

Teaching Tips

A Forum for discussion and tips for
advancing teaching and learning at Mona

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TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL SEMESTER

Welcome back from the summer break although it feels more like summer recess for some people!!! It's a new semester and a new academic year. Let's give it our best shot.

On the first day of class or early in the semester, begin to create the learning environment that you want your class to have.

- Establish your identity
- Establish expectations carefully
- Clarify responsibilities
- Energize and engage your students
- Create that sense of the possibility of great success through hard work

Cautionary notes:

You are in charge, take charge in a caring way! Sometimes students misinterpret a friendly classroom teacher and believe that an invitation is being offered to engage in classroom incivilities or misdemeanors without consequences. Let them know your standards. Tell them that you will hold them accountable for the work that is required and outlined on the syllabus. Even though you may want to establish a collegial atmosphere in the classroom, there are students who might believe that the teacher is their pal "*bredren*". Let them know that your friendly approach does not mean that they cannot get a failing grade if they fail to do the required work.

Remember, what you do on the first day sets the tone for the entire semester, so plan that first class carefully. Let that first session prepare the students for the semester that lies ahead of them. Enjoy the start of your semester; it's probably one of the most exciting times of the year for both teachers and students!

Modeling

Commit yourself to be a role model of meta-cognition. Help your students learn how to learn. You can exhibit skills that help students to see the structure of the subject matter content to relate topics, and to organize information. In fact, you can produce model answers for questions and walk them through the process of thinking how to respond to the question. When you do this kind of modeling, you provide a meta-cognitive assist. Students who follow your example are not only discovering what to learn, but how to learn it. A teacher who says, "This is how we approach a problem in our discipline" or "This is how I would go about answering this question," is showing students a process that is transferable. Combining the modeling process with carefully chosen questions that lead students from one point to another is another strategy for engaging students in meta-cognitive activity.

Special points of interest:

- The **Teaching Tips Newsletter** is a publication of the Instructional Development Unit (IDU) at the UWI, Mona.
- The Newsletter is published once per month and provides tips for improving teaching and learning in higher education. It is available online (<http://myspot.mona.uwi.edu/idu/>) as well as in the office of the IDU.
- If you have an area that you would like to explore using this medium, do not hesitate to contact us at the IDU.



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Modeling Cont'd.

Think Alouds

University teachers usually present students with the results of their thinking. Sometimes we do not identify the thinking processes that we followed to get the results that we are presenting. Accordingly, many students have never observed an expert practitioner in the discipline at work. Modeling is important in teaching and an expert practitioner could model for the student how an expert in the discipline comes to terms with aspects of content particularly complex issues. The think aloud activity is therefore a modeling activity. This activity is designed to make university teachers explicitly address the steps that they use in thinking about content, particularly complex issues that need to be resolved. For most university teachers, these steps are so automatic that they assume the steps are self-evident to students but oftentimes, they are not so easily appreciated and apprehended.

Definition: After some direct instruction on a topic, the university teacher presents new applications of the content and verbally models for the student the thought processes that reflect how an advanced practitioner would attempt to address the issue.

How can I get them to Read This Semester?

The research suggests that getting students to read in preparation for classes might be better accomplished if points or credits are awarded. One way we could use this information is by using OurVLE to set up quizzes that test the knowledge and comprehension of the reading done. This could be a requirement for all classes. The following tips might be helpful in getting your students to really do the readings:

1. Explain the purpose of the reading
2. Explain the benefits and consequences of the reading
3. State how the reading might help them to succeed - in other words link reading to career path
4. Explain what to read and how to read: for instance structure, content, strengths and weaknesses
5. Show films and even YouTube material to spark interest in the reading wherever possible and to create a longing for additional information
6. Create opportunities in your classes for students to lead discussions based on the reading - Discuss readings in groups wherever possible
7. Use think, pair, share to discuss readings
8. Provide list of possible reading for students to choose including non textbook
9. Give writing assignments and papers based on the readings

Encourage the use of note cards to summarize main points of a reading and write questions concerning the reading.

Think about using a Post-Class Summary This Semester

Why not think about and actually use a *Post-Class Summary* this semester. You can do this by sending an e-mail message to your class, highlighting a few important things that happened, reminding them about announcements or changes made to schedules or assignments, and thanking particular people for their contributions to the class. This action can serve a larger purpose of adding some closure to each class meeting. Further, you might want to establish a roster and have students create summaries after class. This would be a useful way to use the forum feature of OurVLE.

Kinesthetic Learning Activities

We come across the term kinesthetic learning in surveys of learning styles. This term is often-times seen alongside verbal and visual learning. Kinesthetic activities are often associated with primary and secondary education and therefore have not received much attention at the university or college level. Very little physical activity is present in the teaching and learning terrain of the higher education landscape outside of those very technical areas with that kind of subject matter content.

Dramas are one of the many techniques for active learning. These are more formally called Kinesthetic Learning Activities (KLAs). The idea of KLAs is to get students to physically act out a concept in a way that teaches or reinforces material in the course. Where dramas might seem more appropriate for social science courses, they are a powerful tool in computer science for getting students involved with the material.

Class: Computer Science

In computer science a simple use of KLAs is in teaching linked structures such as linked lists or binary trees. These concepts can be introduced by putting lists or trees on the board. However, it might be even more innovative to use the students as nodes and have them use their arms as the pointers.

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