaluation (whether or not the mentor provides extensive comments or suggestions for improvement), and this would seem to be an essential part of the professional development of young faculty.

These conversations also provide a unique chance to discuss specific issues that arise with the USC student body, and are thus part of the process by which new faculty become acculturated to this University.

Devising Strategies for Improvement

There may be many advantages to a more careful review of classroom performance, but one of the most important results would be a determination that a new faculty member needs to improve in this area.

Of course, all of us could improve; even the best teachers think of ways in which they can more effectively engage students. In fact, some of the most productive programs put on by the Center for Excellence in Teaching (CET) are aimed at good teachers looking for new ideas, and this might apply to very good new faculty as well.

Still, what is the best way to respond when there is a perception that someone should be doing a better job?

Here is where more focused mentoring by strong teachers in one’s discipline can be especially important. Departments and schools should have procedures in place whereby early and sustained feedback can lead to discernible improvements well before the tenure year approaches. New faculty should not be put in a position where they are told there is a potential problem but are not given the support structure they need in order to adequately address it.

However, in some circumstances new faculty may feel resistant to this kind of strong mentoring from members of their own department. There may be some concern that this level of feedback is inextricably linked to an ongoing process of evaluation and surveillance, and if this is the case than a procedure that should be purely constructive can be turned against the person it is designed to help.

School or department administrators can avoid this development in a number of ways, but among the options that are available is the use of CET. The Faculty Fellows associated with CET represent a wide variety of disciplines and are all available to act as teaching mentors in a way that is completely confidential and non-evaluative. Administrators may want to consider whether this resource is useful for them as they try to deal effectively with some of the challenges presented by new faculty. Even if schools or departments have strong internal procedures in place for addressing these issues new faculty should be made aware of this additional external resource and should be encouraged to take advantage of it, regardless of their level of competency.
In addition to personal mentoring, CET also has an ongoing program of seminars, luncheons, and institutes for faculty interested in discussing ways of improving the classroom experience. For example, the programs often include how to lead discussion groups and how to run large lecture classes. The Center is also interested in hearing from administrators about what kinds of programs would be most useful in helping them mentor their new faculty.

Still, whether the procedure draws on purely internal resources or on larger University resources, there should be strategies in place to respond to situations where new faculty could benefit from greater attention to their performance in the classroom.

**Discussing Special Teaching Opportunities**

Mentoring teaching excellence, though, is not just about putting out fires. It is also about ensuring that new faculty understand all of the opportunities available to them as teachers at this University. Many of our best researchers believe that some of their most satisfying work is done in the classroom. The tenure process is commonly thought of as a chance for us to think about whether we want a new faculty member to join our ranks, but we need to keep in mind that it is also a time when excellent young scholars are considering whether they want to make a career with us. If they love teaching, they should know about the various ways in which that passion can be nurtured and indulged at USC.

The members of particular schools and departments are in the best position to know what opportunities are most viable in light of the other responsibilities of a tenure-track faculty in their fields. In some cases there may be exciting teaching opportunities outside of one’s particular department. In the College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences, for example, some faculty are invited to teach in the special freshman honors program, Thematic Option. Here one finds extremely talented and motivated freshman in challenging interdisciplinary classes.

In other cases specific schools or departments may provide opportunities for interdisciplinary teaching or team teaching. Course development, as part of one’s major or a new minor, may also be encouraged, especially when a young scholar comes to us with an innovative research agenda that deserves a classroom outlet. There are also programs available to work with undergraduates outside of the classroom, as research assistants, as members of student organizations, or as students looking for enthusiastic mentors.
Conclusion

There are other issues that deserve more attention, such as clarifying one’s role as a mentor of graduate students, exploring innovative uses of technology in the classroom, protecting one’s intellectual property from new web-based note-takers, and understanding academic integrity at USC. Perhaps, though, raising a limited set of issues in this module gives us all a chance to think harder about how well we are addressing this important professional responsibility.

If you believe your department or school is doing a particularly good job at mentoring new faculty in teaching excellence, it would be very useful for the rest of us if you were to share your model. We could all benefit.

On the other hand, if this is an area in which you think you can be more attentive, then I hope that this module provides you and your colleagues an opportunity to make some changes that can have an important impact on our junior colleagues – and our students.
How do I structure a lecture?

How do I encourage feedback from my students?

How do I engage my audience?

In order to prevent last-minute stress and oversights you need time to arrange your lecture’s main points, choose and develop pertinent examples, write definitions, solve equations, and pace the delivery of your ideas and themes without losing your students’ attention. Some faculty prepare their lectures well in advance and revise them during the semester to take into account students’ reactions to previous lectures. Others prefer to prepare a lecture immediately after class, when the experience of what worked and what didn’t is still fresh. Typically, novice lecturers complete the bulk of preparatory reading before the course starts and then keep about one or two weeks ahead of their students.

A general strategy for the preparation of good lectures includes three steps:

- Plan carefully both content and format of your lecture.
- The lecture’s structure should clearly point to the objectives and key ideas that are presented.
- Budget your time: allow time for feedback from your students.

**Lecture Preparation**

Read selectively, as needed, and jot down notes on important ideas and organizational structure; try to anticipate questions that students may ask.

- Jot down words, facts, ideas and questions as they come to you.

Experiment with different formats for your lecture notes. Some formats are more suited to certain disciplines or subjects than others:

- An outline is especially useful in organizing a lecture and providing an overview of general structure, subordinate points and transitions.
- A list of major points highlights the lecture’s key ideas or issues to be covered; this format requires a speaker who knows the material well.
- A tree diagram (e.g. a flowchart) provides a system of pathways through important points with optional stopovers, tangents, useful illustrations, or examples.

Use visual cues and notes to aid your delivery:

- Color code your notes with highlighters to identify difficult points or distinctions between major examples.
- Include notations in bold type indicating time to pause, ask questions, raise your voice.
Preparing and Structuring Lecture Notes

- Allow for wide margins for notations such as “Write this on board,” “Have students jot down their responses at their seats,” “If less than ten minutes left, skip to point seven.”

- Examples boxed in red could mean “Use only if students seem uncertain about my point.”

Prepare your lecture for the ear, not the eye:

- Avoid lecturing verbatim from a script; use short simple words and informal diction, including personal pronouns; speak succinctly in short sentences.

- Offer signposts for transitions and structure: “the third objection;” “let’s look at this case from a different perspective;” “now we can turn to….”

- Restate and periodically summarize key points.

- Rehearse your lecture.

Structuring a Lecture

- Begin the lecture by making a connection to the previous day’s topic: students want the direction of the course to be apparent as they proceed.

- Identify your key points (what you most want your students to remember about the topic), specify the main topic or topics, and outline clear objectives for your lecture (an objective is an aim that guides action).

Structure the lecture to suit your audience and the subject matter:

- Structure the lecture in outline form and flesh it out with examples and illustrations.

- Design your lectures in ten- to fifteen-minute blocks.
  - Each block should cover a single point with examples and end with a brief summary and transition to the next section.
  - Define or explain unfamiliar terminology.
  - Use concrete examples, such as study findings or current issues, to frame questions for students and elicit discussion.
  - If you find yourself running out of time, cut an entire block or shorten the middle section of a block rather than rush the lecture’s summary.

- Prepare a one-page sketch of the lecture.
Provide a logical progression for the material – for example:

- A chronological or sequential approach.
- Move from the general principle to specific instances.
- Build up from the parts to the whole.
- Trace one idea across time or space.
- Describe a problem and then illustrate its solution.
- Present a two-sided discussion of a given topic; then provide the “Pro-Con” aspects for each side.
- Announce your thesis, then step back to provide evidence for your argument.

Plan your lecture so that the main points come at a time when students are most attentive (the first 15-minute block in a 50-minute class). Include the following elements:

- Attention-getting introduction.
- Brief overview of main points to be covered.
- Quick statement of background or context.
- Detailed explanation of no more than three major points – the most important first – with a change of pace every ten or fifteen minutes.
- Concluding summary of main points to reinforce key ideas/themes.

Budget time for questions:

- Leave time for students to ask you to repeat material or to supply additional explanations.
- Ask for questions at the beginning of the class and list these on the board to be answered during the hour.
- Encourage student participation and discussion, but summarize the arguments made by students, placing them in a larger theoretical/philosophical context and bringing their ideas back to the main topic of the lecture.
Begin and end with a summary statement.

- Continuity and closure are important: to bring your points home, use different words and examples in your opening and closing summaries. Students will see how each new topic relates to what they have already learned, in addition to what they will be learning in the coming week.

**Solicit Feedback**

Observe students’ non-verbal communication: note-taking, response to questions, eye contact, seating patterns, response to humor (are they “with” you?).

Use the “minute-paper” (or other assessment techniques): ask students to respond in one or two sentences to the following questions:

- What stood out as most important in today’s lecture?
- What are you confused about?

Give mid-semester teaching evaluations or, during the semester, ask the students for suggestions or comments.

**Sources**


How do I encourage critical thinking in a discussion session?

How can we have a discussion in the sciences when there is so much material to cover and to learn?

What do I need to do in order to have all students participate in the discussion?

Active listening to your students is a skill that should allow you to orchestrate and spark dialogue in discussion sessions. Though there are general guidelines for the leading of a discussion, different disciplines may require unique approaches for a good discussion to occur. For example, attention to both the meaning and the common themes in your students’ remarks is important in a humanities or social sciences discussion. In the natural or physical sciences, when students are confronted with large amounts of new material, you may need to engage your students by breaking down a question into a logical sequence of smaller and simpler questions, which they can grasp more easily. In art, music, or film appreciation, multi-media may be a necessary part of the discussion to illustrate an aesthetic judgement.

General Guidelines: Guiding the Discussion

Write on the blackboard key points that emerge from the discussion and use these for summarizing the session.

Keep the discussion focused: brief interim summaries of what has been discussed are helpful.

Use non-verbal cues to maintain the flow:

- Prompt students to speak by an expectant look in your eye, a nod of your head, or a slight motion of your hand.
- Hold up your hand to prevent one student from interrupting another.
- Shift the mood and pace of the class by circulating in the room.
- Step back from a student who is speaking so that he or she will see the other faces in the room.

Bring the discussion back to the key issues. If the discussion is off track, stop and describe what is happening (“We seem to have lost sight of the topic; let’s pick up the notion again that …”; Peter, you have a good point, but does it directly apply to the issue of…? “This is a most interesting insight but we also need to talk about….”).

Clarify students’ confusions: “Let’s clear up this misunderstanding before we continue;” “We’ve covered some important points so far. Are you persuaded or troubled by this line of thinking?”
Prevent the discussion from deteriorating into a heated argument: remind students to focus on ideas, not on personal attacks, and to show tolerance for divergent points of view.

Do not shut off disagreement as soon as it occurs: a certain amount of disagreement can stimulate discussion and thought. Lively exchanges can be generated by asking, “What would a devil’s advocate say?” or “Will someone present an opposing point of view or counterposition?”

Be alert for signs that a discussion is breaking down such as:

Members taking sides and refusing to compromise; ideas being attacked before they are completely expressed; excessive hair splitting or nit-picking; repetition of points; private conversations; apathetic participation.

Vary the emotional tone of the discussion:

- To spark a discussion, ask specific rather than general questions; call on individual students known for their strong opinions.
- To calm a discussion, pose abstract or theoretical questions, slow the tempo of your voice, and avoid calling on specific individuals.

Bring closure to the discussion: Announce that the discussion is ending (“Are there any final comments before we pull these ideas together?”). The closing summary should then show students how the discussion progressed, emphasize two or three key points, and provide a framework for the next session. End by acknowledging the insightful comments students have made.

Assign students responsibility for summarizing the major points. At the beginning of the discussion, select one or two students to be the “summarizers” of the major issues, concerns, and conclusions generated during discussion. A variation of this technique is to tell the class that someone will be called on at the end of class to summarize (this strategy encourages students to listen more carefully for the main ideas).

During the closing minutes of class ask students to write down a question that is foremost in their minds. Collect these questions (turned in anonymously) and use them to initiate discussion at the next class meeting.

**Discussion Sessions in the Humanities and Social Sciences**

In addition to the general guidelines outlined above, the following strategies have proved successful for the fostering of critical thinking in discussion sessions in the humanities and social sciences:

- Start by asking provocative questions. The questions can be distributed in written form either prior to or at the beginning of the session; or ask students to turn in questions of their own to start the discussion.

