



# Teaching Messages Collection 2021-22

59 Teaching Messages from 38 Institutions

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## Table of Contents

Getting Back to Face-to-Face Learning for Fall: Challenges to Address with Students.....	1
Why bother taking this course? Build the Relevance of a Course.....	3
Addressed by Name: Syllabus as “Personal Correspondence” .....	5
Critically Examining the Syllabus.....	6
iMovie Trailers to Build Community .....	8
You Get What You Give.....	10
Hit the Pause Button: A New Kind of Late Work Policy.....	12
Creating Connections with Virtual Students.....	14
Learning Motivated by Cheese and Wicked Problems .....	15
Jumpstart student engagement and curiosity with ABC .....	18
Checking for Readiness to Move On.....	20
Pause and Listen: Teaching in a Fast-Paced World.....	22
Time Management Activity for Students.....	25
Supporting LGBTQ Students in and out of the Classroom.....	26
Nurturing First Generation Students .....	28
Imposter Syndrome in Students .....	29
Inclusive Practices and Universal Design for Learning.....	30
How to Make My Teaching More Inclusive .....	33
Designing for student success through interdependent learning .....	34
Should We Stop Grading Class Participation? .....	36
Infusing Study Skills into the Curriculum .....	37
The Zoom Black Box Blues: Building a Flexible Camera Policy .....	38
Class-Sourcing Interaction: Online Agendas, Notes, Discussions .....	40
Two innovative strategies for interactive online classes.....	42
Multiple Prompt Online Discussion Style .....	45
Intentional creation of an inviting course culture .....	46
Design courses for equity in teaching and learning.....	48
Fostering Student Engagement and Interaction Through Collaborative Annotation and Note-Taking.....	50
Padlet with Purpose and Collaboration .....	52
Recommendations for Mobile-Friendly Instruction .....	54



Honor Pledges .....	55
H.O.N.O.R. Model to Enhance Academic Integrity and Reduce Academic Dishonesty (Ableser, 2021) .....	56
Examining What You Didn't Know They Knew .....	57
A Small Change Made a Big Difference on My Assessments .....	58
Two Buckets Assessment Activities .....	59
Meta-Teaching .....	60
The Powerful Question .....	61
Internationalizing Your Course without the Travel .....	62
Classroom Equity Audits .....	64
Faculty Feedback Forms (F3) .....	66
What is instructor presence and why is it important for learning?.....	67
Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI) and Effective Online Teaching .....	70
The Teaching Goals Inventory.....	72
Turning Large Class Challenges into Opportunities .....	73
Large Class Teaching Strategies .....	74
Rewarding Student Growth and Improvement in Learning .....	75
Are Professors' Views Influential? .....	77
Combatting Myths and Misconceptions.....	78
Get Students to Use Study Strategies.....	79
Learning preferences are not learning styles . . . and why the language we use matters .....	80
Learning without Learning Styles.....	83
Minute Papers.....	84
Who Gets the Credit and the Blame? .....	85
Beware the Curse of Knowledge.....	87
Journaling for Professional Development.....	88
How Mindfulness Meditation May Benefit You <i>and</i> Your Teaching .....	91
Make Professional Development Personal.....	94
Student Evaluations of Teaching .....	95
Garnering Feedback .....	96
Using Student Evaluations to Improve Your Teaching .....	98



## Getting Back to Face-to-Face Learning for Fall: Challenges to Address with Students

As many colleges return to offering primarily face-to-face courses in the fall, what will this transition mean for the instructors and students taking them? Will we just wave a wand, and all will be normal again? No, we all recognize that it is impossible to simply “return to normal” after so many changes with the pandemic. What we can do is devise some strategies to deal with issues that have arisen during the pandemic to make the transition easier.

First, recognize that for many students remote learning did not work as effectively as in-person contact. They may not have mastered important content and skills, thus being less prepared to move on to courses requiring that foundation. Anxiety and mental health challenges have affected many college students during the pandemic, and those entering college as first-year students are not exempt from those same challenges. We must be sure to provide students with information in the syllabus and in class regarding academic support and counseling services that are available to them, and that they have information early on regarding developmental courses and other academic resources to help them review or build skills. The number of students lacking essential skills in many subject areas has grown (Salzman, 2021). Emails and meetings to check in with students to determine how they are doing will be needed, and such meetings and emails might need to be more frequent than they were prior to Covid-19 (Miller, 2021).

Second, group work face-to-face might be a bit of a challenge as social skills and comfort levels may have been affected by the pandemic. Students (and instructors) may need time to re-acclimate to group settings, particularly interactive ones. Proceeding slowly and keeping groups small may assist in this transition. Students may need to “step away” periodically to re-orient to a communal setting. Beginning with icebreakers and having prompts available on LMS (Learning Management System) discussion boards can assist students in getting started with discussion in the classroom. Provide clear instructions and a focus for students. Make sure each group has a leader to moderate group sessions. Informal groups can be very helpful as well, enhancing social skills outside of class. Encourage every student to find a study partner that they can review material with or get notes if they do have to miss class.

Third, recognize that engagement will be more difficult than it was prior to the pandemic and remote learning. Many students may have become used to sitting in the back of the room, either physically or virtually, and not participating. Prompts that focus on having students prepare ahead of time will help in this process. For example, assign each student content in the text or a relevant article to cover, having them lead discussion. Require tickets to class each week (with participation points given) where students write what they learned from the previous class and what questions they still have as well as what they hope to learn in class. This can serve as a formative assessment tool and as an engagement tool.



Fourth, recognize that students have become very accustomed to using digital tools like chats and discussion boards. There is no need to eliminate or stop using these tools in the face-to-face classroom. We can continue to use them to augment and facilitate in class learning. The chats and discussion boards are good strategies to keep discussions going and reinforce learning outside of scheduled meeting times (Miller, 2021; Salzman, 2021).

Fifth, continue using your LMS. It will help with organizing and disseminating content and assignments to your students. If your school provides templates available for the LMS, utilize them and their modular/weekly format. Provide brief introductions and rationales for assignments so that students can connect them with content and their learning.

Finally, be flexible and recognize that there are still many issues that might come up for students, including the anxiety that often accompanies transitions. Don't eliminate the electronic and digital tools you have been using; rather use them to supplement the class. Students want to use discussion boards and have content available online for review (Miller, 2021). This can enhance the face-to-face experience as well as set the stage for interaction.

## References

- Miller, M. (2021). 5 teaching practices to keep from remote learning - Ditch That Textbook. Retrieved from <https://ditchthattextbook.com/remote-teaching-practices-to-keep/>.
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## Why bother taking this course? Build the Relevance of a Course

University Students often ask the question “Why should I bother taking the course?” The answer lies in helping them deconstruct the relevance of the course in their future academic life and/or professional careers. The literature advocates several methods for building the relevance of the course.

