



# Teaching Tips

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

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## Starting the Semester Right...Ideas for the First Three Weeks. Twenty Things You Will Want To Do!!

It is a new semester and a new beginning. The way in which we begin our classes is important; it can set the tone for the teaching and learning that will occur for the rest of the semester. Oftentimes students decide very early, some from the very first day of class in a new semester whether they will come to most of the classes, whether they like the course, the content to be learned, the teacher, and of course their classmates. The following list provide tips of some of the things you can do in an effort to get it right and keep it going pretty well! Studies point out that it is not just the first day of class that is important in setting the tone, retaining capable students and getting it right, but the first three weeks.

1. Be prepared for your first class and ensure that you have an informative and student friendly syllabus or course outline.
2. It is good to give some kind of an assignment on the first day and this should be collected at the next meeting of the class or submitted online.
3. Administer a learning style inventory or provide website where this can be done to help students find out about their approach to learning.
4. Give a brief talk about threshold concepts in your discipline/subject and how students have successfully navigated this course.
5. Communicate high expectations and your willingness to help your students succeed.
6. Indicate to students the number of hours of study required to be successful in your course.

### Special points of interest:

- The Teaching Tips Newsletter is a publication of the Instructional Development Unit (IDU) at the UWI, Mona.
- The Newsletter will be published once per month and will focus on tips for improving teaching and learning in higher education. The Newsletter will be available online 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.

7. Provide students with study aids or approaches to studying for your course, study tips, supplemental readings, exercises, and sample test questions.
8. Use OURVLE or other learning management system to continue the conversations outside the classroom.
9. With your students, create ground rules for your course, assignments and classroom decorum. Let them develop these rules as a cooperative activity so that they can own them and then police themselves. Ensure that you maintain these rules.
10. Announce office hours and hold them. Let them know of other opportunities for students to meet with you and have dialogue about the course or other concerns.
11. Arrange small groups of students, perhaps trios to assist each other in learning together and growing together as university students. Provide opportunities for these students to deepen their understanding of group processes and share experiences.



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12. Explain to students the importance of honesty, collaboration and your abhorrence of dishonest practices such as plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty. Let them know how you will deal with these forms of academic dishonesty.
13. Find interesting ways to start your classes each time, for instance with the use of current affairs, issues in the news relevant to your content area, a slice from life, a puzzle, question, paradox, cartoon, or the use of multimedia equipment with appropriate content.
14. Share your philosophy of teaching with your students and your approach to critical thinking. Under-score the importance of critical thinking in student development.
15. Encourage students to keep a journal, a three-week three times a week journal is good. In these journals they will comment, ask questions and answer questions about issues and concerns raised in the course.
16. Create opportunities for peer assessment, students can be asked to critique each other's essays or other assignments.
17. Be sure to give prompt feedback.
18. Place a suggestion box in your classroom and encourage students to make written comments each time the class meets.
19. Create opportunities for students to meet with each other and support each other whether face to face or by using online learning spaces e.g. FaceBook, email, Ourvle , etc
20. Ask your students to assume the role of a professional within the discipline e.g. biologist, political scientist, economist, sociologist, journalist, manager, entertainment coordinator, literary critic etc., and determine how such professionals operate in particular situations.

### **LEARNING AUDIT**

Have you ever used a learning audit? Well, it might help your students take charge of their own learning. Here is one prepared by Professor Stephen Brookfield that you might want to share with your students. They will use it to monitor their own progress.

- ◆ What do I know about this subject I didn't know last week?
- ◆ What can I do in this subject I couldn't do this time last week?
- ◆ What can I show in this subject I couldn't show this time last week?
- ◆ What can I teach someone to know/do that I couldn't teach them last week?



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