- Make controversy work for you. Write several controversial statements related to the reading material and ask students to agree or disagree with one of them.

- Try to break large concepts or generalizations into component questions so as not to daunt students with large theoretical questions.
• Make silence work for you. Offer an idea or a concept to the class, then tell them they should think about the example for three to five minutes. Comments offered after such a pause will be more thoroughly considered than those expressed off the cuff.

• Think about transitions before the session: determine how various themes are related to one another, so that you can move smoothly from one student’s comment to another’s. Also, try to remain flexible about the order in which topics come up: adhering to a rigid outline may stifle discussion.

• Avoid jargon: some difficult concepts should be explained in familiar terms that students can grasp.

• Make time for group activities: ask students to break up into small groups, which will then report to the class on material from lectures or readings.

• Encourage clarity: If you do not understand students’ comments, ask them to clarify. It will encourage them to rethink, reformulate, and reassess what they have said.

Discussion Sessions in the Arts
In the arts, as in the humanities and social sciences, critical thinking is an essential part of discussion sessions. However, “arts appreciation” demands that students not only acquire a certain body of knowledge, but also that they develop sensory, memory, and cognitive skills, all of which contribute to “aesthetic judgement.” The use of multi-media equipment as well as “live” art should therefore be intrinsic parts of discussion sessions in the arts. In addition to all the guidelines outlined above, the following “tips” can be helpful in assuring a well-organized discussion in the arts:

• Make sure that you have good command over the working of the audio and visual equipment. Make sure that slides, CDs, or other recordings are in order. Students can be fairly tolerant when occasional problems arise but have little patience with consistent, large-scale disorganization (cf. Module 2.5).

• Try to engage the students in “real art situations”: for example, in a music class, invite an amateur string quartet; in a theatre class, invite an actor from a local amateur performing group.

• Be mindful when choosing examples of music or art. Too many examples that are glossed, rather than examined or adequately discussed, can frustrate students.

Discussion Sessions in the Sciences
Though, in general, science courses do not include structured discussion sessions analogous to those in the humanities and the social sciences, your interaction with students in the laboratory includes many elements present in all discussion sessions. However, students in the sciences are confronted with large amounts of new material which they need to understand rather than simply memorize. For example, in chemistry, students need to understand both the structure of an organic compound and its spectrum. Some students painstakingly memorize all the chemical shifts associated with many different functional groups, but fail to learn the underlying patterns which make it easy to remember them: they have learned much of the detailed information but completely missed the basic principles. In discussion sessions in the sciences, students need to have important concepts not only explained to them, but also emphasized, repeated, and otherwise differentiated from the rest of the material.
In addition to the general guidelines outlined above, the following strategies have proven successful for discussions in the sciences:

- Ensure students’ background knowledge: repeat the main points of the lecture. The bulk of class time can then be spent discussing and explaining the topics at an intermediary level to reach most students.

- Review topics for the problem set. If the discussion session takes the format of a problem session, a quick review of the topics upon which the problem set was formulated may help.

- Put an outline on the board. An outline of the topics to be discussed can be written to one side of the board. This helps students follow the material and keeps their thoughts organized as you move on to new topics.

- Engage your students by encouraging them to answer their own questions. This means that you will need to guide them.

- Try to break down a question into a logical sequence of smaller and simpler questions, which they can grasp and answer more easily. For example, if one of your students asks, “What is the product of this reaction?,” you might begin by asking her, “What are the functional groups of the reactants?,” and then, “What are some of the reactions which these functional groups undergo?,” and then, “Why might some of these reactions be more likely than others under these particular reaction conditions?,” and so on. At each stage a very simple question can bring your student closer to an answer to the original question.

- Consider inviting your entire class to participate in this discussion.

Sources


How do I plan for a lively and interesting discussion that can also be a learning experience for my students?

Is it possible to have an unpredictable session and yet remain in control?

How do I help students prepare for the discussion?

Discussions are an ideal way to learn facts, share experiences, solve problems, reach a consensus, and acquire insights and knowledge through the face-to-face exchange of information. Class discussions provide students with learning opportunities as they articulate their ideas, respond to their classmates’ points and develop skills in critical evaluation of evidence and perspectives.

In the ideal discussion session each participant feels that his/her ideas are worthwhile, and all participants should experience strong interest in contributing to the discussion. While a stimulating discussion is spontaneous and unpredictable, it requires careful planning on the part of the instructor: governance should be “invisible” so that the discussion may progress as a well-organized, intellectual adventure with clear goals and stimulating outcomes. In addition, the instructor should create a “safe” environment, where students can test ideas, and react to new perspectives.

Through discussions students gain practice in thinking through problems and organizing concepts, in formulating arguments and counter-arguments, in testing their ideas in a public setting, in evaluating the evidence of their own and others’ positions, and in responding thoughtfully and critically to diverse points of view.

**Before the Course Begins**

Meet with the professor and discuss his/her expectations regarding the role of discussion in the course. For example:

- Establish whether or not participation in the discussion section is mandatory.
- There are several types of discussion sections, each with its own purpose. Determine from the professor what is the goal of the discussion section that you will lead: Review or interpret material covered in lectures? Focus on specific readings? Encourage application of course materials to the problems of everyday life? Develop analytical skills? Motivate students to engage in the writing of a research paper?

**Planning and Preparing for the Discussion**

- Decide what kind of discussion is most useful to your class.
- Is there a specific topic to be discussed?
- Does the group have to reach a conclusion or come to an agreement?
- Is there subject matter that must be learned?
- Is the discussion a forum for expressing and comparing views?
- Is it important that the students carefully analyze the topic or that they learn certain skills?
Creating Good Environments for Discussions

- Plan how you will conduct each discussion session:
  - Devise assignments to prepare students for discussion.
  - Compose a list of questions to guide and focus the discussion.
  - Prepare specific in-class activities (such as group-work or brainstorming).
  - Have in mind three or four ways to begin the discussion (if your first way fails, try another).
  - To renew students’ attention and heighten their motivation, plan to shift activities after twenty minutes if student interest and participation are waning.

At the Beginning of the Course

- Learn your students’ names quickly and encourage them to learn each other’s names as quickly as you do. If you have a large class make a seating chart.
- Discuss and define the role of discussion in the course.
- Describe students’ responsibilities: make it clear that you expect everyone to participate, that the discussion will be more worthwhile if students come to class prepared, and that discussion time is conducted in an environment without fear, where students recognize that they are part of a community of learners actively engaged in exploring a topic.
- Explain the ground rules for participation (must students raise their hand to speak? Do they have a choice not respond when called upon to speak ["Please call on me later."]?).
- Give students pointers about how to participate in a discussion so that they may understand the value of listening carefully, of tolerating opposing viewpoints, of suspending judgment until all sides have spoken, of realizing that often there is no one right answer or conclusion, and of recognizing that they have not understood a concept or an idea.
- Help students prepare for discussion:
  - Distribute four to six study questions for each reading assignment.
  - Ask students to conduct a “fact-finding” mission to gather factual evidence that clarifies a particular concept or problem.
  - Ask students to come to class with a one- or two-paragraph position piece or several questions they would like to hear discussed.
  - Show a videotape of a good discussion session in which people with a variety of perspectives and political viewpoints discuss important issues.

Sources


Encourage Everyone to Participate

- Restate what someone has said if it is not clear to you or to the class.
- Plan to bring out all ideas and facts supporting all sides during the discussion, and then try to put them together in a way that makes sense.
- Use what students say, perhaps reshaping it, to direct or divert the conversation.

Try to Understand All Sides of the Issue

- Seek out differences of opinion, look for contrasting points of view: they enrich the discussion.
- Be sympathetic and understanding of students’ views.
- Encourage students to seek the best answer rather than try to convince other students.
- Avoid disrupting the flow of thought by introducing new issues; instead, wait until the present topic reaches its natural end. If you wish to introduce a new topic, warn the students that what you are about to say will address a new topic, and that you are willing to wait to introduce it until everyone has finished commenting on the current topic.
- Encourage students to change their mind when the evidence clearly indicates that they should do so.
- Look at process as well as analysis – this helps students understand what is happening in the discussion and know that everyone has responsibility for the group process.

Listen Carefully to What Students Say

- Content, logic, and substance: is the student sensitive to the strengths and weaknesses of his/her presentation?
- Nuance and tone, including the speaker’s degree of authority or doubt and degree of emotion or commitment: is the student involved with or removed from the subject matter?
- How the comment relates to the overall discussion: does it build on previous points and strengthen the flow of the discussion?
- Opportunities for moving the discussion forward: do students agree or disagree with what has been said?
Prevent Discussion from Deteriorating into a Heated Argument

- Diffuse arguments with calm remarks:
  1. “Let’s slow down a moment;”
  2. “Hold on. Give Russ a break. It’s not helpful when five people jump all over what their classmate says;”
  3. “It seems that we need to identify those areas we can agree upon and those areas where we disagree. Let’s start with those things we all agree with;”
  4. “This isn’t getting us anywhere. Those who want to continue on this point can do so later, outside of class. Let’s move on to a new topic;”

Think About and Watch Students: Their Eyes, Their Bodies – What are They Experiencing?

- What is the mood of the class as a whole?
- What is left unsaid?

Sources


What do I need to do to ensure that the principles behind each experiment in the lab ties in with the lecture material?

How do I ensure that everyone in the lab follows the safety rules?

How do I maintain both order and student interest in the lab?

The lab teaching assistant is a critical staff partner in teaching a science course. Most labs meet weekly and last 3 to 4 hours, so the TA is the department representative who usually knows the students the best because the TA has the most direct, one-on-one contact with the students on a regular basis.

The TA sets the tone for the lab group and helps determine how much students glean from the lab. The level of satisfaction students derive from their lab experience can affect their performance in the lecture part of the course. A good lab TA helps students with the mechanics of running the experiment, makes a link between the lab and lecture material, and welcomes student questions.

A lab is usually noisy and a little chaotic, so patience and humor are useful assets. In addition, a good strategy for maintaining control in your lab, while encouraging students’ learning, includes the following elements:

- Be clear on lab policies, know the material, and conduct the experiment yourself.
- Safety first! Laboratory rules should be strictly enforced because they are designed entirely for the safety of the class.
- Understand each experiment and relate lab activities to lecture material.

Before the Course Begins

Meet with the professor and be clear on lab policies:

- Do you need a tour of the lab to find out where the supplies are located, how to get equipment, and which are the potential hazards (high voltage electricity, corrosive chemicals)?
- What are the course policies?
- What exactly does the professor expect as far as grading, attendance, and group work? Plan to communicate this information to the students.
- Will you be asked to prepare (or help prepare) laboratory guides and lab report forms?
Before Each Lab

• Know the material: study the theories and methodologies being covered in order to be prepared for students’ questions.

• Do the lab experiment yourself. This is the only way to familiarize yourself with the assignment (in some cases, the lab manuals are unclear, or may not provide detailed descriptions).

• Anticipate problems and practice explaining procedures or difficult theories.

• Give yourself time to set up. You might need to arrive early and make sure that the lab is properly set up for the day’s experiment.

Mechanics of Running the Experiment

• Safety first! Safety enforcement is the number one priority for a lab TA. It is imperative that your students understand the hazards of a lab situation and correspondingly obey the rules set forth by the instructor and the TA. Emergency procedures should be thoroughly reviewed.

• Constant watchfulness is usually required to strictly enforce safety rules.

• Everyone present in the lab must obey all safety rules: students, faculty, and teaching assistants.

• Safety equipment must be used when required (cf. constant watchfulness).

• Ensure that students know and respect your authority. This is the best way to secure the safety of all involved. It may be necessary to keep reminding yourself of this because, in the lab situation, you work closely with individual students and may easily come to see them as peers.

• Stress cleanliness. Cleanliness goes hand-in-hand with safety. A lab where sharp objects, chemicals, reagents, or waste are not properly stored or disposed is a dangerous place.

During the Lab

• Clearly communicate course policies to the students. Outline your grading methods, the course requirements, and how students should write and submit their results. Review safety policies and explain how to use and care for laboratory equipment.

• Keep introductory comments succinct, indicate how the lab relates to the previous lecture(s), and what the procedure entails.

• Start with explanations. Present any theory that needs to be discussed, explain the experiment, and take questions.