### Tips for faculty members:

- **Inquire**
  - o *Ask students at the:*
    - *Beginning of the course:* why are you attending this course/unit? How will it help with your personal and/or professional goals?
    - *Mid/End of the Course:* How what you are learning in the class is relevant for your professional lives? How can this unit help you in your further academic studies?
- **Communicate** how you think the course is relevant for students in their personal and professional lives through text or verbal interaction in the class (Durik & Harackiewicz, 2007).
- **Tailor** course materials according to the students’ individual and collective needs, interests, and prior knowledge & skills. (Walkington, 2013).
- **Instruct** students to change/develop their beliefs around subject and help students scaffold the relevance of the activities to their personal and/or professional life and further studies (Canning & Harackiewicz, 2015).
- **Engage** students in personal and group **reflection** activities so that they can see how the course adds value to their academic and professional lives (Hulleman & Harackiewicz, 2009; Gaspard et al., 2015).
- **Make connections** between course assignments and course competencies explicit. Read [Martini’s story](#) who changed her assignment instructions over time to communicate the relevance of assignments to the students.

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## Addressed by Name: Syllabus as “Personal Correspondence”

“If the syllabus is to be read by someone, it must be written to and for someone: it must be something that is for someone . . . It is a *personal* correspondence. It addresses us as if by name.” - Sam Rocha, *The Syllabus as Curriculum*

What if we thought about our syllabus as a form of communication instead of as a contract? While the contract version of a syllabus might be filled with policies and rules and punitive measures, the correspondence version speaks directly to students as persons, leaving room for a response. Of course, we have to include our institutional policies, and many policies, such as accessibility statements, actively promote the dignity of our students, but the way we word our own sections forms our students’ first impressions of us. As you’re preparing your class, here are some ways to write your syllabus “to and for someone”:

1. **Examine Situational Factors in a Caring Way:** Who are your students? Is your syllabus really written for those persons? Before each writing session, try articulating the goodness of your students in concrete ways. Imagining future collaborators can help you avoid antagonistic language that can undermine community-building even before your first class.
2. **Open the Syllabus:** “Correspondence” implies room for mutual dialogue. When possible, leave room for students to collectively add their own policies and statements. Opening up the syllabus to student collaboration can improve engagement and give students a voice in their own educational experience. To learn more about crafting an open syllabus visit the [Open Pedagogy Notebook](#).
3. **Personalize the Course:** Use technology to address your students by name regardless of class size. With mail merge, you can send a personalized welcome letter along with your syllabus. If working with D2L, you can use [replacement strings](#) to personalize your course shell.

### References

- Fink, L. D. (2013). *Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.
- Nelson, A. (2019). “Collaborative Syllabus Design: Students at the Center.” *Open Pedagogy Notebook: Sharing Practices, Building Community*. from <http://openpedagogy.org/course-level/collaborative-syllabus-design-students-at-the-center/>.
- Rocha, S. (2021). *The Syllabus as Curriculum: A Reconceptualist Approach*. New York, Routledge.

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## Critically Examining the Syllabus

Many of us have spent the spring and summer more deeply considering what we can do to actively advance social justice. In considering how teaching decisions work for or against social justice in our courses, the syllabus may be a good place to start, as it is the snapshot of the whole course. The syllabus can be the site for analyzing and dismantling cultural hierarchies and power structures in one's required readings, activities, and assessments. This can include

- Who writes the required texts
- What student expressions count as learning
- What cultural expressions are deemed valuable
- The format and flexibility of course content
- Who you cite and use as examples in presentations

As you review your syllabus, consider what people, values, and types of knowledge are reflected in texts, activities, projects, and other learning engagement.

### Be precise about your actions and goals with the syllabus.

Being precise about what we are doing can help us be intentional about our current and future goals, and helps us properly acknowledge the distinct work of others. For example, some refer to “decolonizing the syllabus” in an oversimplified way, as a stand-in for general “diversity and inclusion stuff” rather than acknowledging the specific effects of colonialism in our teaching and students’ learning. [Nayantara Sheoran Appleton \(2019\) challenges faculty to be precise about what they are doing with their course content](#) and offers these terms and goals as alternatives:

- Diversify your syllabus and curriculum
- Digress from the canon
- Decentre knowledge and knowledge production
- Devalue hierarchies
- Disinvest from citational power structures
- Diminish some voices and opinions in meetings, while magnifying others

These “Ds” progressively work toward deconstructing system of privilege and power: while “diversifying” might simply be sprinkling in more diverse texts, “decentering” is recognizing groups and ideas that over-represent a field and moving the focus off of these groups and ideas. By being more precise, you can recognize the trajectory of your work.

### Be realistic about the time and effort it will take to make effective improvements.

After analyzing the syllabus and identifying some goals, determine which are most urgent and feasible and which will require more learning and work. Part of this work includes *learning from others and centering their work*. If we rush and implement goals with an incomplete understanding, we may effectively work against our goals.

Determine what you can do today to immediately implement more inclusive strategies ([U-M's Inclusive Teaching Checklist](#) may provide some ideas) and to work toward long-term changes.



As many are moving to online, Flower Darby offers [6 Quick Ways to Be More Inclusive in a Virtual Classroom](#), focusing on [universal design for learning](#) and culturally responsive teaching.

[Learn how others in your field are doing this work.](#)

Each field likely needs to focus on different power structures at play, and the work is underway. Search for reading lists of underrecognized scholars and open educational resources. Twitter is often a good forum for recognizing scholars and activists doing critical and community engaged work related to your field. Consult professional organization listservs: if nothing is immediately available, put out a question asking others to provide sources, ideas, and insight.

The work of creating a more inclusive and just learning environment is urgent, but also requires long-term planning. Whatever ideas come out of your critical examination of the syllabus, always ask yourself what you can do right away and what is worth working toward in the months to come.

### References and Resources

Appleton, N. S. (2019 February 4). Do Not 'Decolonize' . . . If You Are Not Decolonizing: Progressive Language and Planning Beyond a Hollow Academic Rebranding. *Critical Ethnic Studies*. University of Minnesota Press.

**Recommended:** Maha Bali, Associate Professor of Practice at the Center for Learning & Teaching at the American University in Cairo (AUC), explains [nuanced definitions of equity, social justice, and decolonization](#), with a focus on higher education (July 13, 2020).

Renes, S. (2020). [Amplifying indigenous voices](#). *Critical digital pedagogy: A collection*. Hybrid Pedagogy Publishing. <https://cdpcollection.pressbooks.com/chapter/amplifying-indigenous-voices/>

### CETL Resources

- [Inclusive Practices and Diversity: Faculty Resources](#). Provides many ways to think about inclusive practices and diversity. Queen's University's self-paced modules on [Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Pedagogy and Practice](#) include one on Conversations on Decolonization.
- [Universal Design for Learning: Faculty Resources](#). UDL is about thinking of a design that reduces barriers and allows more flexibility in the learning environment.
- [White Racial Identity in Faculty Roles: Resources](#). Useful to think about the way that white identity is often centered in our courses, which can then be the foundation for thinking about decentering in order to increase what Nancy Fraser calls "parity of participation."

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## iMovie Trailers to Build Community

*"They don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." ~Anonymous*

As educators, we know that building community increases the likelihood of student success, and building community is based on trust and respect. One way I like to start building trust in my class is creating an iMovie trailer (I'm sure there are other platforms out there!) of what my class is going to be about. In the trailer, I show pictures from past classes and explain what types of major assignments they will be doing.

This movie trailer is taken from the class I was teaching last fall, PreK Methods and Materials. It was supposed to be an in-person class, but that only lasted a few weeks until we went all remote.

