

Teaching Tips

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

Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, The UWI Mona



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Special points of interest:

- The **Teaching Tips Newsletter** is a publication of the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) at the UWI, Mona.
- The newsletter is published three times during each semester and once during the summer. It provides tips for improving teaching and learning in higher education and is available online (<http://myspot.mona.uwi.edu/cetl>) as well as in the office of the CETL.
- If you need additional teaching tips on specific classroom practices, please contact us.

**Welcome to the new
academic year
2020 - 2021**

Welcome

The CETL welcomes all new and returning faculty to the new academic year, 2020-21. We are indeed in serious times with our experience of this global pandemic, COVID-19. The spike over the summer has been highly problematic and clearly, we have some way to go before we will be able to fully control the spread of this infectious disease and get rid of it altogether. Let us all follow the protocols and keep safe. Our best wishes for a good semester as we continue to engage in remote and online teaching.

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Remote and Online Teaching

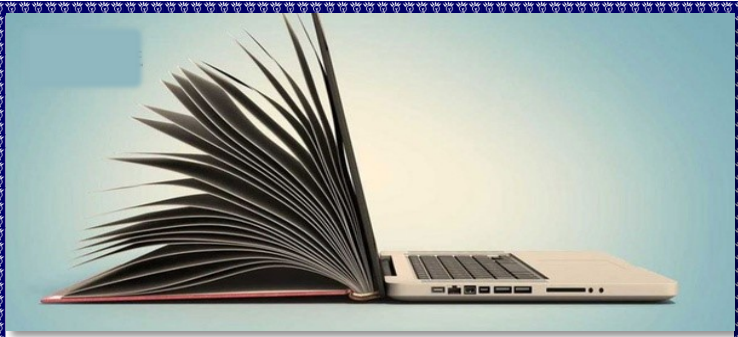
The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly changed all aspects of our world, including how we, as university teachers, continue to prepare our students for successful personal and professional lives. We continue to use the online tools at our disposal at the UWI as we engage in remote and online teaching. In this regard, all of us have been using MOODLE or the UWI's Learning Management System (LMS), otherwise called OurVLE, supported by Zoom or Blackboard Collaborate. In many instances, faculty have indicated that there is a real need to improve online teaching skills. This is particularly true for faculty who are new to teaching online and here, I am referring especially to those who started to teach online since the onslaught of the pandemic.

In this issue, we offer ten teaching tips for teaching in COVID-19 times and some tips on using "small teaching."

Please also look out for our online workshops where we will provide training this semester for you to improve your online teaching skills and competences.

Ten Teaching Tips for Online Teaching in COVID-19 times

1. Remember you are a content expert even if you are not an expert in using 21st century technologies for teaching. Determine in your heart to get better at online teaching.
2. Get familiar with the technologies that are available for you to use by all possible means. There are various online workshops available etc. Enroll and participate.
3. With respect to preparing for your online teaching experiences, create a space to properly prepare and teach from that is conducive to your learning and of course, teaching. As much as possible, it should be distraction free.
4. Provide clear information to your students about class times and the various 21st century technologies to be used, support services etc.
5. When your class commences, extend a warm and personalized welcome to all your students and set out to create a classroom climate that is welcoming and supportive of learning.
6. Explain concepts and ideas as best as you can and provide alternative examples, explanations and approaches just as you would do in the face-to-face classroom. You will also want to suggest where additional resources might be located.
7. Please provide frequent and effective feedback to your students on the content they are learning. Also, create opportunities for peer feedback.
8. Try as much as possible to reach out to your students, especially if they are not participating as much as they should. Let them know you care. Be there for them.
9. Maintain realistic online office hours.
10. Ask for help and elicit suggestions for those issues that you need clarification. This might be from students and colleagues.



Small Teaching for Advancing Online Learning

There is much talk these days about “small teaching” for the advancement of teaching and learning in the virtual classroom. But what is “small teaching?” It is an approach to improving teaching by adding interventions that help students to learn the content in more effective ways. Also, it creates a meaningful pathway for the attainment of learning objectives.

In 2016, James Lang published a book called *Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons from the Science of Learning*. The focus of Lang’s work was not online teaching but face-to-face classroom teaching. Small teaching is a phrase coined by James M. Lang and he used it to describe an incremental approach to improving pedagogy. In his book, he explained how minor modifications have a significant impact on our teaching in terms of, advancing student learning. The important concern is to intentionally make those pedagogical adjustments based on the neuroscience of how people learn.

Lang (2016) was concerned about how faculty could use the learning science research to update their teaching practices. However, it was left to Flower Darby to demonstrate the real place of small teaching in online learning. She published the book *Small Teaching Online: Applying Learning Science in Online Classes*.

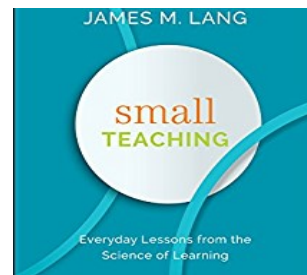
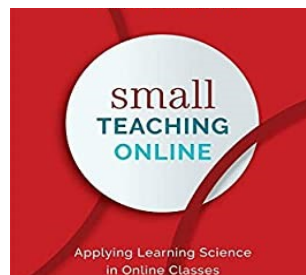
Making small changes to our teaching practice is easy and is possible in many of our classes without much inconvenience. For instance, you might include an exercise that take five minutes to complete at the beginning or end of a teaching and learning session. This exercise might take no time to grade. This seemingly insignificant intervention has the possibility of having an awesome impact on student learning. However, it must be based on evidence-based practice/principles such as retrieval practice or interleaving.

We now know that small teaching allows faculty to make small improvements to the way we teach our courses. At times, as a faculty member, you might have been introduced to new pedagogical procedures that seem very difficult or time consuming to incorporate into your teaching practices. The good thing about small teaching is that you can make one small change to your course and with that change achieve considerable gains in student learning. That is exactly what we want. These small changes help students to properly retrieve and retain information over time you will want to create opportunities for students to engage in retrieval practice to aid retention and overall learning.

One approach to developing your students ability to retrieve information is to incorporate frequent low-stakes assessment tasks that call on students to recall information and in the process, strengthen learning. Of course, it is best when these assessment tasks are accompanied by feedback, whether automated or by the university teacher in order to help students identify and clarify misunderstandings. Practice tests and quizzes are also approaches that might be used to strengthen the capacity of your students to retrieve information stored in long term memory.

A word on Interleaves ...

Interleaves involve alternating between lectures and the use of active learning activities. In this regard, they occur in between presentation segments to help break up the lecture so students have time to process the information that was communicated in the lecture. For instance, there might be a presentation (perhaps using PowerPoint slides), in a segment of the class. You presented information in the form of a lecture to your students and they listened, made notes and responded to questions that were posed by you. You also entertained their questions. After this segment of lecturing, there might be an interval where students are required to engage in quick pair discussions. This becomes the interleave. It might be followed by another mini lecture.



References

- Darby, F., & Lang, J. (2019). *Small teaching online: Applying learning science in online classes*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass
- Lang, J. M. (2016). *Small teaching: Everyday lessons from the science of learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

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