• Make the objectives of each experiment clear. These should not be a secret. Tell your students what they are expected to find. Review the procedures for the day’s experiment.
• If applicable, explain the relevance of the experiment to real life. This will make the lab more meaningful to students. Or ask students to think how their results apply to a larger scientific question.

• Wherever possible, point out interesting historical aspects of the experiment: e.g., “Galileo did this whole experiment using a cathedral lantern for a pendulum and his pulse for a watch!”

• Circulate throughout the room and see how students are doing. Ask conceptual and analytical questions to determine what students know and to clarify what confuses them. For example you might ask students not only what they are doing, but why a certain aspect of the procedure might be necessary, and why they would expect this outcome. If the students cannot answer a question relating to the experiment, try to work through the problem until they are asked to demonstrate proper techniques. Be willing to help with problems and questions before they develop into failures or catastrophes.

• Maintain a current open lab grade book during lab time so that students can check their progress.

• Although, in some cases, staff is responsible for the cleaning of labs after the class has met, there may be times when students are responsible for cleaning work areas. Consider assigning individual students to clean specific areas each week and rotate the responsibility throughout the semester.

• The amount of material covered during the laboratory period should not exceed the time available. Keep the students to a schedule. If you do not want to spend all day (and all night) in a lab you must encourage your students to proceed through the experiment in a timely fashion. Make sure they know approximately how much time each step should take. Emphasize that they should finish by a certain time; then call out the remaining time at regular intervals. If the experiment requires groups of students, have a student in each group collate data on the board for the entire class. In this way, the variability of data is appreciated and generalizations may be drawn.

• Have students help each other. Depending on student capabilities, it is sometimes a good idea to encourage them to address some of their more straightforward questions to each other rather than to you.

• Set a good example by practicing and insisting on lab safety, cleanliness and courtesy.

Sources


Self-Assessment

- Display a working knowledge of the material and lab techniques.
- Clearly explain how to use the lab equipment.
- Explain possible lab hazards, and insist on safe practices.
- Provide clear, appropriate instructions before or during the lab.
- Use the teaching techniques of demonstration, illustration, and strategic questioning effectively.
- Grade lab reports fairly and return them promptly.
- Remain attentive to the needs of all the students in the lab.
- Answer student questions, offer encouragement and useful advice during lab activities.

Assessing the Lab’s Contributions to Student Learning

- Students have sufficient access to equipment and supplies needed for experiments.
- The lab experience stimulates student learning and interest.
- The lab experiences of the course are designed so that students have the opportunity to do additional experimenting on their own.
- Lab activities are sufficiently challenging so as to encourage critical thinking.

Assessing Lab Experiments and Activities Related to the Lectures

- The lab experience adds to students’ understanding of the course.
- Lab activities investigate problems that come up in the lecture sessions of the course.
- The results of the lab activities are discussed in the lecture sessions.
- The lab manual contributes to understanding and completion of the experimental activity.

Assessing the Conditions of the Lab

- The lab equipment is adequate, reliable and safe.
- There is enough equipment for all the lab groups.
- The lab environment (i.e. arrangement, space, heat, light) is conducive to the activities planned for the lab period.

Questions students will ask during the first lab:

- If I can’t make it to lab one week, can I go to another TA’s lab to do the work?
- If I miss a lab, how can I make up the work?
- Will the professor grade the lab work, or will you?
- If I can’t finish the experiment during lab, can I keep working after class?
How does teaching in a studio differ from traditional classroom teaching?

As students develop their project(s) will they expect to be given a set of guidelines to follow?

What is an effective peer critique?

**The Learning Environment in a Studio Classroom**

In a studio course, the processes of learning and creating are as important as the product. Often students work on their assignments during class time. Learning evolves over time in successive cycles of action and reflection. Students might rework an assignment several times, to learn and to practice techniques and skills, both during class and on their own. Through discussions and critiques students learn how to talk about and evaluate their work.

A studio course typically includes some work days – that is, days when the students work on their assignments during class. Before the work day, establish guidelines for how the time will be used:

- Emphasize that the students need to attend class.
- Tell the students what preparations they need to make for the work day: do they need special supplies? Do they need to bring research to class?
- Indicate the assignment’s objectives and immediate goals.
- What process they use in completing the assignment is as important as the product. For you to evaluate that process, you must be present to witness it, because most creative processes are not documented as experiments in a lab notebook. It is advantageous for both you and the students to be able to talk about the process during the experience, rather than after the fact.
- Students should be told if the assignment will be critiqued and what the topic of the critique will be.

**Critiquing the Assignment**

A distinguishing feature of studio classrooms is the practice of peer reviewing or critiquing. Before you bring your students together for a critiquing session, share with them the general goals of the critique and the specific requirements and guidelines that they should focus on for each project. Effective peer critiquing requires planning on your part. First-year students, in particular, may find the idea of publicly sharing their projects or their writing intimidating or confusing. Forethought on your part will help you avoid sessions that become unproductive or frustrating.
The timing of critique sessions may need to be determined in advance. A critique session could occur at the intermediary stage of the first major project: students’ peers and you can give some direction for further revision and reshaping to be completed before students submit a finished assignment. Alternatively, it could be scheduled at the end of the first major project, when students can reflect on the project as a whole and consider alternative and future directions. Finally, midterm and finals are other times to consider critiquing: these are good points at which to consider an instructor-student conference, so that you can give individual attention to a student’s work.

What Type of Critique to Use

Critiques can be structured in a variety of ways: large-group sessions, small groups, one-on-one formats, and either oral or written feedback. Each type has both advantages and disadvantages, depending on the type of project to be critiqued, how familiar students are with critiquing, classroom dynamics, and the time available.

- **Large-group critiques:**
  Involve the entire class. They can be especially useful if you want to model the process itself. The particular advantages of large-group sessions are that many viewpoints can be expressed and you can facilitate discussion more readily. However, large-group sessions take longer, so time considerations may require you to use small groups (groups of three or four) instead. Another disadvantage is that some students will be less assertive and less at ease speaking in large groups.

- **Small group sessions:**
  In addition to encouraging quieter students to participate and managing classroom time more efficiently, small-group sessions have the advantage of being more intimate, in that students oftentimes respond more candidly to one another’s work. Be aware that small groups function less effectively if the members are friends or if they all tend to be quiet. Appointing a group leader to facilitate, or working out good “mixes” of students, will help avoid such problems.

- **One-on-one sessions:**
  Using student pairs for one-on-one sessions is effective for students who would benefit from having just one other student act as a sounding board, observer, and listener in helping them solve a troublesome problem or approach. Student pairs can reduce the anxiety of large-group sessions and allow students to concentrate on just one other project. One-on-one critiques between the student and you allow the student to understand the project.

- **Oral or written feedback:**
  Whether you decide to use oral or written critiques, or a combination of both, will depend on the time constraints, whether the critiques are intended to be formal or informal, whether you think students will benefit from having a record of the discussion, and whether written critiques could help students to articulate the cognitive processes in addition to their personal reactions.
Participation Guidelines

Fostering an atmosphere of mutual support, trust, and respect is key to a productive critique, but it requires some ground rules and guidelines for participation. Make students aware of these rules prior to the session. Some guidelines to consider are the following:

- Everyone should be expected to participate.
- Both strengths and weaknesses of the assignment should be discussed.
- Comments should never be personal, but instead directed at the work.
- Disagreements will develop and some comments will be subjective, but critiques are discussions, not evaluations.
- In large-group sessions the critique should be focused and relatively brief.
- If the class becomes too divided over an issue, or if a situation of class-versus-instructor develops, try to refocus the discussion by asking questions; or end the discussion temporarily, and indicate that you will return to it later but that the class needs to move on.

Summarizing the Objectives

A summary and self-evaluation are important components of critiques. The following concluding steps may help students in summarizing the assignment’s objectives:

- You can prompt a brief summary at the end of each student’s critique by asking the student what she or he thinks are the particular strengths and weaknesses of the project and how it might be revised.
- Solicit responses from the student about the assignment – where did he or she have difficulties and what worked successfully? It might be beneficial for you to solicit a critique of the assignment itself from the entire class.
- Ask students to relate the current project to future assignments and goals. This will help them recognize that the particular processes, skills, and knowledge they applied on the current project are a foundation upon which to base their next level of learning.

Critiquing a Tool for Learning

There are several ways to collaborate with peers in a studio environment:

- Students begin to develop a self-reflective response to their own work. As they receive constructive feedback they redirect or revise their approach to their project, so they can continue with the next steps toward completion.
Peer critiquing can strengthen the skill of critical judgement in that students will learn to make informed responses to a variety of aesthetic approaches. Furthermore, peer critiquing contributes to the affective aspects of learning. As students begin to understand their roles and responsibilities in critiquing, they likely will become more self-confident, more independent, and more open-minded in their responses and attitudes toward enquiry.

The emphasis on learning as a process (and not merely as a product) is enhanced as students begin to recognize learning as successive cycles of action and reflection.

Source


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**TIPS ON...**

**Grading the Studio Assignment**

Grading in many studio courses is less objective than in courses where grades are based on written tests. In a studio course, grades are given based on a variety of criteria. Since the creative process itself is also important in many studios, the product is not the only variable:

- Include your criteria for grading in the syllabus, then stick to them.
- The same criteria should apply to everyone in the class; you cannot change them from individual to individual.
- What progress the student makes from the beginning to the end of the semester might be important.
- Work ethic, attitude, effort, and risk taking might also be factors.
How can I ensure that all students can hear and understand me?

How can I establish feedback loops within my class?

Two elements of teaching can help you energize large classes: attention to self-presentation and incorporation of discussion.

An Illuminating Experiment

In 1997, psychology professor, Stephen J. Ceci at Cornell University conducted an experiment (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 3/11/97). He taught one course in exactly the same way he had the previous term – same texts, tests, and grading standards; he changed only one variable – his mode of presentation. He spoke and gestured more enthusiastically.

What was the outcome of this experiment? His students’ opinions of his teaching skyrocketed. Dr. Ceci concluded that one should be suspicious of student evaluations. But surely, his experiment also illustrates the fundamental importance of presentation style in the classroom.

Presentation and Basic Theatre Exercises

As a teacher, you must be aware of how you are presenting your material. Physical and vocal energy, clear enunciation, fluid gestures and expressive body language all help you present complex ideas to your students. They are also the stuff of actor training. So why not adapt basic theatre exercises to the needs of the classroom?

Let us review four points:

Relaxation

Physical relaxation sets the stage for successful public speaking as well as for performance. Physical tension, in contrast, fosters stage fright. One simple technique that is nonetheless always productive is to take a series of deep, long breaths before you enter the classroom. You will find an increase in your focus and a decrease in any nerves. Further, avail yourself of workshops that teach relaxation and yoga in order to leave your daily concerns at the door.

Vocal Projection

When teaching large classes, you must ensure that all students can hear and understand you as you speak. To accomplish this goal, you should focus on your vocal projection. With proper projection even the student furthest from you will hear and understand. How is this accomplished? Most people believe that they must speak loudly in large rooms. However, loudness, as in operatic singing, depends on vowels, which carry sound but not meaning. The secret to projection lies in crisp articulation with special attention paid to consonants.

Choose a passage from a book or newspaper, a poem, anything you like, and read it so slowly that you elongate every vowel and enunciate every consonant. (Pay attention to how mobile your face becomes.) Now speed up your reading without losing clarity in the consonants. This exercise, when practiced daily, develops the habit of good articulation.
Awareness of Space
Know that, when you speak, you command the entire room, not just the podium behind which you stand. Look out over the crowd and speak to the last person in the last aisle. Consider walking through the room as you speak to encourage the attention of all.

Reactive Attention to the Behavior of the Audience
As you look around the room, catching eyes here and there, begin to build a feedback loop: observe what your listeners are doing. Are they leaning forward, fiddling with their belongings, sleeping, talking? Their behaviors are your cues to adjust and react. You might speed up or slow down, throw in a joke, ask a question, and, afterward, allow for the moment of silence in which your students collect their thoughts.
Courses with Service-Learning

What is “Service-learning?”

As its name suggests, service-learning is a teaching method that integrates community service and classroom learning in such a way that the community service is more informed by theoretical and conceptual understandings and the classroom learning is more informed by the realities of the world.

Service-learning finds its roots in a tradition of voluntary service within higher education that seeks to provide support to communities with limited resources and, in some cases, to work toward broader goals of achieving social justice. However, service-learning differs from traditional community service programs in that the service-learning students’ work in the community is tied to clearly-defined curricular and educational goals.