Anyway, the video is in our LMS, Canvas, for students to view before the semester begins. I created the video and then uploaded it to YouTube for free. When you upload to YouTube, you are provided a link that you can copy and share with your students and embed into your LMS "About the Class" page. For the iMovie, you can make use of your Bitmoji since it's very trendy right now. Here is the link to the YouTube video: [Welcome back to ECE](#), or click on the picture, or scan the QR code to access.



QR Code to access Youtube video



## **iMovie Trailer Directions**

1. Open iMovie app
2. Click on big + sign to begin a new trailer
3. Select trailer
4. Select which trailer you would want to use (I used "teen") for the one in this email, but there are so many others that are good!
5. Click Arrow pointing to right to go through the examples; otherwise, click on "create" in upper right hand corner
6. Wherever there is text, you can edit and put your own. Just click text box and it'll let you edit and then "done" when you are finished with that box
7. For each grey colored picture, you will select items in your camera roll to add. Click on the grey pic box and then click on the pic you want in that box from your camera roll. It'll automatically drop it there for you after you select it. (there will be a slight delay, but you will see it being dropped)
8. If you want to view the video as you drop items in, just click on "done" in upper right corner. There will then be two different arrows to select. If you select the little one in the box on the left, it will show the video from the beginning. If you select the big grey arrow, it will show the video of that pic.
9. You can keep editing and going back to view. Once each item is in place, you can click on an item to move it around in the frame.
10. Once you are completely done adding all text and pics, you click "done" in the upper left corner. Then you can watch it from the beginning.
11. I uploaded my video to YouTube for free. It's easier to get a share link to use in an LMS like Canvas, but you might have a different way to upload yours.
12. Have FUN!!

**References:** I created everything!

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## You Get What You Give

My ten-year old son heard me 'lecturing' online to a set of students in May 2020 and said to me that he wished he was in my class because I am obviously such a great teacher. Wondering if he meant that I was knowledgeable or gave clear explanations, I asked him why he thought that. He said "because you are so kind and respectful to your students all the time and my pre-K teacher told me that you should treat others how you want to be treated." It hit me hard that at ten he already knew that when it comes to teaching, if you want to get respect and participation from your students that you have to give it to them. Setting up a classroom that is welcoming and inclusive can be a challenge so here are a few quick and easy tips:

- Learn their names! You expect them to learn yours. Whether you do a seating chart, photo board, or name tents, the number one way to communicate to students that you care about them, that they are not just a number in a seat, and that therefore they should care about you and your course and to build rapport is to learn their names.
- Show up to class on time, or better still early! 1. Let all your students know that you respect and care about them. Start a conversation with a student in your class that you do not know well. If you are able to, showing up early allows students to ask questions and chat with you in an informal way which is often a easier place to address questions than during or after class, or in an official meeting. Reach out to a student in your class who appears withdrawn or doesn't seem to be included in classmate's friendship groups.
- Respect their contributions to class. They may not have it right yet, but if you are respectful to them as they are working on building those new thinking-patterns with your guidance.
- Be flexible. This is the hardest for many faculty who love to have hard deadlines, but if you are flexible with when you accept work so long as students are progressing through the course, then if you do have to take a couple of
- Praise publicly, criticize privately. It is so hard when you see a student being disrespectful during class not to call them out but to do so can make everyone uncomfortable. Take the time to acknowledge students who demonstrate kindness, consideration, and support for fellow students and model positive classroom behavior for your students.
- Use positive humor, not sarcasm
- Choose your words carefully – "I don't care" can be used by instructors in an attempt to demonstrate flexibility but could also come across like you genuinely don't care about them.



Developing positive and respectful classrooms relationships is an important part of a student's emotional and social development, promotes self-esteem, and assists them in developing a sense of belonging which is known to be critical for persistence to graduation. Teaching students about positive and respectful relationships by modeling them in your classroom sets expectations and supports them as they experience the challenge of learning. Creating a positive and respectful classroom community can be a constant work in progress but implementing any one of these strategies will assist your students where they are.

This teaching tip was crafted by Marina G. Smitherman of Dalton State College who can be contacted at [msmitherman@daltonstate.edu](mailto:msmitherman@daltonstate.edu) for questions. For more creative ways to innovate in your classroom from award-winning faculty across the University System of Georgia, please visit [https://www.usg.edu/facultydevelopment/engaged\\_student\\_learning/volume\\_2](https://www.usg.edu/facultydevelopment/engaged_student_learning/volume_2).

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## Hit the Pause Button: A New Kind of Late Work Policy

Like many, I have learned a lot about myself as a teacher and my students as people through the pandemic. We all had to make adaptations, some of which will disappear when (if?) the virus eventually does. One that I have decided to keep is my new “pause button” approach to late work.

In March 2020, everything was panicky and confused and, well, not anything any of us had experienced. While I primarily teach online and have no kids that I suddenly found at home as many of my colleagues and students did, I was not immune to their distress their work-life balance shifted so dramatically after spring break. And with that, I took a deep breath and let go of some control, and boy did it feel good! This is the message I sent my students about our new “late work” policy:

***If you can't get work completed on time, don't panic.*** *I want you to be happy with what you submit, and sometimes life takes over and school needs to be put on pause while we cope. **For my class, hit the pause button if you need to.** Just email me and let me know. You don't have to share details, just “I need to hit the pause button this week” works. No penalties for late work. This lets me know you're still out there and trying your best vs just giving up on the class completely. I hope no one gives up.*

I gave this grace to both my undergraduate students and my graduate students. My initial concern about implementing such a policy was that they'd all “hit pause,” and then I'd end up with loads of incomplete students. But that did not happen. I had a few students per class who had to “hit pause”—some worked in health care, some suddenly had several children at home 24/7, and a few actually got sick, with 2 needing prolonged hospital care. But you know what? Every single one of them completed their courses. One of them needed about 10 days beyond the final exam period to complete the final paper, but everyone else finished on time.

I received many emails thanking me for taking the pressure off and knowing that they had this option, even if they never used it. The students who did use it said it was the difference in their being able to rest easier knowing that I meant what I said—to focus on themselves and let me know when they were “pushing play” again and what questions they had before they got started.

In Spring 2020, even I had to “hit pause” when things got to be a little too much as I helped colleagues who had never taught online before shift to that modality way too quickly—and students let me know it was okay if I needed a break, that they completely understood. When you give grace, you get it in return.

I have continued this policy every term since then—Spring 2020, Fall 2020, Winter 2021, Spring 2021, and Summer 2021. And I will keep doing it. I still have had not even one student take advantage of it. (I know it will happen eventually, but I'll deal with it when it does.)





I think the one silver lining we have of this whole pandemic experience is we all had a chance to learn something—not in spare time (!!!), but from the experience of it all. I learned that a little kindness and transparency go a very long way to creating a welcoming learning environment and stronger relationships with my students, and I look forward to continuing to allow this human touch, this little bit of grace, in all of my classes.

