

CLASSROOM TECHNIQUES

First Things

The following are techniques suggested for getting the class off to a good start at the very beginning of the semester:

- ◆ **Be enthusiastic** about the subject and about the coming semester. Your mood is the most contagious thing in the room. Spread a good one.
- ◆ **Emphasize each student's name** by saying it clearly and asking for clarification if you are unsure of the pronunciation.
- ◆ **Have the students introduce themselves** to each other, talk for a few minutes, and then introduce each other to the whole class. This simple process can change a class from an aggregation of apprehensive strangers into an easy group engaged in a common enterprise.
- **Have students "pair up"** as buddies and exchange phone numbers to get missed assignments etc. This will save a lot of excuses later on.
- **Give a clear overview of the course content**, your expectations, your requirements and your grading standards.
- **Be encouraging**. Many of our students are insecure.
- **Find out** from each student, preferably in writing, what s/he wants to learn from the course and what background s/he has in the material.
- **Give a written pretest** of the course material so you will be able to better gauge students learning readiness in course content. Later in the semester, rereading these will give you, and them, an idea of how far they have come.
- **Present the textbook** and go over it in detail.
- **Give a written assignment** based on the text. For example, "Read the Table of Contents and the Index, and select three topics that interest you. Write one paragraph about each telling why." This will cause them to take responsibility for their learning, and will cause the procrastinators to get the text and "get with it" right away. Be sure to collect the assignment, write a comment on it, and return it at the beginning of the next class. This will let them know you expect to receive and return work promptly.
- **Express your pleasure** at the prospect of working together throughout the semester. Students of whatever age respond positively to feeling individually valued and welcome in the class.

Establishing Positive Relationships

The following are classroom techniques which help establish positive relationships between faculty and students.

- **Always treat your students as individuals**, not just members of “the class.”
- **Learn each student's name**, especially each nick name, and how to pronounce it.
- **Repeat each name often**. If you forget it, ask. Students would rather be asked a dozen times, than be forgotten permanently.
- **Be sure the students know your name**. They will probably be too embarrassed to ask if they forget it. Write your name on the board every class meeting for the first month.
- **Ask each student, by name, what his/her educational goals are**. Make notes so you will remember for later conversations.
- **Ask international students about their homelands** and cultures; these can be fruitful sources of comparison and interest within subject matter. Encourage them to share experiences and perceptions with the class. Your interest conveys respect.
- **If a student misses more than one class**, call and express concern for his/her welfare. This small personal consideration has kept many students from having their home lives overwhelm their school lives and cause them to drop out.
- **When students hand in assignments**, return them promptly with handwritten notes from you. Many students believe their work is not read by the instructor. Your written comment belies that, and shows your concern for their learning.
- **If any students do poorly on tests or assignments**, privately ask how you can help him/her get a better grasp on the material. If lack of the fundamental computer, English, or math skills is the problem, contact the Academic Learning Center (ANX, ext 6866) with the student as soon as possible. If the problem is course specific, contact the Tutorial Center (ANX 108, ext 6738) to arrange tutoring, or supplemental instruction. If you are helpful, students will really try. Classroom visits by lab staff or class tours of the Academic Learning Center labs can also be arranged by calling the specific lab or ALC office (ext 6866).
- **Encourage your students to contact you** with individual concerns outside of class. Of course, this is easier for full-time instructors who have offices, but students do not distinguish between full-time and adjunct faculty. All instructors are full Hartnell faculty in their eyes, and this is as it should be. Adjuncts should encourage contact either by phone, or before or after class, or during class breaks. If you wish, speak to your Area Dean about offices that are available to adjunct faculty for student consultation. Encourage students to discuss their academic problems and concerns. Try to suggest practical, realistic solutions.

- **Encourage reticent students to speak in class.** Call on them for opinions and answers to non-threatening questions.
- **Never embarrass a student**, especially in the presence of others.

Techniques Related To Classroom Presentations

- **Create an “active” learning environment.** Transfer the focus of the student from that of audience to that of active player in the class. Have the students help plan the class, set goals of material to be covered, review the plan of the textbook and relate it to the class schedule, hold small group discussions, choose topics for the class to concentrate on, set priorities for covering a menu of topics, schedule testing, etc. These activities engage the student in the course enterprise. When they have set up their own rules (within the guidelines set by the instructor, of course), they become actively engaged in the learning process. Throughout the semester having students, individually and in small groups, consider, discuss and apply course concepts through class activities with the instructor as guide, keeps the active learning momentum going.
- **Start a lecture with a puzzle**, question, paradox, picture, cartoon slide, or transparency to focus on the day’s topic.
- **Elicit students’ questions** and concerns at the beginning of the class and list these on the chalkboard to be answered during the session.
- **Distribute “teaser outlines” of the lecture.** These are outlines with random words left blank for students to fill in as the lecture progresses.
- **Give frequent examples**, or solicit same, from students’ own frame of reference to anchor learning (increases active learning).
- **Ask students to suggest applications of principles** in their own lives, or those of others.
- **Ask questions of individual students** and wait for their response, prompting where necessary. Do not be put off by their silent stares; keep prompting until they do come up with a response. The next time you call on them, they will respond more easily.
- **Divide the class into small groups** (3 or 4 students) to discuss questions, solve problems, apply principles to real life situations etc. and after 10 minutes have each group report its conclusions to the rest of the class.

Techniques Related to Testing

- **Call your tests “quizzes” or “check-ups”** to reduce anxiety. Frequent, smaller tests give better feedback on learning than less frequent major tests. The final exam must be comprehensive, i.e. cover the whole semester’s work.
- **Pretest** in your subject area to assess entry level knowledge of students.
- **Test early in the semester** to gauge learning pace.
- **Encourage students** to form **study groups** or choose a **study buddy**.
- **Explain how to study** for the kind of tests you give.
- **Distribute sample questions** the week before the test. These questions should not be questions from the actual test, but should reflect the same level of specificity, importance, detail, and difficulty as actual questions.
- **Distribute sample “A” answers** to sample questions, and discuss what comprises an A response.
- **Try tandem testing.** In this technique students are allowed to ask another student to take a test as a team. No more than two students in any tandem. The test is taken together, and one test paper is turned in with both names on it. The same grade is recorded for both students. This policy, announced ahead of time, encourages studying together and substantially reduces test anxiety. Not all tests in the semester should allow tandem testing, and the final exam must be taken individually.
- **Explain the difference between legitimate collaboration and academic dishonesty;** be clear when collaboration is wanted and when it is forbidden.
- **Give a take-home test,** and compare the results to in-class tests for each student.
- **Give oral tests** to students whose written language ability in English is so poor that written tests are not indicative of their knowledge.
- **Return tests promptly,** preferably at the next class meeting.
- **Return each paper with a written comment** to advise or encourage the student.
- **Allow students to partially raise poor test scores** by writing answers to missed questions at home and turning them in at the first class meeting following the return of the test.