Similarly, service-learning builds on experiential education approaches, including internships, lab work and other out-of-classroom instruction, yet it is uniquely focused on providing students with learning experiences that contribute to the “greater good.”

How might service-learning benefit my students?

When effectively implemented, service-learning is associated with several positive outcomes for students:

- Service-learning enhances students’ communication skills, leadership abilities and sense of self-efficacy (Astin & Sax, 1998; Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000).
- Service-learning promotes critical thinking skills and the ability of students to apply concepts and theories to the “real world” (Eyler & Giles, 1999)
- Service-learning challenges stereotyped thinking and facilitates interracial understanding (Astin & Sax, 1998; Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000).
- Service-learning strengthens students’ sense of civic duty and social responsibility (Gray, Ondaatje, & Zakaras, 1999)

The key words here are “effectively implemented.” Simply sending students out into the community to serve without carefully structuring the experience is unlikely to achieve the kinds of outcomes described above. Here are a few key factors to consider as you develop a service-learning course:

Meaningful community service assignments, maintained over the course of the semester

- Research indicates that service-learning assignments that require a minimum of 20 hours of service per semester, spread out over the course of the semester, are more likely to have positive outcomes for students (Gray, Ondaatje, & Zakaras, 1999).
- The community service assignment should closely correspond to the faculty member’s learning objectives for the course. For example, if in a child developmental psychology course the goal is to allow students to observe developmental principles “in action,” the service-learning assignment must be structured so that students are able to work with and observe children.
- The agency or school that agrees to host service-learning students should play an active part in defining community service assignments that are mutually beneficial to the students and the site.
Clarify for students and agency staff the differences between volunteer work (widely varying projects, not linked to specific educational goals), internships (time and labor-intensive projects, often loosely tied to educational goals), and service-learning (time-limited projects with distinct educational goals). Try to ensure that the service-learning projects are realistic given the limitations of the semester schedule and the time spent in the community each week (usually 1-4 hours).

Stay in close contact with agency staff in order to resolve any problems with students’ schedules, service assignments, etc., early on. Maintain contact throughout the semester in order to stay abreast of students’ activities.

**Note:** If you plan to allow students to choose their own service-learning sites, make clear the criteria they must use in selecting assignments that will fulfill the learning objectives of the course. Establish early deadlines by which they must submit their selection for your approval. Contact the site supervisor to discuss the course goals and the agency’s expectations for the student to make sure they are compatible.

**Pre-service training**

- Inform students about the work they will be performing in the community and provide them with any specialized training for this work, if necessary.

- Prepare students for their experiences in the community by helping them set realistic expectations. Providing information about the community, the site, the people with whom they will be working, etc., can empower students with information while reducing the fear and anxiety they may have about leaving the comfort zone of the campus.

- The learning objectives of the course should be clearly spelled out to students prior to the start of their service assignments. Letting students know what they are expected to learn through their experiences in the community -- and how they will be evaluated -- will help them to focus their observations in order to achieve these goals.

- Students need to know the logistics of their service-learning assignments in advance. Establish beginning and ending dates for the service assignment. Offer maps and bus routes to the site as well as the name and contact information for a staff member(s) who can assist the students if any problems should arise at the site. Clarify the attendance policy and whom to inform if students are going to be late or need to reschedule their assignment.

- Remind students that they act as representatives of the university when they work in the community and emphasize the importance of dressing and behaving responsibly.

**Opportunities for students to regularly reflect on their experiences**

- “Reflection” is the perhaps the most critical factor in helping students make the connection between “service” and “learning.” Provide students with ample opportunity to reflect on, write about, and discuss their experiences in- and outside of the classroom.

- Set aside class time for students to share and learn from one another’s experiences.

- Require students to keep journals or other regular writing assignments that ask them to connect what they are learning from the lectures, texts and in-class discussions with what they are observing in the community. Do not wait until an end-of-the-semester term paper to see if students were able to “get” this connection.
Provide meaningful feedback to students over the course of the semester to facilitate their intellectual and personal development. Don’t assume that students will automatically be able to apply abstract concepts and theories to their experiences in the community. Facilitate this process by questioning students’ assumptions, validating attempts to apply theory to practice, and encouraging them to develop increasingly sophisticated understandings of their experiences.

Anticipate a developmental process in your students’ intellectual and personal growth over the course of the semester and develop reflective exercises that take this process into account. Students’ early impressions of the community are often characterized by “culture shock” and an acute awareness of the differences in their own experiences and those with whom they are working. As they spend more time in the community, students tend to become more aware of shared experience, as well as the particular social and historical contexts that shape individuals’ lives (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000). In addition, keep in mind that for many students, the ability to apply theories and concepts does not come automatically. Reflective exercises assigned early in the semester should draw primarily on students’ observations and impressions, while later assignments can require increasingly complex and abstract thinking (Cone & Harris, 1996).

10 Principles of Good Practice for Service-learning Pedagogy

Principle 1: Academic Credit is for Learning, Not for Service
Principle 2: Do Not Compromise Academic Rigor
Principle 3: Establish Learning Objectives
Principle 4: Establish Criteria for the Selection of Service Placements
Principle 5: Provide Educationally-Sound Learning Strategies to Harvest Community Learning and Realize Course Learning Objectives
Principle 6: Prepare Students for Learning from the Community
Principle 7: Minimize the Distinction between the Students’ Community Learning Role and Classroom Learning Role
Principle 8: Rethink the Faculty Instructional Role
Principle 9: Be Prepared for Variation in, and Some Loss of Control with, Student Learning Outcomes
Principle 10: Maximize the Community Responsibility Orientation of the Course


Service-learning resources at USC:

USC faculty are fortunate to have many resources on campus that provide technical assistance and support for service-learning courses. A few of these resources are listed below:

- The Joint Educational Project: Since 1972, the Joint Educational Project (JEP) has placed tens of thousands of service-learning students in the community surrounding USC. JEP students work primarily as mentors, teaching assistants, or “mini-course” teachers in local schools, and receive USC course credit for demonstrating their ability to apply what they have learned in class to what they are observing or teaching in the community. In recent years, JEP staff have worked with faculty to develop a variety of service-learning experiences for their students, ranging from community-based research projects to service-learning internships. JEP can offer faculty assistance with service-learning course development, the placement and monitoring of students, the development of reflective exercises, and the evaluation process. For more information about service-learning and the Joint Educational Project, please contact the JEP House (213-740-1837) or go to JEP’s website: www.usc.edu/jep.
The Office of Civic and Community Relations: The Office of Civic and Community Relations (CCR) serves as an important link between the campus and the community, often helping to connect faculty, agencies and schools interested in developing service-learning partnerships. CCR is an excellent resource for faculty interested in learning more about resources available in the nearby University Park neighborhood. For more information about CCR, please call 213-743-5480 or visit CCR’s website: http://www.usc.edu/CCR/

The Volunteer Center: The Volunteer Center maintains a database of agencies in the greater Los Angeles area which can be a great resource for faculty researching service-learning sites for their students. In addition, the Volunteer Center offers a few short-term, intensive service-learning experiences, such as several Alternative Spring Break programs and the Immersion Weekend program. For more information, please call the Volunteer Center (213-740-9116) or visit its website: http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/faculty_partnerships/volunteer_center.html

Other helpful service-learning resources:

- American Association for Higher Education: http://www.aahea.org/
- California Campus Compact: http://www.cacampuscompact.org/
- National Campus Compact: www.compact.org
- National Service-learning Clearinghouse: www.servicelearning.org
- National Society for Experiential Education: www.nsee.org

Sources


You have prepared the course and organized the content. You have practiced and mastered the basics of good teaching. And you are ready to apply a variety of methods to your pedagogy. But how will you know what and if the students are learning?

This module will cover some of the basic principles of assessment and provide some tips on quick ways to assess student learning throughout the course. As you read, keep the following points in mind:

- Assessment gives students useful feedback on what they know and how they can learn better, and lets the instructor see in what areas students are struggling;
- Assessment should be an on-going endeavor – something you can and should do, in various forms, for the duration of the course;
- Assessment is about what students are learning, and should be linked to course goals.

**What Is Assessment?**

We commonly think of student learning assessment in terms of tests, papers, and other assignments, also known as summative assessment. This is certainly an accurate definition: we use such methods as the basis for grades assigned to students over the length of a course.

However, there is another approach, known as formative assessment. This approach is useful in giving teachers and students feedback on the nature and progress of student learning. Formative assessment techniques are not used to assign grades, but rather to gain a sense of what students have mastered and where they are struggling.

Regardless of the approach, here are some principles that are important to keep in mind:

- Your assessment should always be linked to course objectives. Whatever technique or approach you take, you should attempt to understand to what degree students are learning the material you want them to master.
- Assessment should be regular and on-going. You can combine formative and summative techniques during the course to gain regular feedback on student progress.
- Assessment should be designed to facilitate learning – for you and for your students. Your assessment should reflect on students’ learning and what help they might need, as well as give you insights into what areas to cover in greater depth and possible adjustments in your teaching style.
- You should share with the students what you have learned after each assessment. With what content did students struggle? What were common questions or misunderstandings? What will you be doing differently to facilitate student learning?

While later modules will cover summative assessment methods, the remainder of this module will provide formative assessment techniques you can try in your classroom during the semester.
Selected Formative Assessment Techniques

Formative assessment techniques are quick and easy ways for you to gain a sense of how and what students are learning; students are able to reflect on their learning and you are able to make adjustments in the course to meet your learning goals.

These techniques might be applied at regular intervals throughout the course – weekly, after each class or each unit, etc. – perhaps in coordination with summative techniques. Since you will not be grading responses, and because anonymous feedback is often more candid, allowing for anonymity can be useful. Finally, the questions you ask should be focused on student learning (“What have you learned?”) rather than on your teaching (“What do you like best about my teaching?”).

The following techniques are drawn from a book on classroom assessment by Thomas Angelo and K. Patricia Cross, Classroom Assessment Techniques (1993).

- **Background knowledge probe:**
  Use multiple choice or short-answer questions to assess the level of students’ prior knowledge on the subject matter of the course. Doing this at the start of the course will help you gain a sense of misconceptions and the degree of relevant knowledge.

- **One-minute paper:**
  Allow for two or three minutes before the end of class and ask students to respond, on a half-sheet of paper, to the following question: What was the most important thing you learned in this class today? You may also ask: What question remains unanswered (or is unclear) from class today? This gives you a sense of how students’ understanding of the class is similar to, or different from, your goals.

- **One-sentence summary:**
  Ask students to summarize the “who, what, where, when and why” of something (an event, a chemical process, a story plot, etc.) in one, clear grammatical sentence. This gives you a sense of their ability to analyze and synthesize information in a concise format.

- **Application cards:**
  Distribute 3x5 index cards to students and ask them to identify one real-world application of an idea, concept or principle they have just learned. This helps students connect the material to prior knowledge and lets you see whether they understand the applicability of the concept.

- **Student-generated test questions:**
  Have students prepare two or three test questions with model correct answers. You will be able to see what students believe the main ideas of the course are, what they believe are fair test questions, and what is their ability to answer the questions.

- **Pro-con grid:**
  Have students create two columns and generate a list of pros and cons on a particular topic. This process helps students see multiple sides of contentious issues and gives you a sense of their depth of understanding.
Sources


Module 4.1
Assessing Student Learning

TIPS FOR...

Engaging Classes
• Reward behavior you want with praise, feedback on exams or papers, or a personal note.
• Use a light touch: smile; tell a good joke.
• Ask a question directed to one student and wait for an answer.
• Stage a change-your-mind debate with students moving to different parts of the classroom to signal change in opinion during discussion.
• Tell about your current research interests, how they relate to your current teaching topics, and how you reached those interests from your beginnings in the discipline.

Effective Lecture Presentation
• Cue important ideas by varying speech rate, volume and pitch.
• Speak to students and not the blackboard, walls, notes, or floor.
• Let your sense of humor show.
• Avoid repetition of pet words or phrases (e.g. “okay,” “you know,” “you know what I mean”).
• Establish and maintain eye contact with your students.
• Use gestures and physical movements which complement your verbal statements (e.g. looking at students while asking for student questions, waiting for students to respond to your questions)
• Practice in advance with audio visuals.
• Avoid distracting gestures or physical movements (e.g., grooming, pacing).