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## Creating Connections with Virtual Students

Non-verbal, physical presence is essential in building a connection between the instructor and virtual student as well as adding a bit of fun. As such, asking students to have a consistent presence on Zoom while in a class is recommended if not required. Along with being physically present the entire class time, here are 4 easy tips to maximize presence when teaching a Room and Zoom class:

1. “Antler Ears” – sit up straight, have the computer at eye level (or close to it). Spread out your fingers on both hands and place your thumbs by your ears. The student should have each pinky finger on the edges of the vertical sides of the screen with their face being in the middle (it looks like “antlers”). Of course the student takes their hands down, but now they know how close they should sit to the screen so it is easy for the instructor to detect how the student is engaging and the student will be more accountable for their engagement.
2. “See Saw” - Go back and forth when engaging with student responses and questions – call on someone in the Room and then someone on Zoom and then in the Room and then in Zoom. Going back and forth brings a rhythm to conversation as well as keeping everyone engaged more readily since they might be called on.
3. “Show up and Tell” - Bring Roomers up front to speak in front of the camera so Zoomers can hear and see their fellow Room classmates more easily.
4. “Name Game” - Have Zoomers use their real name so you can easily call on them OR, as you become more familiar with the students, have them choose their favorite bible character, superhero or fictional character. You might be calling on Moses, Superman or Tom Sawyer one day.

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Moody Bible Institute



## Learning Motivated by Cheese and Wicked Problems

In their book *Burnout*, twin sisters highly accomplished in their fields of music and health tell a story about a scientific study comparing how two groups complete a maze puzzle with pencil and paper (Friedman & Förster, 2005). In both versions, a picture of a mouse is at the entrance of the maze, but in one version a piece of cheese waits at the end while in the other an owl is lurking. Those with the cheese maze completed the maze faster and at higher rates. The lesson:

*“We thrive when we have a positive goal to move toward, not just a negative state we’re trying to move away from” (Nagoski & Nagoski, 2020, p. xix).*

This reminded me another example testing persistence in a maze-like challenge: when people were challenged to complete a game coding challenge that got a car out of a maze, one of two things happened when they did not successfully code the puzzle. One group was simply prompted to try again, while another lost 5 points (everyone in both groups had 200 points). Which conditions cultivated more success? In the group that lost (totally meaningless) points, 52% completed the maze. In the no-penalty group, 68%. The former NASA engineer who conducted this experiment deemed this [the Super Mario Effect](#), saying:

*“The key is finding the right way to frame the learning process” (Rober, 2018).*

While these challenges are not exactly the same, they have a consistent message important for any educator: penalties do not motivate the kind of creative and analytical learning we hope for from students. This does not mean we don’t let students make mistakes, but that we create environments where it is safe to make mistakes (better yet, where students can make *lots* of mistakes) and where the end goal is clear, interesting, and important.

How we teach and design learning environments to motivate learning rather than stifle persistence may be somewhat different depending on our teaching context, but one goal can guide all of our decisions: **center the cheese, and eliminate the owl**. Here are some potential ways to get started:

1. **Define the “cheese.”** What “positive goal” are we having our students “move toward”? The examples explained here are not grand goals, as they both involve solving puzzles. The point is that the goal is in sight. Sometimes making an interesting, small challenge is enough. Alternatively, you can explain what the cheese could be (e.g. a foundational concept to all of x). Students might also be able to define the cheese: why does this matter to them? Describing short-term and long-term positive goals can increase persistence. [“Wicked problems”](#) might work well to connect your course or individual learning tasks to a larger “real-world” issue.
2. **Eliminate “owls.”** We cannot eliminate every stress and threat in students lives, but we can identify the “owls” that may loom in our courses and eliminate or reduce them. One universal place to start might be grades, or the extent to which they are used.



Proponents of “[ungrading](#)” argue that ranking and numerical scores interfere with the actual learning task. Instead, they promote minimizing and delaying these numerical grades as much as possible in exchange for [mastery learning approaches](#), feedback, revision, and unlimited attempts.

3. **Normalize mistake-making.** When penalties based on points and grades are eliminated, we can begin to normalize mistake-making. When students see they have made a mistake--even in zero-threat situations such as asking students to write down an answer to your question or answering an anonymous multiple-choice poll in class--they get immediate feedback that there is something to learn. When we create situations in which mistakes are not only okay and frequent but a normal part of the learning process, we are encouraging risk-taking and creativity. This is [why frequent testing and recalling might be better for learning than simply reading about a concept](#): when students receive feedback that their answer is wrong and are prompted to try again, they see that learning is happening.
4. **Use stories and metaphors.** [Later in Rober’s Super Mario Effect TEDTalk, he demonstrates that there is nothing inherently interesting about pressing buttons on a gamepad, but it is the story that is connected to the buttons](#) (run, jump, hit, duck, throw, etc.). Some educators have taken a message like this to promote gamification, but I would start with a broader approach of storytelling. This might be opening a lecture with a story related to the activity or concept. It could be using case studies to prompt students to apply course concepts to a problem. It could even be asking students to explain the course concept through a metaphor with the two-sentence fill-in-the-blank prompt: “[Course concept or process] is like [metaphor/illustration]. [Explanation of the connection],” or to consider how they would explain the concept to different audiences, such as a second-grade classroom or another layperson group related to your content.

As students hustle to keep the requirements straight among four different syllabi and make sure they’re keeping up with work, family, degree requirements and bills, lets use our inherent imaginations and curiosities to keep all of us motivated and energized.

### References and Resources

- Blum, S. D. editor (2020). [Ungrading: Why Rating Students Undermines Learning](#). West Virginia Press. One contributor, Jesse Stommel, speaks about [ungrading on the Teaching in Higher Ed podcast](#).
- Friedman, R. S., & Förster, J. (2005). [Effects of Motivational Cues on Perceptual Asymmetry: Implications for Creativity and Analytical Problem Solving](#). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 88(2), 263–275. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.88.2.263>
- Nagoski, E., & Nagoski, A. (2020). [Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle](#). Ballantine Books.



Hanstedt, P. (2018). [\*Creating Wicked Students: Designing Courses for a Complex World\*](#). Stylus.  
He also speaks [wicked problems in the Teaching in Higher Ed podcast](#).

Rober, M. (2018). [The Super Mario Effect: Tricking Your Brain into Learning More](#) | Mark Rober  
| TEDxPenn.

**Written and submitted by:**

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## Jumpstart student engagement and curiosity with ABC

Early in my first semester of grad school, a mentor introduced what was then a counterintuitive teaching strategy: Activity Before Content, or ABC. The strategy is simple: have students explore concepts and ideas before presenting them with new content. For example, before introducing a new concept, ask students to define it, drawing from their experiences and expectations: What do they *think* it means? What does it remind them of? How have they encountered it in previous situations? ...

ABC can be used with equal impact in both face-to-face and virtual learning environments.

### Why use ABC?

ABC has many advantages. Among them, it

- Engages students in active learning
- Enables students to retrieve existing information and make predictions about new information
- Provides opportunities for students to review what they know, or think they know, before piling on new information
- Creates a preliminary foundation for new content
- Encourages students to share both knowledge and questions with their peers
- Fosters a classroom community that values socially constructed knowledge
- Positions you as a collaborator and member of the classroom community, rather than a sage on the stage

### How does it work?

Many familiar teaching strategies lend themselves to ABC, for example,

- Write or project a question on the board for students to answer before class begins. Using a polling application (e.g., PollEverywhere), share responses as they accrue in real-time or immediately after everyone has responded, so students can see what their classmates are thinking. As a class, discuss the responses; be sure to explore any misconceptions/outliers as well as correct responses.
- Start class with a one- or two-minute freewrite. Discuss students' responses as a class or in small groups before sharing them out with the entire class. In online classes, leverage asynchronous discussion threads for these small group explorations.
- Create a low-stakes quiz that students complete in small groups at the beginning of class. Provide a few minutes at the end of class for groups to revisit/revise their answers after you've presented and discussed the content.



