

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 once per month and provides tips for improving teaching and learning in higher education. It is available online (<http://myspot.mona.uwi.edu/CETL/>) as well as in the office of the CETL.
- If you have an area that you would like us to explore in this newsletter, do not hesitate to contact us at the CETL.

Teaching with 21st Century Technologies: PowerPoint & Web Pages

Teaching and learning with 21st century technology tools is a big part of our lives today. It can be both challenging and engaging for teachers and students. Twenty-first century technology tools are readily available to be used by university teachers to make teaching and learning sessions more interesting and enjoyable with the potential of really promoting deep and enduring learning. There are technologies that can be used in providing feedback and improve student engagement with the content. Oftentimes, it is extremely challenging to choose the best tools since there are so many options and it might also be quite a task to choose the most appropriate tool in relation to learning objectives. We want to take a look at some of the technology tools available for use in our university and how we might use them effectively and efficiently to advance teaching learners and hopefully maximise learning. This month the focus will be on PowerPoint and Web pages. These tools can help to create a better structure for your lectures. The following are some practical guidelines for using PowerPoint in the university classroom to enliven your teaching and cause greater levels of engagement.

PowerPoint

Best Practices: Constructing your Slides

- Select the appropriate text size: Your text must be clearly readable from the back of the room. It is best to use fonts 24 points or larger for the text.
- Avoid cluttering your slides with too much text. It is best to adhere to the 6x6 rule (no more than six words per line, and no more than six lines per slide).
- Employ dark text on light background for the overhead/slide.
- Use transitions and animations sparingly and consistently to avoid distractions.
- Choose a template and use it consistently throughout your presentation.
- Illustrate and enhance the presentation with the use of graphics and pictures.
- Refrain from USING ALL CAPS. (CAPS are normally harder to read so it is best to use upper and lowercase

- Use Italics or colour rather than underlining to emphasize a point. (Please note that when we underline, this makes some characters very difficult to read).
- Use the overhead/slide as a guide for presentation.

Employ Learning Sciences Approaches to Maximise Learning Potential

- Use graphs in conveying content. The research suggests that graphs increase understanding of subject-matter content.
- Explain concepts using bulleted lists since they have the potential to improve students' ability to organise the ideas/concepts better.
- Present the content in short phrases. There is a greater potential for students to learn more by presenting the content in short phrases rather than in full sentences and paragraphs.
- Use relevant pictures to increase the potential for meaningful learning. When irrelevant pictures are used, learning is usually decreased in comparison to PowerPoint slides with no pictures.
- Give your PowerPoint slides to your students before class since it is more beneficial for them to have these to review and hopefully be in a position to ask intelligent questions and add meaningfully to the teaching and learning session.
- Create your slides to leverage the student's working memory by using the information to cater to the visual and auditory senses. You do not want to overload the visual or the auditory modality. Balance is important. In this regard, oral comments with pictures are preferred than pictures with text since, when we integrate an image and narration occurs, less cognitive effort is required for processing than integrating an image and text.

- Remove any irrelevant material that might cause distraction, interfering with the processing of content. These irrelevant content might include music, sound effects, animations and background images.
- Make use of simple cues that will point students to important aspects of the content. Using text size, bolding, italics, or placing content in a highlighted or shaded text box is sufficient to underscore the importance of the key concepts and significance of the points you are making.
- Ensure that you do not place all the comments you have to make on an idea or point on your PowerPoint slide. Instead, keep some of the information displayed in short chunks that are easily read and easily explained.

Best Practices: Delivery

- Face the audience when showing the overhead/slide.
- Distribute a copy of the overheads/slides to students ahead of time (if possible).
- It is best to present your slides by talking about the content on them since verbal explanations of pictures/graphs help more than written clarifications.
- Activate the feature on your computer that causes your screen to go dark by hitting the “B” button and clicking it again to cause it to toggle the screen back to the presentation: There are times a dark screen might be effective to focus attention on the comments you are making orally.
- Try to move your slides as smoothly as possible. Please note that by clicking the left mouse, your slide will advance to the next slide but it's somewhat more cumbersome to right-click to move back one slide. The arrow keys on your keyboard will be easier to use to navigate through your slideshow, use them to go forward and backwards. If you know the number of the particular slide, it's easy to just type it in the presentation and then hit the enter key to go directly to that slide.
- Ask students to listen to the points you make and take notes when you are not speaking.
- Avoid putting students in a passive mode of receiving information by combining the overhead/slide presentation with chalkboard/whiteboard use or other learning activities.

- Ensure the course web pages functionality before class (when you plan to use them in class).
- Devise a back-up plan for lectures if you are going to use the web pages extensively in the lecture (e.g., print or save the web pages on your local hard drive).
- Prepare properly for your presentation, for example:
 - Review the readiness of the classroom for the use of the technology (e.g., browser, software, computer memory, monitor, and audio).
- Verify links, especially the external links.
- Check the room lighting to see if it is suitable for both viewing the projected screen and taking notes.
- Arrange for a technical support staff to support your use of the technology and this might call for some personnel to be in your classroom at the start of class to help with the setup if necessary.
- Encourage students to use resources available online and underscore the importance for them to filter and interpret information on the web.

Student Web Pages (Project Web Pages)

- Challenge your students to design their own web pages for educational purposes.
- Guide students to define the specific objectives that will be relevant for their web pages.
- Provide detailed guidelines for student web pages/projects.
- Indicate to students the expectations established and the standards to be realised in the assessment of student web pages/projects.
- Make student web pages/projects an integral part of classroom experience especially in relation to student learning outcomes.
- Arrange technology training sessions for your students, if necessary.
- Encourage peer engagements to advance learning through group sharing and reviewing.

Teaching with the Web

Course Web Pages

- Plan and design your own course web pages.
- Post relevant class information and content to your course web pages.

Check out our publications at:

myspot.mona.uwi.edu/cetl/publications

which features our monthly *Teaching Tips*, *The Mona Teacher*, the Assessment Handbook and other resources.

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