Making Homework and Assignments Useful
• Allow students to get into small groups and discuss the assignment after you have given it to them.
• Have students take a short test or write a brief paper early in the semester and return it to them, with feedback, at the next class.
• Create homework problems that allow students to practice for the next test.
• Encourage students to share ideas on how to solve problems.
• Have students read and comment on drafts of one another’s papers.
Assignments and Homework

Writing assignments and homework are two of the most common ways in which instructors give students an opportunity to develop, apply and demonstrate new knowledge. These assignments can take many forms: short papers, research papers, problem sets, lab reports, and so forth. Such assignments are also an important means of summative assessment, providing us with grades that we hope reflect students’ level of effort and learning.

For these reasons, assignments and homework are an important part of the learning process. Therefore, they deserve a fair degree of attention on your part if you hope to make your course a valuable learning experience for students. This module will walk you through some of the basics of preparing and presenting homework and writing assignments. It is important to keep three main points in mind:

- You should be clear and specific with students about what your goals and expectations are for each assignment;
- The nature and construction of each assignment should reflect the learning goals you articulated when you created the course;
- The assignments you create for students should be challenging but not intimidating or overwhelming.

General Principles for Homework and Written Assignments

While there are important differences in the format and nature of homework and written assignments, both are directed at giving students the opportunity to develop and display particular skills and knowledge. And both have, as their main goal, the facilitation of student learning.

Thus, despite differences, certain general principles apply if you want the assignments you create to be effective learning tools:

- Present each assignment verbally and in writing. Presenting the assignment to students verbally gives them a chance to ask you questions and discuss any concerns they may have. A written handout allows you to state your expectations in greater detail and gives students something to refer back to as they work.
- Clearly outline your expectations. The written handout (one for each assignment) should clearly articulate what you expect from students, and how they will be graded.
- Test the assignment on yourself and others. If you are assigning problem sets, solve them yourself to see where students might struggle and where directions are unclear. If you are giving a written assignment, read the directions and/or have friends do so to help you make sure that what you have written is specific and easily understood.
• Consider having multiple, shorter assignments. Particularly early in the term, it can be useful to have many, smaller assignments as opposed to few, larger ones. Shorter assignments seem less intimidating to students.

They also give students a chance to learn your standards and expectations, and such assignments enhance student motivation by minimizing the damage a poor grade (on any one assignment) can do to their learning experience.

• Consider separating the tasks for younger learners. In lower division classes, where students are still being exposed to college-level work, break large projects into chunks. Rather than assigning a term paper and waiting to collect it at the end of the term, have students first write a proposal, then compile a bibliography, then submit a first draft and then turn in the final paper. In the sciences, you might have students write an analysis of one experiment, then another, and then compare the two (Davis, 1993).

• Create realistic problems for students to work through. You can help students see the direct application of the knowledge by giving them “real life” situations to work on. For instance, rather than asking architecture students to write about architectural excellence, ask them to draft a memo to a potential client about the criteria for excellence and how this can be judged (Davis, 1993).

• Track where students succeed and struggle. As you read papers and grade problem sets, keep notes on which ideas or problems students do well with, and where they have difficulty. You can share this with students to facilitate their learning and it will help you in constructing future assignments.

Written Assignments

Written assignments include such things as reaction papers, analytical papers, and research or term papers. They are usually constructed around some question or issue that students are expected to respond to or discuss in some detail.

The following are some suggestions that you can use to make sure that the assignments you create and present are as effective and useful as possible:

• Be clear in defining the task you want students to undertake. Generally, this means you must be very careful in the verbs you ask students to use. For instance, asking students to discuss charter schools is vague and broad; they have little direction or sense of what you want to see. However, if you ask them to compare and contrast two of the competing schools of thought in the debate over charter schools, or to select and evaluate one position, they have a more detailed sense of what you want them to do.

• Be clear about your expectations for the assignment. The written handout should cover a range of questions. What type of paper is this (memo, essay, annotated bibliography, etc.)? How long will it need to be (in number of words rather than pages)? Will it need to be typed? Double-spaced? What criteria will you use to grade the paper? When is it due and how will you handle late papers?
In addition, there are several considerations you should make when you assign research papers to students (Davis, 1993):

- Know what you want students to gain from the experience. Are they simply to develop a familiarity with various library resources? Is there a specific type of resource you want them to learn how to use? Should they be learning how to collect and evaluate material?

- Work with the library. You should consult the campus library to be sure that they have the resources to actually support what you are asking students to do. Nothing is more frustrating than having the instructor require a citation from a particular journal only to find that the library does not carry it. Reference librarians are also often eager to teach a class on library resources and basic research skills.

- Do not put students in competition for the same material. If you want all students to use one particular article or book, put multiple copies on reserve or distribute copies in class.

- Break the research paper into smaller tasks. As noted above, younger students in particular may have trouble being told to “write a paper” and then hearing nothing until it is actually due. You can ease the learning process by identifying the key steps in developing a paper (topic identification, data collection, outline, draft, final product) and collecting products along the way to help students progress.

Homework

There are no hard-and-fast rules for how much homework (reading, writing, problem sets, etc.) students should be assigned. As a rule of thumb however, the expectation is that students will do two to three hours of work for each hour of in-class time (Davis, 1993).

- Determine when you prefer to announce homework. Some instructors like to present all the homework assignments to students at the start of the term (so students can allocate their time) while others distribute them piece-by-piece. Some instructors like to hand out assignments at the start of class while others prefer to do so at the end.

- Coordinate the homework with lectures and readings. Do not give students homework problems when you have not yet covered that material in class or in assigned readings. Homework should be a chance for students to apply knowledge and skills they have learned.

- Create a reasonable, even load of homework. Distribute assignments over the course of the term rather than having them compressed near the beginning, middle or end of the semester.
• Make the first assignment a review. Doing this allows you to assess students’ prior knowledge. You can then talk with students for whom the course may not be appropriate and gauge your teaching to the overall level of student knowledge.

• Balance routine and challenging problems. Too great a concentration of either type of problem will cause students to be frustrated and lose interest. Mix problems that force students to think with some that build their confidence and let them practice basic skills.

• You can grade selectively. It is not necessary for you to grade every part of every problem set. You might, for instance, tell students you will grade three problems on every homework but that the others are also fair game for quizzes and tests.

• Collect the homework at the start of class when it is due. If you wait until the end of the class session, students will feel they can come late and still get the assignment in “on time.”

• Vary the type of homework you assign. It is not necessary always to assign problem sets to students. You might periodically ask them to summarize the main concepts or ideas from the course up to that point. This helps them synthesize and reflect on what they have been learning.

• Be prompt in returning homework. If you expect students to submit material to you on time, then you must be prompt in returning it to them. In addition, feedback on assignments is most useful to student learning when it comes within a reasonable time period of when the work was turned in.

• Find out how long students are spending on homework. It is easy for teachers to underestimate the amount of time homework will take students to complete. Make it a point to check in periodically with the students to find out how much time most of them are spending to complete the assignment.

Source

How do I know what I’m teaching?

How can I construct effective test questions?

While we are all familiar with what it is like to take a test, few of us have ever actually designed and administered a test. This is an important skill for teachers to have, because a well-constructed test can be an accurate barometer of what students have learned and can facilitate further learning.

There are other benefits to tests as well. Tests help:
- motivate students and structure their efforts by making clear your goals as a teacher;
- give you feedback on how successful you have been at presenting the material;
- reinforce learning by giving students feedback on their work;
- ease the final grading process by giving you data on students’ progress over the term.

This module will present ways you can design and administer tests in a manner that will help you assess and facilitate student learning. Keep in mind:

- Tests should typically measure the learning objectives you have identified as you planned the course.
- Test writing can be as challenging and time consuming as grading, and it is often more important to student learning.
- Different types of test questions assess different kinds of understanding, and the most effective tests integrate a variety of question types.

Designing Tests

One of the most underestimated aspects of testing is the process of design. A well-designed test can be a useful learning tool for students; a poorly designed test, by contrast, can create a frustrating experience that only assesses students’ abilities to take it.

Some basic tips for designing tests include:

- Create new tests each time you teach a course.
  Each time you teach a course, you probably do so a little bit differently; different ideas and concepts are emphasized. Using old tests usually means you are not testing on what you have actually taught.

- Leave yourself time to write the test.
  Do not write the test the night before it is to be taken. Give yourself one to two weeks to refine the test questions and format.

- Create a bank of questions during the term.
  You do not need to wait until just before an exam to write the questions. If you pay attention to the questions and discussion in class, you will probably have ideas after each class about what the students are comprehending as well as what they are questioning. Write test questions down as they come to you. This helps to ensure that you test all of what you have taught, covers what the students know and should know, and saves you work down the road.
• Pay attention to the layout of the exam. The layout should be clear, crisp and easy to read. If you have different kinds of questions, group them together. If point values change, state what the value is for the question(s) as appropriate.

**What Will You Test?**

The first step in designing an effective test is clarifying just what it is you want to evaluate. This means asking two questions:

• What content do you want the students to know?
• What do you want them to be able to do with the content (recall, discriminate, analyze, etc.)?

What you decide should be largely in line with the course goals and objectives you mapped out at the start of the term. These goals state what students should know and should be able to do, and they have presumably driven what you have taught.

At the same time, the class will invariably take on a life of its own. The goals you identified before the class may not reflect all that has been taught. Students will struggle with topics and ask questions you had not anticipated – and you may even have decided not to cover all of the goals as a result. You must be ready to look beyond your goals as you design your tests.

**How Will You Test?**

Different types of questions, and different kinds of tests, are better suited to testing certain skills. In addition, the various forms of questions available to you have their own practical strengths and weaknesses.

Objective Questions (multiple choice, true/false, matching, fill-ins): These types of questions are best at testing recall of facts and the ability to discriminate between choices. A true/false question gives a student a 50/50 chance of guessing correctly. With the exception of multiple choice items, objective questions are fairly easy to write.

Short-Answer Questions: These are useful questions to test students' recall of facts, but they can also let you see if students are able to identify the key concepts for a particular question and state them concisely, omitting extraneous information.

Essays: These are excellent formats for testing higher-level skills such as analysis, synthesis, evaluation and application. Research shows that students study more efficiently for these kinds of tests and achieve higher-level learning (McKeachie, 1999).

Problems: These questions are useful in testing application of knowledge and understanding of concepts. However, problems that are too lengthy can be tedious for students and become tests of endurance.

Performance Tests: These tests are common in the arts, where students must perform a particular skill or task. It is important that you set your criteria for assessment in advance and tell the students what these will be.

Take Home Exams: These tests allow students time to do a richer analysis of some topic. If you use them, you should set clear limits on the number of pages or words, and state whether students can collaborate or not.

It is possible, of course, for one test to combine many types of questions (e.g. objective, short answer, and partial take-home). In fact, it is probably preferable since this will permit you to test different kinds of knowledge and skills.
How Do You Construct the Questions?

Once you have a sense of what you want to test and how, it is time to begin generating the questions. Some instructors construct a matrix (content down the side, skills and objectives across the top) and check off the appropriate box each time they write a question to be sure their questions are balanced.

Here are some basic tips for constructing questions:

Multiple Choice: You should state the problem succinctly – the “stem” (the leading part) of the question should be short and direct. The correct answer should be unquestionably so (some recommend asking students to select the “best” answer) and the other possible answers you provide should be plausible.

Essay and Short-Answer: The question you pose should be a clear and concise statement of what you are looking for. Do you want students to compare two theories of cold fusion? Should they describe and explain three problems with the idea of free trade and then state their position? Davis (1993) recommends not giving students a choice of essay questions, saying it can create unnecessary anxiety and distract them from the task of answering the question.

How Many Questions Should I Give?

It is important to allow your students enough time to complete the exam comfortably and reasonably. Inevitably this will mean you must make some choices about which questions you will ask. Consider the following rules of thumb for how long students typically need to answer different forms of questions (McKeachie, 1999):

- One minute per objective-type question.
- Two minutes for a short answer requiring one sentence.
- Five to ten minutes for a longer short answer.
- Ten minutes for a problem that would take you two minutes to answer.
- Fifteen minutes for a short, focused essay.
- Thirty minutes for an essay of more than one to two pages.

You should add ten minutes or so to allow for the distribution and collection of the exam.