Once you get started, you'll think of many more ways to pique your students' curiosity, engage them in active learning, and create a vibrant classroom community with ABC.

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## Checking for Readiness to Move On

Not all students in a class will master material at the same rate. This tip discusses techniques for verifying that your class is prepared to learn new concepts, as well as ideas for helping those who fall behind.

Even though everyone's learning journey is very personal, much of the university learning experience takes place in the context of a community and within the constraints of a semester or term schedules. At times, some members of that learning community may not be ready to move on to the next stage of learning. As teachers we sometimes move on, leaving learners behind, and sometimes these learners never catch up. Without stifling those who are ready to move forward, it is possible to pause and verify that everyone is prepared to move on. What can we do to ensure that each learner is ready to proceed on the learning journey? Here are several ideas to consider:

How do you identify who is being left behind? Simply ask the students what they understand

### Approach 1: Invite students to do a think-pair-share

Ask students a question.

- Give students appropriate time to formulate a response.
- Have each student turn to another to share his/her response.
- Randomly call on various students to share their responses with the entire class.
- From a sampling of responses, determine if the students are ready to move on.

### Approach 2: Conduct class instant polling

- For instant in-class polling, use a classroom response system like i>clickers, Top Hot, TurningPoint, or other tools available at your institution.
- For outside-of-class polling or surveys use tools like Survey Monkey or Qualtrics, etc.

### Approach 3: Invite students to complete one-minute papers

- At the end of each class period, invite learners to answer questions about the experience (e.g., "What is the most significant thing you learned in class today?" or "What is still confusing about what was covered in class today?")
- Collect and review the responses to determine who is ready to move on and who needs additional instruction.

Once you've identified who is being left behind, what can be done to help them? Provide additional learning opportunities



### Approach 1: Use low stake quizzes

- Low stake quizzes are worth few or no points.
- Low stake quizzes can provide opportunities for students to demonstrate learning.
- Significantly, electronic quizzes have the advantage of automatic grading and automatic feedback.

### Approach 2: Model and practice

- Explain a concept or model a process that students need to master.
- Then break students into teams to practice, following your example.
- When the class comes together, select a sampling of students to demonstrate what was learned.
- Provide immediate constructive and confirming feedback.

Everyone has the potential to learn, even though he may represent the proverbial “last wagon.” Teachers can use a few simple practices to help each student make steady progress in their learning.

### Additional Resources

Angelo, Thomas A. and K. Patricia Cross. *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993)

Davis, Barbara Gross. *Tools for Teaching* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009)

McKeachie, Wilbert J. *Teaching Tips: Strategies, Research, and Theory for College and University Teachers* 10<sup>th</sup> edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999)

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## Pause and Listen: Teaching in a Fast-Paced World

*"My own capacity to listen widely, generously, and attentively becomes my resistance." Sherri Spelic*

In an anxious, sound-saturated world, a few minutes of silence is the space students need to think. [While it is ideal to pause for 12 seconds to allow a group to respond to a question, we instead wait about 1.2 seconds.](#) Allowing this mental space is not just a kindness to our students: It can be the difference in whether students remember and apply what they have learned. Our brain needs time to process information and make connections to prior knowledge.

Another form of pause is listening, a lost art in many western cultures. When are we *really* listening to students, giving them our full attention without sifting their response for the answer we anticipate? How often are students prompted to listen to each other, and how do we teach them to listen deeply?

This teaching tip offers four places to start, from simple strategies to thinking more deeply about listening as radical action.

[Reflect on to whom we and our students are listening.](#)

Listening is an intentional act of those we give respect, priority, and value to, and "How well or how poorly we listen often reflects the value we place on the messenger in a given context." In "[Listening as Resistance](#)," Sherri Spelic writes about what it means to listen, how we listen in the texts we read and then the choices we make about who we follow on Twitter and which publications we consult to interpret an event. Rather than just tuning into the voices with the most intellectual expertise or most resources, she writes in bold, "**I listen to people who have skin in the game.**"

Reflect on who students listen to based on your curriculum and course design: texts, podcasts, videos, blogs, social media, guest speakers. Do these prioritize individuals or groups? Do students get a chance to listen to different aural voices rather than only through the voice students generate while reading? Are we willing to bring in nontraditional media, voices, and perspectives, such as those "who have skin in the game"? In our own professional development, are we committed to listening to new voices?

[Begin and end with reflective silence.](#)

If you facilitate live class sessions, open class with reflective silence. You could prompt students to close their eyes, recognize the things that currently occupy their thoughts, pause them or let them go for the time being, and invite focus to the course. (For online sessions, you could encourage students to turn off their cameras and mute their mics for this part.)



This opening silence can also be structured by asking students to write a two-sentence review from the previous class session, a review of what they learned in their assignments leading up to class, or what they anticipate they will learn in the class ahead.

At the end of class, reserve five minutes for students to write a simple reflection of what they learned (which has been called a one-minute paper) or remaining questions (which has been called “muddiest point”). This metacognitive act is crucial to students getting the most benefit from the learning they have done in class--switching too quickly can cause much of that learning activity to melt away.

In asynchronous online courses, write these prompts at the beginning of lessons or class messages, and have students to share their opening and closing reflections in a Google Doc, [Q & A Moodle forum](#), or [Padlet](#).

Opt students to [Pause and Write](#).

This teaching tip offers strategies for intentional pauses throughout the class period, from committing to longer pauses after posing a question to the class to using discussion and activity lulls to bring students back to writing. These strategies help students who need or want to think through an answer (an introvert quality) rather than think as they respond (an extrovert quality).

[Prioritize listening in student discussions.](#)

In her work with indigenous educators in Alaska, Libby Roderick facilitates professional development programs on listening in which participants practice fully listening without interjecting responses verbally or even with body language. (See the open access book [Stop Talking: Indigenous Ways of Teaching and Learning and Difficult Dialogues in Higher Education](#).) Consider how to direct students to listen fully, such as prompting students in small groups to share responses uninterrupted and sharing out what someone else has said. In group work, emphasize the importance of coordinating group communication and including everyone’s voices rather than one’s ability to direct everyone’s work.

In asynchronous discussion forums, assign some student roles to listening, meaning rather than providing their own response, they synthesize the responses of a set group, or determine emerging themes by scanning all of the posts. Encourage them to use other students’ names and quote them directly or indirectly.

References and Resources

[Silence in Discussion? Pause and Write: Teaching Tip](#)

[Pauses Make Learning Visible with Melissa Wehler](#) (audio: 60 minutes), from the ThinkUDL Podcast. December 2020.



Read her accompanying article [Pause, Play, Repeat: Using Pause Procedure in Online Microlectures](#) (3-minute read), plus many other resources included in the podcast link above.

[Indigenous Ways of Teaching, Learning & Being with Libby Roderick](#) (audio: 64 minutes), from the ThinkUDL Podcast. December 2020.

Mercurieff, I., & Roderick, L. (2013). [Stop Talking: Indigenous Ways of Teaching and Learning and Difficult Dialogues in Higher Education](#) (free PDF of book). University of Alaska Anchorage. See also the partner book [Start Talking: A Handbook for Engaging Difficult Dialogues in Higher Education](#).

