

Teaching Tips

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

Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning



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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 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 CETL.
- If you have an area that you would like to explore using this medium, do not hesitate to contact us at the CETL.

Welcome



Welcome to yet another new academic year. We trust you will have a successful and enjoyable year. From the very outset, plan to engage your students as much as possible in all your classes.

Actively Engaging Students in the Classroom

There is a great amount of joy in planning your classes in a way that your students are actually doing something with the content that you are teaching. In other words, you want your students to be engaged. Engaging students is a profitable approach to encourage meaningful learning in your classroom. It requires that you design your classes to enable students to be discussing the issues or dealing tangibly with the content. You should always plan your lessons to enable learning to take place as a result of the interactions between teacher and student, student and student and student and content. One way by which students become engaged is by giving them an opportunity to explore each other's attitudes and values rather than just remaining passive as information is transmitted. Engagement then is about active learning and the development of skills, especially enabling the utilization of the higher order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, evaluation and the ability to create new knowledge or new products.

Numerous research studies over the years have validated the proposition that students learn more, and indeed are more concerned about the content they are learning when they are actively engaged in their learning (Astin, 1985; Bulger, Mayer, & Almeroth, 2006; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Cross, 1987; Ericksen, 1984). Of course, some students' resistance to actually doing something with the content in the classroom is to be expected when you attempt to engage them in learning activities in your class.

Hence, help them to understand the importance of writing skills and teamwork in the job market. There is no doubt that the majority of your students are interested in finding jobs after university and the employers are indicating the kinds of skills and competencies that they want to see in the graduates. In many cases, employers want to see team work abilities and in this regard you must point out to your students that groups work will help to build this competence. So, tell this to your students and find the evidence to support your statements.

How can I engage students?

There are numerous strategies that you might employ to engage students in your classroom. These include creating opportunities for talking/discussing the issues, writing, reading, debating, acting, role-playing, journaling, conferring, interviewing, building, creating and more.

Here are some tips to get you on the road of classroom engagement:

Students' attention span is generally considered to be pretty short, perhaps 15-20 minutes. Therefore, if you are using the lecture, design in segments or in lecturates. So, in a one hour class you might have two 15 minutes segments. Present a lecture for the first 15 minutes followed by a group activity for another 10 minutes and then the second segment of the lecture for another 15 minutes with another group activity for another 10 minutes.





How can I engage students? Cont'd

This activity could involve summarizing, for instance, filling-in the blanks on PowerPoint slides or on paper individually or in groups, use of minute papers, one sentence summaries, think, pair & share, the muddiest point response etc. Here are some approaches:

- ◆ Use the *interactive lecture approach* if you are in fact lecturing. You might want to begin your class with a brainstorming session and allow students to give information about what they know or think they know about the topic. You can use the information generated for introducing new content or even as reference points in the lesson.
- ◆ Utilise the *questioning strategy* meaningfully. Plan questions, especially open-ended questions. Direct some questions at small groups and provide opportunities for them to discuss these together and provide a group response.
- ◆ Plan to use *group activities*. Ensure that you fully explain the reasons for using group activities and how your students will benefit. Here are some specific strategies:
 - *Write, pair & share*: The format for this strategy is identical to the think-pair-share, except that students process the question asked of them by writing about it rather than quietly thinking about it. After a brief time to note their thoughts, each student turns to a partner to discuss. The activity closes with the instructor calling on random students to summarize their responses. As with the think-pair & share, the instructor may choose to skip the summary portion of the exercise depending on the circumstances.
 - *Focused Listing*: In this exercise students are given a concept that you as the teacher deems important in the particular lesson. Of course, students are arranged in groups and the exercise is fully explained. They are asked to list one thing that they know about the concept

and pass on the list to the next person in the group. As they pass on the list, the student will read aloud the item just added to the list. The student has the opportunity to pass the list on if he or she cannot come up with an item. The list should make it around the group at least three times. This is a good way to find out what students know about the topic and of course it also creates opportunities for students to share their knowledge with their peers.

- *Quick Thinks*: These are activities that you can easily insert in the lecture. Several of them bundled together might be used in the lecture discussion approach. The following is a list that you might select from or use all:
 - * select the best response
 - * spot the error with the sentence
 - * correct the error with the sentence
 - * complete the sentence
 - * fill in the blank spaces
 - * compare and contrast
 - * support the statement
 - * reorder the steps
 - * reach a conclusion
 - * paraphrase the idea
- *Three-Step Interview*: As the faculty member responsible for the course, you will identify three questions that are of importance to the topic being taught. The larger group is divided into small groups, preferably in groups of four. In these groups of fours, the students will take turns asking the three questions of their partners. Then, each partner recaps the other answers to the other pair. In this way, an opportunity is created for the individual student to check his or her comprehension.
- *TV Commercial*: The task is to decide on a topic or concept that you would want your students to pay additional attention to. In groups, ask your students to develop a 30 second TV commercial that illustrates the concept.

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