Administering Tests

When it is time to have students take the test, there are several things you should keep in mind to make the experience run as smoothly as possible:

- Have extra copies of the test on hand, in case you have miscounted or in the event of some other problem;
- Minimize interruptions during the exam by reading the directions briefly at the start and refraining from commenting during the exam unless you discover a problem;
- Periodically write the time remaining on the board;
- Be alert for cheating but do not hover over the students and cause a distraction.

There are also some steps that you can take to reduce the anxiety that students will inevitably feel leading up to and during an exam. Consider the following:

- Have old exams on file in the department office for students to review.
Give students practice exams prior to the real test.

Explain, in advance of the test day, the exam format and rules, and explain how this fits with your philosophy of testing.

Give students tips on how to study for and take the exam – this is not a test of their test-taking ability, but rather of their knowledge, so help them learn how to take tests.

Have extra office hours and a review session before the test.

Arrive at the exam site early, and be there yourself (rather than sending a proxy) to communicate the importance of the event.

Some instructors seek to ease anxiety by allowing students to bring in information on a 3x5 or 5x8 index card, or a single sheet of paper. They believe this helps students choose the most important ideas to write down. Others feel it provides a distraction that hurts student performance during the test. This is an individual choice you must make.

In addition, some professors give the questions to students in advance. Typically, they give a larger number of questions than will be on the exam. Students (we hope) prepare for them all, and thus learn more material than can be covered in a test.

Returning Tests

The process of returning exams can also promote student learning.

Return the exams promptly, preferably within five days, so that the material is still fresh in the students’ minds.

Discuss the general results in class. In what areas did the students do well? Where did they struggle? What does the exam tell you about what they are learning?

Have extra office hours after the exam to discuss concerns, but consider asking students to wait twenty-four hours to formulate their questions and calm down if necessary if they are upset about the results.

Sources


We know that grades often cause anxiety for students. Receiving grades can be an emotional experience. While some students view it as a limited assessment of their work on one item, others take grades to heart and see them as reflections on their personal worth and success.

As difficult as grades can be for students, the grading process is also hard for teachers – particularly new ones. If you are grading for a professor, you wonder how to do so fairly and efficiently. If you are creating a course, you worry about how much to weigh different projects, assignments and exams.

However, if you are able to keep some basic principles in mind, grading can be an experience that enhances student learning. This module will address some important elements in the process of evaluating and grading students. Among the main points are:

• Evaluating student work is about more than simply assigning grades — comments that explain your assessment, and a willingness to have conversations about ideas, are important.

• You must be clear up front about your grading standards — explaining what level of performance is necessary for an “A,” for example.

• The goal of evaluating student work is to encourage students to continue learning, not to provide harsh feedback that decreases their intrinsic motivation.

**General Principles**

We will consider selected elements of effective grading below. However, first it may be useful to present some important basic ideas in assessing student work:

Your grading standards should reflect course goals. If your course is designed to emphasize analysis and integration of ideas, then your assignments should reflect this. In addition, your criteria for grades should also be built around the degree to which students analyze and integrate ideas.

Your grading standards should be clearly stated. You should articulate, early in the course, how students will need to perform to earn an “A”: for example, how technically proficient must the writing be. You should also let students know the criteria for each assignment.

Give students a chance to learn your standards early. Do not wait until the mid-term to let students discover you have high standards. Assign a short paper or homework in the first two or three weeks of the term. Some professors like to grade these rigorously and give students a chance to re-write one assignment, reasoning that students will learn the course standards and perform accordingly for the remainder of the semester.

Grade only on academic performance. It is important that you grade a student’s work on its merits, not on personality, or whether he or she talks in class or is constantly arriving late, for instance.
Assignments and tests should be weighted relative to their value to course goals. As a rule of thumb, final exams or projects should be less than or equal to one-third of the final grade (Davis, 1993). Generally speaking, it is a good idea to give students a variety of types of assignments (papers, tests, homework, etc.) to demonstrate their ability and knowledge. You should weigh each according to amount of effort and its relation to course goals.

Generally, it is not a good idea to grade on improvement. Scholars (Davis, 1993; McKeachie, 1999) generally recommend against grading a student based on his or her improvement over the term, arguing that this is a difficult thing to measure. They suggest that it is possible to reward students for improvement by increasing their grade by all or part of a letter grade at the end.

When possible, use numerical rather than letter grades. It is generally easier to convert numbers to letters than vice-versa. In addition, numbers do not have the same emotional value for many students as do letter grades.

The Mechanics of Grading

As a teacher, it is important that the grades you give to student work are fair and consistent. It is also desirable, from a more selfish standpoint, to grade as efficiently as possible. These two intentions may come into conflict – grading quickly can mean that the grades you give are not always fair or consistent. While there is no quick fix for grading, there some things you can do to maximize your efficiency while grading fairly and consistently.

State your criteria explicitly. Particularly in studio classes or in evaluating writing exercises, it is important to outline what you will be looking at when you evaluate student work. Does neatness count? Is posture important? How essential is good organization?

Read several papers before you begin grading. This is helpful in gaining a sense of the overall quality of the papers. You can see whether you might be expecting too much of students, what the common problems are and so on. It is also helpful in determining “model” papers for each grade – papers that represent the performance level students much reach to earn a particular grade.

Consider “norming” papers before you grade. If you are grading in a group, have each member pick two or three papers at random for entire group to grade. Then, discuss each portfolio until you all agree on a grade. Having done this, you will have a sense of the criteria for each grade – which will help ensure consistency.

Consider grading papers anonymously. Have students turn in their work with a title or cover page with their name on it. Turn that page back on all of the assignments before you begin grading so that you will not know whose work you are evaluating.
Grade only three to five papers at a time. Our mood and our energy level inevitably affect the grades we give. To avoid boredom or getting tired, grade no more than three to five papers before taking a break. When you resume, look at the last paper to be sure you were fair and consistent as you read it.

When you have finished, “norm” all the papers yourself. If you grade papers alone, particularly over several days, it is helpful to group the papers according to grade when you are done. Do all of the papers in the same grade range (e.g. the 80s, or B-range) generally have the same level of quality? If not, now is the time to make adjustments.

For tests, problem sets and short answers, consider grading in teams. When assignments and tests have multiple problems to grade, you may save time and ensure consistency by getting together in a team and each taking two or three problems to grade on all tests. While this may be somewhat tedious, it does allow each grader to get a sense of common problems and grade more quickly by focusing one's attention.

Do not “split” grades. Some teachers like to give two or more grades on papers and assignments. For instance, one for content, the other for organization. However, this can suggest to students that the two are not connected, when in fact they are.

As suggested early in this module, commenting on student work is an important part of the educational process; simply assigning a grade is not enough – your comments tell the student why you graded as you did and how he or she can improve in the future. There are several benefits to commenting on student papers:

- Comments justify and explain the grade you have chosen to give. Students may justifiably question you when you return a paper with a “C” and no comments. They are less likely to question the grade when you have provided many comments and explained the grade.

- Comments let you give students feedback for continued improvement. Students can see what it is they need to do better or differently in the future to reach the standards for the course.

- Finally, comments can motivate and encourage students. When properly written, comments on student work can inspire them to continue working and improving as learners.

Following are some suggested ways to comment on student work from a constructive and educational perspective:

Comments should be balanced. Constructive comments generally reflect a balance between three kinds of comments: what was done well, what was weak, and how the student can improve.

Avoid over-marking student work. While you should comment frequently on student work, you must also be careful not to over-criticize. Too many negative comments can overwhelm and demoralize students. You may want to read a paper or exam first to get an overall sense of its strengths and weaknesses, and then comment on the prominent problems.
Commenting on Student Work

Gauge the tone of your comments to promote learning. Rather than writing “no!” when a student makes a mistake or is unclear, consider more constructive comments. Sometimes it may be appropriate to raise a question (“Are you suggesting this is the only reason Kennedy won the election?”) or allude to other ideas (“How does what you are saying here relate to what we have learned about gender stratification?”). Doing this encourages students to reflect and gives them a sense of how to enhance their work.

Explain the grade. Use your comments to help students understand why you graded their work as you did. For example, you might say, “While this paper has elements of excellence, occasional lapses in analysis and careless spelling errors have kept me from giving it a B.”

Write a mix of marginal and final comments. Research suggests that students learn best from a mix of marginal comments that make specific points in the text and final comments that summarize your overall impression of the work and explain the grade.

Write legibly. No matter how insightful and well-presented your comments are, they will have no effect if students cannot read them. Take time to write your comments carefully and encourage students to approach you if they have any questions.

Returning Tests and Papers

Returning students’ work does not have to be simply an administrative task that takes up valuable class time – it can in fact be a worthwhile learning experience. It provides you with a chance to give the entire class feedback that will help them see and explore relationships, applications and implications of the knowledge they have been studying.

Ask students what they thought of the test or assignment. You can begin by asking students to describe what they thought the most difficult areas of the assignment were and why. This gives you a sense of where they struggled and may need extra help.

Give students a sense of the class’s overall performance. Students typically like to know how they did in relation to their peers. Once you have graded all the work, see how the grades are distributed. Show students this distribution and talk in general terms about where the class seemed to do well and where it struggled.

Review those areas of the assignment where students struggled. If, while you grade, you keep track of those problems or ideas with which students most commonly struggled, you can take time when you return work to review some important concepts and provide the foundation for future learning.
Handling Student Complaints

Invariably, no matter how careful and consistent you are, one or more students will raise a question about the grade they have received. Most students will simply want an explanation as to why they received the grade—a clearer sense of what your standards are. They certainly deserve this.

Setting out your criteria for grades early and making comments on each assignment will help cut down on the questions you receive. However, what should you do when a student approaches you and asks to talk about his or her grade?

Keep records of student performance. It is helpful to keep your own notes on the work of each student. This will help you in tracking his or her overall performance and will allow you to be prepared should any questions arise. You should hold on to this information for several years in case there are questions even after the course is over.

Be prepared. If a student approaches you with a question, it is preferable to set up a meeting and then arrive at the meeting ready to explain your decision. Come with any notes you have on the student’s work, with an example of a model assignment or test, and with an explanation for how the student’s work did not meet that standard. Some instructors like to ask the student to submit a paragraph explaining their question and why they think the grade should be changed.

Listen to the student. When a student wants to talk about the grade, your first task is to listen to their thoughts. Students want to be heard, and you can go a long way to diffusing a potentially tense situation by listening to their concerns before making any decisions. It is also important to keep an open mind about the matter. We all make mistakes and a student may have legitimate concerns.

Respond to the student. Once you have listened, it is time to respond to the student. You may show how he or she did not meet the standards. In that case, it is helpful to turn the discussion to what they might do in the future, pointing to specific examples in their work that can be improved for later success. If you think you may want to change the grade, it is acceptable to tell the student you would like to think about it, or that you need to consult with your supervisor, but tell them when you will get back to them. Students will respect your honesty and your willingness to think about it.

Sources


What is academic dishonesty?

Can I prevent academic dishonesty in my class?

Where do I turn if I need help?

Integrity is an important component of students’ academic experience. The academic evaluation a student receives for a course becomes a permanent university student record, and it is critical that such records be accurate and consistent.

In addition, the integrity students learn and exhibit at the university will be the model for the professional integrity they practice when they complete their academic work.

While integrity involves all members of the academic community, faculty, staff, and students, you, as the teaching assistant, are uniquely positioned to teach, model, and assure integrity in students’ academic assignments.

What is Academic Dishonesty?

Academic dishonesty includes four general types of activity: cheating, dishonest conduct, plagiarism, and collusion. Academic dishonesty is not limited to the following examples:

**Cheating:**

- Copying from others during an examination.
- Communicating exam answers with another student during an examination.
- Offering another person’s work as one’s own.
- Taking an examination for another student or having someone take an examination for oneself.
- Sharing answers for a take-home examination unless specifically authorized by the instructor.
- Tampering with an examination after it has been corrected, then returning it for more credit.
- Using unauthorized materials, prepared answers, written notes or information concealed in a bluebook or elsewhere during an examination.
- Allowing others to do research and writing of an assigned paper (including use of the services of a commercial term-paper company).
Dishonest Conduct:

- Stealing or attempting to steal an examination or answer key from the instructor.
- Changing or attempting to change official academic records without proper sanction.
- Submitting substantial portions of the same work for credit in more than one course without consulting all instructors involved.
- Forging add/drop/change cards and other enrollment documents, or altering such documents after signatures have been obtained.
- Intentionally impairing, in class, the concentration of other students and/or the instructor.