Morris, S. M., & Friend, C. (2020). [Listening for Student Voices](#) (7-minute read). *Critical Digital Pedagogy: A Collection*. Hybrid Pedagogy Press.

Spelic, S. (2018, June 28). [Listening as Resistance](#) (5-minute read). She spoke on this topic on the [View from Venus podcast \(episode: 20 minutes\)](#). This piece and others included in her book [Care at the Core: Conversational Essays on Identity, Education and Power](#).

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## Time Management Activity for Students

At the beginning of each semester, I have a time management activity I do with each class to help set student expectations. I have each student complete a weekly schedule that accounts for 24 hours a day for an average week. This is a very detailed schedule: they have to include all their classes, online assignment time for hybrid classes, hours of homework to expect each week, and all the other things in their lives - work, family, exercise, even sleep. I tell them to start by filling in the hours for immovable events – if they work, their average work hours each week; if they have children, time spent on childcare. Then fill in their class meeting times, enough hours for homework (and we talk about how many hours is reasonable to plan – always a shock to first semester students!), and finally everything else they want to do that week. We also talk about sustainable versus emergency choices: in a crunch week, they can get by on less sleep or no exercise, but that's not a good goal to have for a 16-week semester.

I tell students that the goal of this activity is to help them think realistically about their schedule and what they need to do to be successful this semester. They submit the schedule online with their self-introductions, but they also must bring it to their first meeting with me so that we can talk about it.

I have found that **starting the semester with conversations about what they need to commit to in order to be successful is helpful, and that these conversations are most helpful when informed by something concrete to talk about** - hence the schedule activity. It only takes about 5-10 minutes to explain and demonstrate in class, but it's something that I refer back to anytime I speak with a struggling student during the semester.

[Link to the shareable spreadsheet](#) (the link will prompt you to make a copy for yourself)

[Link to the overview video I share with students](#)

I also have a version of this activity for faculty to use: [faculty time management](#).

I hope you find this useful - please let me know if you have any questions!

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## Supporting LGBTQ Students in and out of the Classroom

A 2021 Gallop poll finds that almost 16% of Gen Z identifies as LGBTQ so if you have noticed a rise in queer, trans, and nonbinary students at your school, you are not alone. How can institutions of higher learning better serve this growing population? Here I suggest a few simple acts you can take to improve student success for sexual and gender minorities.

### Ally Trainings

Take Safe Zone and other ally trainings at your school and display signage in your office, and other spaces as you can. Queer students notice these visible indicators that identify you as an ally. This makes them more likely to come to you with questions and issues, and makes them feel safer in your classroom, office, and unit.

### Names and Pronouns

Use preferred names and correct pronouns. Ask students what they like to be called and their pronouns. One way to model this in the face-to-face classroom is to introduce yourself on the first day with your pronouns. Say, “I’m Dr. Barton, and my pronouns are she/her.” Then, take attendance using only students’ last names, and ask them to tell you their preferred first names, and their pronouns if they like. Do not make saying pronouns required of students as some may not be ready to come out publicly.

It is easy to misgender someone, which means to use the wrong pronouns, and to forget or be uncomfortable with they/them pronouns. If you misgender someone, quickly apologize, use the correct pronoun, and move on. If a student misgenders another student, quickly correct the student, and move on. You might use the mistake (your own or another’s) as a teaching opportunity to discuss the challenges of pronoun usage and explain that social change is a work in progress.

Put your own pronouns on your syllabi, signature file, zoom and other video conferencing systems. Again, doing this normalizes the practice and indicates you are an ally.

### Come out

If you are a member of the LGBTQ community, and feel it is safe to be out, come out to students. I have been out in the classroom as a lesbian for the past 25 years. I teach Gender, Women’s Studies, and Sociology so the content lends itself toward this disclosure, but anyone in any unit can come out by mentioning a same sex spouse, and/or discussing their significant other like heterosexuals would a heterosexual partner.

In online classes, I introduce myself on a thread writing that my wife and I live in Lexington, KY, have two cats and a dog, and then I share some of my research and teaching interests, and hobbies. In the classroom, I will mention my wife, or find some other way to indicate my sexual orientation to students.

It’s best to come out early in the term, preferably in the first week. This allows students to consider what they say aloud about sexual orientation and gender identity from the beginning of a class. Those that might have said something homophobic, or transphobic, are more careful, and this is best for you and them. If you come out mid-term, a student may have *already* said or written something that is bigoted and worry this will affect their grade. All this said, any time



you come out, you can positively affect those around you because you normalize gender and sexual diversity, and support queer students in their journeys. Finally, I have observed, and studies support, that Gen Z is more accepting of sexual and gender diversity than previous generations.

### Share information on your syllabus and unit web pages

It's easy to include syllabus and web page statements with information about how to change one's name in the university system if your institution, like most, have this option for students. I share the link to my institution's form on my syllabus. I also email the link to individual students on a case-by-case basis when, perhaps, their name in the body of a message does not match their official email designation, and especially when one writes to share their pronouns with me.

You can also include information about where to find the all-gender bathrooms on campus, links to your university gay-straight alliances, Pride center, Women's center, and any other clubs and resources you think students would find valuable.

### Gather demographic data on sexual orientation and gender identity

Many institutions still do not gather simple descriptive data on the number of LGBTQ students and employees on their campus. Make the case to gather this data on your campus at large, and request a break down by college, unit, and department. Knowing the numbers helps you make a stronger case for institutional resources.

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## Nurturing First Generation Students

Morales (2012) conducted a qualitative analysis of students' experiences in liberal arts courses. Participants were 20 first-generation students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds. Morales identified three key themes that we can see in many introductory courses and throughout the experience of higher education:

1. Legitimizing the private by making it public: Especially in literature courses, but certainly with other learning experiences as well, students can be exposed to perspectives of others that validate their own experiences. Marginalized students, in particular, may come to realize that they are not alone in feeling embarrassed or confused as they encounter common challenges in adjusting to campus life and new disciplines.
2. Contributing academic accuracy to pre-existing knowledge: Students develop knowledge and understanding of their histories and their worlds. Learning to think in the method of their discipline (e.g., as a historian or scientist) empowers students who can now feel freed from erroneous beliefs and belief systems around contexts and events important to them. Profound intellectual excitement accompanies the emotional and cognitive liberation of seeing the world through new eyes.
3. Validating dissent: Students in our introductory, as well as advanced, courses have the opportunity to develop ideological autonomy. Many adolescents learn simply that knowledge is dispensed by authority figures, but with higher education can come to realize they can question this knowledge, and even participate in creating new knowledge. For some, this may be the first time they've been asked or allowed to question prior norms, thoughts, and values.

Instructors can nurture development of these realizations by pointing out connections between course material and students' own experiences, and by asking students to do so. It also helps to directly address common myths and misconceptions in your field.

### Reference:

Morales, E. E. (2012). Learning as liberation: How liberal arts education transforms first-generation low socio-economic college students. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 13(4), 499-518.