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is intellectual theft. It means use of the intellectual creations of another without proper attribution. Plagiarism may take two forms, which are clearly related:

- To steal or pass off as one’s own the idea or words of another.
- To use a creative production without crediting the source.

Collusion:

Any student who knowingly or intentionally helps another student perform any of the above acts of cheating or plagiarism is guilty of collusion.

What do I do if a Student Commits an Act of Academic Dishonesty?

Before the course begins:

In your planning meeting with your professor you will want to clarify the procedures that will be used in responding to academic dishonesty. Some faculty delegate full responsibility for such matters to TAs, while others prefer to pursue such matters personally. The Office for Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards recognizes your role in reporting academic dishonesty by authority of your appointment.

Prevention, Confrontation, Reporting

Prevention: It is important that instructors take steps to prevent academic dishonesty as they set up the class and develop each assignment. For example, during the initial class meeting in which expectations and structure for the course are discussed, include a discussion of the academic standards for the course.

Confronting Acts of Academic Dishonesty: The Office for Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards can assist with various strategies for identifying and confronting cheating during exams, in out-of-class assignments or in research papers.

Reporting: Instructors have a contractual obligation to report allegations of academic dishonesty to the Office for Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards. Following appropriate reporting procedures protects instructors from accusations of misconduct and unfair grading. Specific instructions on reporting academic misconduct are outlined in Module 5.3.
General Strategies

- Make sure students know the criteria for evaluating their performance: describe acceptable and unacceptable behavior; give examples of plagiarism or of impermissible collaboration.

- Learn to recognize signs of stress in students: make students aware of campus resources that they can turn to for help if their grades are low or if they feel under pressure.

- Ensure equal access to study materials (assignments, exams, old homework assignments).

- Make sure that students feel they can succeed in your class without having to resort to dishonesty: encourage students to come talk with you if they are having difficulties.

- Discuss alternatives to cheating:
  - The Academic Support and Disability Services Program at USC offers free tutoring and learning skills instruction, and computer-assisted instruction to USC students in many classes.
  - The Writing Center offers undergraduates help in composition. Tutors are available for 30-minute appointments; however, Writing Center consultants focus on content and will not edit grammar.

Giving Tests

- Define what you mean by “cheating.” Students generally assume that if you have not prohibited a specific strategy, it will be permitted.

- Make clear the consequences of cheating.

- Make sure that you or a designated departmental staff member is in the room at all times.

- Seat students in alternate chairs if space allows – have students place personal belongings on the floor rather than on empty seats.

- Make certain that students have cleared the memories on their calculators.

- Supply scratch paper.

- Collect exams from students: do not allow students to rush chaotically to return their bluebooks.

- If the class is large, require students to sign an attendance sheet when they return their exams: count those present at the exam to make certain that the number of examinees matches the number of exams.
Examinations

- Change exam questions as often as is practical.
- Return exams and assignments to students in person.
- Keep exams, grade books and rosters safe in a locked cabinet.

Essays and Papers

- Discuss the concept of plagiarism. Clarify the distinctions between plagiarism, paraphrases, and direct citations. Clarify your expectations regarding the use of outside sources, and the proper procedures for crediting those sources.
- Assign specific topics that are likely to require new research or that stress “thinking about” rather than “looking up.”
- Limit students’ choices of broad topics (avoids their turning to commercially produced term papers).
- Change the topics or assignments from semester to semester (prevents students from appropriating an essay from someone who has already taken the course).

Demystifying Writing

- Give a short lecture on how to research and write a paper or essay (librarians can assist you significantly by offering a class on how to research a topic).
- Discuss openly in class the difficulties of writing; help students understand that the anxieties or blocks they face are a normal part of the writing process.
- During the semester schedule a variety of short in-class papers: such assignments help students develop their writing skills and help determine their abilities. Instructors who assign only one paper per semester have a hard time judging whether that assignment is the student’s own work.
- Early in the course require students to discuss with you their research or essay topic. Later in the course ask them to share outlines and how they plan to organize their ideas or findings. This approach not only helps students write better papers, but also allows you to see students’ ideas develop.
Preventing and Submitting Papers

- Discuss tutoring and proofreading: is it acceptable in your class for a student to have someone (or a computer) check assignments for spelling and grammatical errors? What about correcting awkward sentence structure? Is it acceptable for a “proofreader” to make changes to a student’s paper?

- Request that final versions of papers be handed in with drafts – ask for outlines as well.

- Specify the format for papers: Instructions for the style of the headings, footnotes, margins, and other editorial requirements discourage students from purchasing commercial papers.

- Collect papers from students during class. If papers are turned in a department or faculty office, provide the name of the individual responsible for the collection of the papers.

- Keep a copy of the corrected papers with your comments: to consult the next time you teach to identify possible pirated papers.

- Be aware of electronic “paper mills.” A good article on this topic is Bruce Lelans’s “Plagiarism and the Web” <http://www.wiu.edu/users/mfbhl/wiu/plagiarism.htm>.

Resources

Each TA should receive a copy of the student guidebook, SCampus (available online at http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS), which contains the Student Conduct Code and other policies that constitute the university’s contract with students. In addition, the booklet, Trojan Integrity – A Faculty Desk Reference, includes strategies for preventing and confronting academic dishonesty as well as the process for reporting incidents to the Office for Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards. Student publications on academic dishonesty and avoiding plagiarism are available for distribution in your classes. Copies of all resources are available from the Office for Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards (http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/).

Sources


Irvine, CA: Instructional Resources Center, University of California.


Los Angeles: Center for Excellence in Teaching, University of Southern California.
Excerpt from the online USC SCampus:
(http://web-app.usc.edu/scampus/university-governance/)

14.00 Academic Integrity Review Process
In cases involving alleged academic integrity violations, the appropriate action is initiated by the course instructor or appropriate university official.

14.10 Initiating a Complaint
If the instructor has reason to believe, based on observation or other evidence, that a student has violated the university academic integrity standards, he or she should make reasonable attempts to meet with the student and discuss the alleged violation and the evidence which supports the charge. When necessary, such discussions may be conducted by telephone or electronic mail. In this meeting every effort should be made to preserve the basic teacher/student relationship. The student should be given the opportunity to respond to the complaint.

If the violation is discovered during the final exam period, the instructor should assign a mark of “MG” until he/she has had an opportunity for such a meeting. Likewise, if the instructor’s grade penalty is a grade of “F” for the course, a mark of “MG” should be assigned if the student does not admit responsibility for the violation and accept the grade penalty.

Also, because the student may contest the allegation, he or she must be allowed to attend all classes and complete all assignments until the complaint is resolved.

14.11 Sanction and Consequences
Unless the instructor dismisses the allegation, he or she will determine an appropriate sanction for the violation.

A. Sanctions include but are not limited to: grade sanctions (e.g., “F” in course, grade reduction for course, “F” or “O” on assignment or exam) and dismissal from the academic department. In addition, sanctions of suspension or expulsion from the university may be assessed through a review process when requested by the instructor, requested by the academic or administrative unit in which the violation occurred, or when indicated by university standards (such as the seriousness of the misconduct or the existence of previous academic violations by the student).

Refer to Appendix A, Academic Dishonesty Sanction Guidelines, when determining which sanction is most appropriate for the violation.

B. Students may not withdraw from a course in which they have committed or have been accused of committing an Academic Integrity Violation. Students found to have withdrawn from a course in which an academic integrity violation is alleged or determined will be reenrolled in the course upon receipt of a violation report by the Office for Student Conduct. In addition, students found responsible for an act of academic dishonesty in a course in which they have participated but have not enrolled, will be retroactively enrolled and assigned an appropriate sanction.
C. Graduate students who are found responsible for academic integrity violations may be sanctioned more severely than Appendix A suggests. Sanctions for second offenses by graduate or undergraduate students will be more severe and generally will include suspension or expulsion.

14.12 Reporting Violations

As soon as possible (preferably within 15 days but not later than one year from the date of discovery of the incident), the instructor will provide the Office for Student Conduct with a completed Academic Integrity Violation Form. The instructor likewise will make a reasonable attempt to provide a copy of the report to the accused student.

14.13 Response to Report

Once a report of an Academic Integrity Violation has been submitted, the Office for Student Conduct will review the report, confirm whether or not the accused student has a previous disciplinary record at the university, and notify the student of the allegation in writing. A copy of the notification will be sent to the instructor submitting the report and to his/her academic dean.

A. If the incident does not require further review, the student will be notified in writing of the opportunity to meet with a staff member from the Office for Student Conduct. Subsequent to that meeting, the student has the opportunity to request a review of the matter. Such a request must be made in writing within 10 days of that meeting. If no meeting or further review is requested, the matter will be considered complete and sanctions initiated.

B. If the incident requires further review (such as when an instructor or academic unit has requested additional sanctions, when a student has previously been found responsible for an academic dishonesty violation or when university standards indicate expulsion, suspension, revocation of degree or revocation of admission), the student is notified in writing and must meet with a staff member from the Office for Student Conduct. If the student fails to respond to the written notice and to schedule an appointment with the designated member of the Office for Student Conduct, an administrative hold will be placed on the student’s record prohibiting the student from performing registration transactions until an appointment is scheduled and completed (see Section 10.10E). In addition, a Summary Administrative Review may be conducted in absentia when a student fails to respond to initial notification (see Section 12.05).

C. As indicated, reviews may be requested by the accused student, by the instructor reporting the alleged violation, by the academic or administrative unit in which the alleged violation occurred or by the university in cases where the alleged behavior indicates expulsion, suspension, revocation of degree or revocation of admission. Appropriate review processes are Administrative Review or University Review (see Section 12.00).
## Responding to Academic Misconduct

### Appendix A: Academic Dishonesty Sanction Guidelines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Violation</th>
<th>Recommended Sanction for Undergraduates (assuming first offense)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Copying answers from other students on exam</td>
<td>F for course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One person allowing another to cheat from his/her exam or assignment</td>
<td>F for course for both persons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possessing or using material during exam (crib sheets, notes, books, etc.) which is not expressly permitted by the instructor</td>
<td>F for course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing to write after exam has ended</td>
<td>F or zero on exam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking exam from room and later claiming that the instructor lost it</td>
<td>F for course and recommendation for further disciplinary action (possible suspension).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing answers after exam has been returned</td>
<td>F for course and recommendation for further disciplinary action (possible suspension).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraudulent possession of exam prior to administration</td>
<td>F for course and recommendation for suspension.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtaining a copy of an exam or answer key prior to administration</td>
<td>Suspension or expulsion from the university; F for course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having someone else take an exam for oneself</td>
<td>Suspension or expulsion from the university for both students; F for course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plagiarism</td>
<td>F for course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission of purchased term papers or papers done by others</td>
<td>F for course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission of the same term papers to more than one instructor, where no previous approval has been given</td>
<td>F for both courses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unauthorized collaboration on an assignment</td>
<td>F for the course for both students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falsification of information in admission applications (including to reapply. supporting documentation.)</td>
<td>Revocation of university admission without opportunity to reapply.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentary falsification (e.g. petitions and supporting materials; medical documentation)</td>
<td>Suspension or expulsion from the university; F for course when related to a specific course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plagiarism in a graduate thesis or dissertation. prior to graduation; revocation of degree</td>
<td>Expulsion from the university when discovered when discovered subsequent to graduation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please refer to Trojan Integrity: A Faculty Desk Reference, for more information on assessing sanctions. You may also consult with members of the Office for Student Conduct at any point in the process (213) 740-6666.

Note: The Student Conduct Code provides that graduate students who are found responsible for academic integrity violations may be sanctioned more severely than Appendix A suggests.

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CONSULTATION

Teaching Assistants are encouraged to consult with staff of the Office for Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards at any point during the semester concerning prevention strategies, assessing whether a violation occurred, confronting a student believed to have committed a violation, and filing a report. Professional staff in the office will provide information and resources, answer questions or assist in determining possible courses of action.

Office for Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards
FIG 107, MC 1265
Director: Robert Schnereger
(213) 740-6666
Email: schnereg@usc.edu

Academic Support and Disability Services Program
Student Union Suite 301, MC 0896
(213) 740-0776
(Call ahead for an appointment for learning skills)

The Writing Center
THH 321, MC 0022
(213) 740-3691
The University of Southern California is committed to maintaining an environment which is conducive to learning and scholarship and free from sexual harassment. To this end, a formal written policy has been developed that specifies certain behaviors by employees of the university, acting under the aegis of the university, which fall within the definition of sexual harassment and which are therefore subject to sanction. In addition, even though students are not covered by the public laws on this subject, behavior by students which falls within the definition of sexual harassment is also subject to sanction by the university. In addition, the university president has issued statements on sexual harassment and on tolerance, and USC has policies: (1) prohibiting sexual harassment by students, (2) committing the university to equal opportunity and nondiscrimination, (3) providing for resolution of grievances, and (4) manifesting the university’s commitment to academic freedom, academic tenure and full academic due process.

I. Policy

A. Definition of Sexual Harassment

Conduct is sexual harassment if it is an unwelcome sexual advance; request for sexual favors; or any other verbal, physical or visual behavior of a sexual nature; when:

1. Quid pro quo. Submission to such conduct is made, either explicitly or implicitly, a term or condition of an individual’s academic evaluation or employment; or submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as a basis for any academic evaluation or employment decision affecting that individual; or

2. Discriminatory abusive or hostile environment. Such conduct (intentionally or unintentionally) is severe or pervasive enough to create an objectively abusive or hostile work or academic environment: that is, an environment that some victim perceives as abusive or hostile and that a reasonable man or a reasonable woman would find abusive or hostile. Such conduct need not be directed at a particular individual.

If a complaint is made that an environment is discriminatorily abusive or hostile, the following factors will be considered: the totality of the circumstances; the frequency of the conduct; the severity of the conduct; whether the conduct unreasonably interferes with the complainant’s work or educational performance; whether the conduct was physically threatening or humiliating, or a merely offensive utterance; and its effect on the victim’s psychological well-being.

B. Participation

Participation by the harassed person in the conduct is not determinative in deciding whether or not the conduct was unwelcome; the individual may have acquiesced or consented out of fear or coercion.

C. Intent Not a Defense

It is no defense to a claim of sexual harassment that the alleged harasser did not intend to harass.

D. Types of Sexual Harassment

In the context of the definition given in the preceding Section A:

Verbal sexual harassment may include, but is not limited to, written or spoken epithets; derogatory or sexually suggestive comments or slurs about an individual’s body or dress; questions or statements about sexual activity, other than in an appropriate context such
as academic study of such activity; sexual jokes and innuendo; whistling or suggestive sounds; or persistent, rejected, requests for dates or to have sex.

Physical sexual harassment may include, but is not limited to, assault, stalking, impeding or blocking movement, physical interference with normal work or movement, touching, fondling, intentional brushing against an individual’s body.

Visual sexual harassment may include, but is not limited to, sexually suggestive objects, pictures or letters; obscene gestures; office parties with nude dancers or pornographic movies.

Some illustrative examples:

Clinical staff or students seek sexual relationships with patients or clients;
A lecturer makes a habit of touching or making sexually suggestive comments to a student;
A workspace has nude pin-up calendars and photographs or sexually suggestive objects;
An office party in the workplace includes the showing of pornographic movies;
A lecturer includes irrelevant sexually explicit slides in an audio-visual presentation;
Co-workers talk about sexual experiences or exchange sexual jokes in front of someone who is offended by them;
A co-worker makes persistent, rejected requests to date a colleague.

E. Applicability Outside the University

The academic or work relationship between the parties extends at times beyond the physical university site and beyond university work hours. Therefore, evidence of sexual harassment can include, but is not limited to, offsite or after-hours functions and events under the aegis of the university.

F. Retaliation

It is a violation of the university policy on sexual harassment to retaliate against any person for exercising the right to make a formal or informal sexual harassment complaint, to use any of the informal processes provided by the university or to testify or offer evidence connected with a complaint. Retaliation is a violation of this policy whether or not the underlying claim of sexual harassment is proven president who will take appropriate preventive or corrective action, and will notify the general counsel who may initiate a formal investigation under Section III B.

II. Complaint Procedures

Copies of the detailed procedures followed by the university in the event of a complaint being made against a student, may be obtained from the Center for Women and Men, Student Union 202, (213) 740-4900. For complaints against a faculty or staff member, please contact the Office of Equity and Diversity, Figueroa Building 202, (213) 740-5086.

Reprinted from the USC SCampus online
http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/
One of the foundations for a successful class is the textbook. Not only is choosing the right textbook important but following procedures to insure that the textbook is in stock when the class starts.

Choosing a textbook

The selection of a textbook is a highly personal matter. There can often be dozens of competing textbooks on the same subject especially for general education type courses. However, there are resources available to assist you in selecting the appropriate textbook.

1. Peers – what books did the previous instructor use? Even if you do not feel that the textbook that faculty member used will work in your class, that faculty member, having previously gone through the adoption process, might be able to recommend a different title that would more closely align with your course. Additionally, by their having gone through the adoption process, they may already have a copy of the textbook that you can borrow to evaluate it for use in your class.

2. Publishers’ representatives – although they will naturally pitch the book that their company publishes as being the best, you can question them about the contents of their textbook to see if it aligns for your class. Also, they will be able to tell you what type of ancillary support materials, i.e. Instructor’s manuals, overheads, test banks, web resources, etc., are available.

3. Amazon.com & Barnes and Noble.com – a keyword search by subject can pull up dozens of titles on a subject that you are interested in. Additionally, the web page for a book may include reviews, table of contents and occasionally sample chapters.

4. Faculty Center Network – this is a database compiled by MBS Textbook Exchange, one of the leading national textbook wholesalers. Where as Amazon and B&N are geared more toward general books, this site is geared more to textbooks. In addition to much of the same bibliographical information that you can receive on the other sites, you can also get sales and demographic details. This site can be accessed from the USC Bookstore website under Faculty Services.

Keep in mind your students when selecting textbooks. Your student’s perception of the value of the textbooks that you selected is a major component in their overall assessment of the class. These are some things to consider:

1. Integrate the Textbook – testing from and referring to the textbook in your lectures are the two most important factors students take into account when deciding on the value of a textbook. Students are often heard during book buyback stating that they never opened the book.

2. Pace the Class – if you are ordering 10 titles for a 16-week class, ask yourself can you realistically get to all 10 titles?

3. Required Versus Optional – if you are testing from or giving assignments out of a textbook, you should list it as required when placing your order. However, there are often titles that you think that your students should have to further their understanding of the material; are titles that anyone considering further study in that field should own; want to have available for extra credit assignments. These titles should be listed as optional. In general, the bookstore order 20% of enrollment for optional titles, if you think a title will be of interest to a great number of students, let the bookstore know and they can adjust upwards accordingly.

4. Packages – publisher representatives will often pitch combination packages, usually book, study guide and other supplemental material often web based. Make sure that you are using all of the components in your class. Publishers will usually include in the package some type of item that cannot be ordered separately. This can impact on the store’s ability to buy the book back from the student or obtain used copies from the wholesaler. That is the intent of the publisher in the first place. When considering a package consult with the bookstore. This will help insure that they correct package arrives and together you may be able to negotiate
a way to create used packages.

Desk Copies

In an effort to facilitate the adoption of their books, many publishers will provide instructors with examination or as they are commonly known, “desk” copies. If you keep the following procedures in mind they will help in obtaining desk copies:

1. Not all publishers provide desk copies. Some smaller publisher, foreign publishers, non-profit organizations and governmental organizations do not.

2. Some publishers may have order minimums before they will provide desk copies. Sometimes, due to excess stock from a previous semesters, buyback from students, or books obtained from used book wholesalers, the order we place with the publisher may not meet that minimum.

3. Desk copy requests must be made by the department. Publishers will not honor desk copy request made by the bookstore. The desk copy request must be on departmental letterhead or your can download a desk copy request form from the bookstore website.

4. Place your desk copy requests as far in advance as possible. Some publishers will take up to 6 weeks to process a desk copy request.

Sometimes due to various circumstances, the semester has begun and you do not have a desk copy. The bookstore can loan you a copy to use until you receive your copy from the publisher. All desk copy loans must adhere to the following rules:

1. All desk copy loans must be backed up with either a credit card or an internal requisition. We have been forced to adopt this rule due to the difficulty in getting desk copy loans returned in previous semester.

2. We will not charge your credit card or internal requisition without consulting you first.

3. You must return a clean copy free of any markings (unless you borrowed a used copy.)

If you keep these procedures in mind your desk copy request should go smoothly.

Ordering the textbooks

Now that you selected the materials for your class, the next step is to place your order. Placing your order by the FTR submittal date is the best thing that you can do to help insure that your books are in for the start of class. The FTR submittal dates for USC are:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>April 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>October 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>March 15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The multiple factors that go into determining the submittal date are:
1. Book Buyback – we must have a verified order to be able to offer the best price during buyback. In Fall 2001, late book orders cost USC students an estimated $175,812. This dollar amount consists of two factors, the amount of additional money the students could have received during buyback and the additional amount of money that the students had to spend on new books instead of used.

2. Used Book Search – the earlier that we can start the used book search the more used copies we can obtain. Used books are a finite resource. As we get closer to the start of a semester, the supply of used books dries up.

3. Publisher considerations - some smaller and governmental publishers can take up to 6 weeks to process and ship an order. Foreign publishers can take up to 12 weeks and many European publishers completely shut down during the months of August and December.

4. Logistics – need to allow enough time to verify and enter over 5,000 titles each fall and spring semesters (Summer usually has around 1,600 titles) and price and shelve over a quarter of a million individual units during the fall and spring semesters.

To help prevent any misunderstanding orders or changes to orders must always be submitted in writing. There are 4 ways in which can submit your orders:

- Paper FTR Form
- Online FTR Form (under Faculty Services at www.usc.bookstore.edu)
- Fax (213-740-7686)
- Email (textbooks@bookstore.usc.edu)

The more information that you can provide at the time of your order, the smoother you order will be processed. The basic information needed is:

1. Department & Course Number – for example, HIST-101
2. Five Digit Class Number – for classes with multiple sections, it is vital that the correct class number is entered. This is the key that the Oasis system uses to print out the student’s required book lists. If your section number changes after you submit your order, please notify us so that we can make the correction.
3. Estimated Enrollment – please try to be as accurate as possible as we wind up returning millions of dollars in unsold textbooks. This creates serious financial liabilities for the University due to: shipping costs, processing costs, and publisher penalties. If you enter “E” in the estimated enrollment, we will determine the amount based on historical data.

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In review, following these steps will help ensure an effective and efficient order process:

1. Making required course materials an integral part of your course.
2. Communicating the value you place in adopted course materials to students.
3. Requesting course materials as early as possible.
4. Keeping the store informed about enrollment and other changes.
5. Involving the textbook buyer in your selection when there are multiple options.

USC Custom Publishing

Now that you’re considering course materials for your class, are you finding it a challenge to select a single textbook? Is your curriculum calling for materials from two … three … four or more different sources? Are you concerned about the cost to your students for all these sources? Perhaps the customized course reader is the solution for you.

The customized course reader is a flexible and unique teaching tool that allows you to control all of its contents. You put it together yourself to suit your curriculum and individual teaching needs. It is more convenient and cost effective because you select and use only those materials that you wish to use from a variety of sources – newspapers, journals and periodicals, portions of books, case studies, your own works and writings -- you assemble a custom “anthology” of readings. The materials are printed, bound together, and sold through our store as part of course materials.

Summary of Guidelines for Getting Your Course Reader Produced

• Gather all the materials that you wish to use.

Your originals may be your own work, photocopies, or the actual books and journals. If you’re using photocopies, remember that the better the quality of your originals, the better the quality of the students’ copies.

Note: If you are using any Harvard or Darden business cases, you may submit just a listing of the cases desired (including titles and case numbers) and Custom Publishing will retrieve them for you.

• List, in as much detail as possible, the items that you are including.

For your convenience, all forms (including one for a complete bibliography) are provided, but you can always use one by your own design. Of course, you need not list all of the copyright information if you submit original books and journals.

Or, simply include a copy of the title page for each item, showing all the information. Should you elect this option, you should still include a listing of all materials being submitted. It helps in verifying the order that the readings are to be placed in, and that all materials are included before final printing.

• Submit (bring or mail) your materials to us.

Do this, preferably, by the “due date” to insure that your reader is ready by the start of classes or by the time you assign readings or other work from it.

USC Custom Publishing will clear all permissions, oversee all production (printing and binding), conduct all sales, and handle all reimbursement/payments of all royalties back to the copyright owners.