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## Imposter Syndrome in Students

Students often come into our classrooms feeling academically inadequate and fearful of being found out as imposters. They want to learn and are willing to work hard to do so, but worry about the assumptions they think professors make about them. This sense of being judged, or believing that others are noticing them more than is likely, is what social psychologists call the *spotlight effect*. Several strategies can be used to overcome students' fear of self-conscious embarrassment:

1. Communicate your understanding that introversion and shyness are not indicators of disinterest or disrespect.
2. Warn students in advance that you are going to call on them, and follow through. Give them time to prepare both academically and emotionally. For example, ask certain students to prepare an answer to a question that will be posed in a later class session. Plan for all students to take turns doing so.
3. Talk with students about the process of developing a professional or academic identity separate from their private self. Practice transparency by explicitly telling students that you are intentionally creating a safe, brave space for them to practice speaking up, sharing ideas, and taking risks.

For more on this topic, see:

- Cox, R. D. (2009). *The college fear factor: How students and professors misunderstand one another*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kaufman, P., & Schipper, J. (2018). *Teaching with compassion: An educator's oath to teach from the heart*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Newkirk, T. (2018). *Embarrassment: And the emotional underlife of learning*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

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## Inclusive Practices and Universal Design for Learning

What do you picture when picturing an engaged student? A disengaged student? Is it students using technology in class, body language we interpret as boredom, or something else? These days it might be students opting not to turn on cameras during a live lesson, or not logging onto Moodle for many days. It is easy to take it personal when students aren't engaged in a course you have worked hard on, but it is more productive to ask "Why are they disengaged?" The answer may be different than we expect, especially with the many ways higher education norms mystify students, especially first generation students or students who bring with them educational experiences and perspectives very different from those prioritized in our courses.

Since we do not know who will come into our class in any given semester, and we don't always know a lot about our students, it helps to create courses from a design perspective, particularly one that is flexible and accounts for students of many different interests, strengths, and motivations.

**Universal Design for Learning (or UDL)** is a way to "improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn" (CAST, 2015). This approach considers the why, what, and how of students' learning while reducing the barriers students may face in achieving course outcomes. Learning during the pandemic exacerbates these barriers, which is why UDL is the foundation of a [recent Chronicle article on six ways to be more inclusive in your virtual classroom](#). UDL doesn't water down instructional expectations or standards; instead, it provides students access to opportunities to succeed. [See our UDL resources and videos for more on UDL's principles](#).

### Things to Do Now (or Soon)

These are some first steps to consider in increasing access for a variety of students. They don't need to be done all at once. The authors of *Reach Everyone, Teach Everyone: Universal Design for Learning in Higher Education*, recommend a "plus one" approach, which promotes making one change, one time, forever (Tobin & Behling, 2018). Consider where you can get the most benefit for your work: about what parts of your course do students always....

- ask questions about the content,
- get things wrong on tests and exams, or
- ask for alternative explanations?

They also recommend choosing where to start by asking students themselves: where do they get stuck? What kind of options would increase their motivation and deepen their understanding?

- ☐ **Provide early access to course content.** Allowing students to look at least one week ahead in a course helps them plan for uncertain schedules.
- ☐ **Record sessions.** Recorded sessions not only supports students who cannot attend live sessions, but also provides an opportunity for students to review specific parts as many times as needed.



- ❑ **Turn on live captions.** Google Meet, Google Slides, and Microsoft PowerPoint have live captioning options. While not perfectly accurate, this visual reinforcement can help students who have difficulty understanding audio.
- ❑ **Be flexible in assignment due dates, when possible.** Do assignments need to be turned in within a date range, or is it crucial for students to turn in assignments on the day specified? Timelines help students scaffold their learning, so consider how to encourage timely submissions without drastic penalties for work submitted shortly after the due date.
- ❑ **Encourage variety in discussion forum expression (text, video, audio).** With increased online classes, we are all likely doing a lot of reading these days. Moodle's multimedia tools allow students to add text, video, or audio directly to Moodle text boxes. Encourage students to respond in a variety of formats: sometimes students can articulate more complex thought in audio or video, and variety can help increase student motivation.
- ❑ **Provide checklists or templates to help students focus on the learning.** During a pandemic, students are not only learning concepts related to the discipline, but also how each instructor sets up their Moodle course, how different activities work, plus a litany of other processes. Checklists or assignment templates can help free up some of students' cognitive load in order to focus on the important stuff.
- ❑ **Link to the reading source (rather than uploading PDFs).** PDFs can either be highly accessible or difficult to read depending on how they are produced (see our [PDF accessibility guide](#)). Check for the original web source for a PDF, whether a journal article or popular web piece, and link students to that web page, which tends to scale better. Providing both PDF and weblink is an added bonus.
- ❑ **Share course documents in Google Docs or Word rather than just PDF.** These editable formats more easily allows students to customize appearance and annotate the document based on their needs (highlighting due dates, rearranging information, etc.). Additionally [Google Docs has a "make a copy" feature](#) that allows students to make a copy of a document, which allows you to maintain a master copy while also allowing students to annotate their own copy.
- ❑ **Find existing reinforcement resources** ([Lightboard videos from the Tutoring Center](#), YouTube videos, visual guides). Many faculty are publicly sharing their teaching resources. When you recognize a pain point in the semester, note it for later exploration and see what the web offers. Sometimes an alternative explanation and example reinforces a concept in a way that helps it stick for students. Make these additional resources optional for students who feel like they need additional review.



### Inclusive Practices Rejects a Deficit Model

I hope this checklist provides a good starting point *and* sparks a deeper interest in UDL. I also hope you continue to explore UDL's opportunities. When considering UDL from an inclusion lens, it's important to note that UDL is more than a "one size fits all" mindset. As is often articulated by disability experts, designing for the marginalized doesn't merely "help" the marginalized, but creates a better design. Therefore, rather than using UDL to "help" underperforming students, UDL should be used to de-center the value placed on one way of engaging students, representing ideas, and measuring their learning. In other words, UDL should emphasize student difference as an asset rather than to compensate for perceived deficits.

### Resources

[Center for Applied Special Technology](#). (2015). *About UDL*.

[National Center on Universal Design for Learning](#). (2014, November 12). *Universal design for learning guidelines*.

[6 Quick Ways to Be More Inclusive in Your Virtual Classroom](#) [Chronicle article, 5-minute read]. Flower Darby, author of *Small Teaching Online*, focuses on inclusive course design based on two frameworks: universal design for learning and culturally responsive pedagogy.

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## How to Make My Teaching More Inclusive

*“The role of a college instructor is to help students feel included and ready to thrive!”*

See the article in [The Chronicle of Higher Education by Viji Sathy and Kelly A. Hogan](https://www.chronicle.com/article/how-to-make-your-teaching-more-inclusive) (22 July 2019) <https://www.chronicle.com/article/how-to-make-your-teaching-more-inclusive>

Two principles the authors addressed for inclusive teaching included:

1. The more structure, the better for all.
2. Too little structure leaves too many behind.

A simple application for inclusive teaching is to teach note-taking to students. I work through the tips below on the first/second day of class and even provide handouts with blanks for students to fill in for the first few classes. The Association of College and University Educators (ACUE) provide these suggestions for sharing with students:

- Review notes from the previous class and assigned reading and ask the instructor to clarify what doesn’t make sense.
- Avoid writing too small and strive for easy readability.
- Leave a generous left margin for rewriting important words and abbreviated key content later.
- Make key words, important relationships, and conclusions stand out. Underline, highlight, box, or circle them.
- Organize your notes according to the instructor’s words and phrases. Listen for signal words such as “the following three...,” “the most important conclusion,” and “on the other hand.”
- Identify the most important points by watching for instructor cues: deliberate repetition, pauses, a slower speaking pace, a drop in pitch, a rise in interest or intensity, movement toward the class, displaying a slide, or writing on the board.
- If the instructor tends to speak or move from point to point too quickly, politely ask him or her to slow down.
- If you lose focus and miss part of a lecture, leave a space and ask a classmate, a teaching assistant, or the instructor to help you fill in the blank.
- Review, edit, clarify, and elaborate your notes within 24 hours of the lecture, again a week later, and again a month later—even if for just a few minutes.

Additional Resources: <https://crlt.umich.edu/multicultural-teaching/inclusive-teaching-strategies>

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## Designing for student success through interdependent learning

How can faculty design courses to maximize student success? Designing for success means engaging in intentional course design, leveraging tools, and pedagogical strategies to support the success of all students—and especially those who are more likely to face challenges. One way to design for success is to enable interdependent learning.

### What is interdependent learning?

Interdependent learning requires connecting with others and cannot be achieved alone. This is in contrast to independent learning, where the student works individually and is independently motivated.

### Why is interdependent learning important?

Interdependent learners often come from cultures where individuals are motivated by others' high expectations and which place great value in collaboration, including collaborative research. Following the footsteps of accomplished others, following rules, and appreciating others' opinions are norms in many interdependent cultures.

Interdependent learning can benefit most learners, but it can be especially useful for first-generation college students. First-generation students often feel discomfort in traditional college environments, experiencing a disadvantageous cultural mismatch between their own norms and the norms of university culture. This may affect students' performance by influencing their perception of the setting and the construal of tasks expected of them in that setting. Hence, they may find tasks more difficult and may perform poorly in comparison to their counterparts with one or more parents who have college experience.

### How to include interdependent learning in course design?

Interdependent learning opportunities need to be purposefully built into course design so that they appear to be organic to the learning process. Faculty should carefully analyze course learning objectives to determine which can be met using interdependent learning opportunities. Instructors encourage interdependent learning by having students work collaboratively in groups, conduct collaborative research, and engage in opportunities to appreciate the opinions and contributions of others.

Merely putting students in groups will not automatically result in interdependent learning. Faculty need to consciously scaffold interdependent learning in groups by setting up transparent, well-articulated tasks and participation expectations, as well as providing rubrics to define assessment criteria.

### Some design questions to consider

Where in your course design might you enable interdependent learning? How will you make sure students understand the interdependent nature of a learning activity? What steps will you



take to ensure both individual and group accountability in learners? In what ways can you communicate that interdependent learning does not reinforce dependence on others?

### Resources

DeBraak, L. (2008). Independent and Interdependent remedial/developmental student learners. *NADE Digest*, 4(1), 11-18.

[Interdependent Learning](#)

[Teaching for independent and interdependent learning](#)

[The Importance of Interdependence Within the Classroom](#)

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## Should We Stop Grading Class Participation?

Does class participation factor into the final grade for your classes? Are you looking for ways to reward or encourage class participation?

In [this article from the Chronicle of Higher Education](#), James M. Lang provides some insight into why grading class participation is not a particularly sound pedagogical practice and can actually lead to unintended effects and consequences. Instead, Lang offers strategies for how to make participation an ungraded classroom norm and a more inclusive and equitable practice.

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## Infusing Study Skills into the Curriculum

Students can come to college feeling like they know how to study, but then the first exams for the semester come back. Sometimes they were surprised that their confidence in how well they did was off after seeing their first exam grade. Psychologists call the ability to recognize how well you know information metacognition. Signs of poor metacognition can be cramming, stopping study too soon ("I got this" or "good enough"), being overconfident, and thinking study habits are good when studying did not help. If a student is studying and it does not increase their understanding, they should recognize they could be using a poor study skill strategy.

Here are a few tips in helping students find success in their study strategies along with some resources! First consider how students study - is the study session organized? Louisiana State University has a quick video for students on Intense Study Sessions ([view video here](#)). Sharing a study plan can be helpful for students to be efficient and purposeful with their study time. The YouTube video reviews steps to make a study session efficient – make a goal for the session, study (choosing how), recap/review (test your learning), and then take a small break.

Now for "how should students study" advice . . . there are several study strategies that are universally successful regardless of the subject matter. Studying with no distractions is key to have focus on what is being studied (i.e., find distraction-free times for this intense study session). Students sometimes don't see their phone being around or studying where there is activity being a distraction – but these things can pull away from our attention. The American Psychological Association put together a [quick study habit quiz](#) with tips you can also share with students to further the conversation. Here are a few other resources: [Learning Scientists materials](#): research proven study strategies from an amazing group of cognitive psychologists who want to share and explain what study skills work and why. They have videos explaining their identified six key strategies and other downloadable materials to instructors, students, parents, and researchers. The [videos by Dr. Stephen Chew](#): covers a range of study topics, each video is six to eight minutes and he includes a teaching resources guide on his website. I know of a handful of faculty who assign or share these for students to watch on their own and get positive student feedback. Finally, I put together a [Study Smart 3-min video](#) of study tips suggested here and an activity from the American Psychological Association Introductory Psychology Initiative.

Thank you for reading through these and sharing with your students. We can come together to all play a role in student success. If you are feeling frustrated with your students' performance, there is hope, and I wish your students' academic success!

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## The Zoom Black Box Blues: Building a Flexible Camera Policy

The question of whether or not to require that students keep their cameras on during synchronous online classes can be fraught. On the one hand, we use faces to help gauge participation, presence, and even the flow of conversation. On the other hand, a variety of legitimate concerns can keep students from turning their cameras on. As we enter a new semester, here are some ideas and strategies for crafting a course policy that respects your students' needs while ensuring effective and rigorous class participation.

Let's start by acknowledging that **students have a lot of good reasons for turning off their cameras**. These reasons can range from social (anxiety over being constantly seen by the rest of the class) to familial (sharing a small room with other zoomers) to technical (e.g., Zoom optimizes bandwidth, so turning off the camera may be the only thing keeping them in class when using a subpar internet connection). It is better to assume good faith on the part of the students. They logged into the class, after all, so let's find ways to honor that decision.

The teleconferencing software we're using is a form of communication technology, and we recommend using it to communicate! **Talk to your students**. If the lack of student faces on the screen is impacting your ability to teach, discuss that fact with the students. As with all things teaching, relate to them as human beings first. Consider providing a flexible camera policy in your syllabus, and be sure to remind students of your camera policy throughout the semester.

Also, please keep in mind that **a live camera is not necessarily evidence of student engagement**. Have you ever been in a meeting where you appeared more attentive than you actually were? Even in physical classrooms, presence does not always equate to attention. A robust [participation policy](#) will ensure engagement more than any hard rule about camera usage. Also, consider that teleconferencing is not a perfect recreation of a traditional classroom. Prior to the COVID lockdown, we did not spend our entire class time looking people directly in the eyes from mere inches away. Now we might spend all day doing exactly that! Meanwhile, we have no idea what students are looking at on their own screens.

With these facts in mind, you can take some simple steps to mitigate the issue. First, **ask students to add a profile picture**. In Zoom, this can be done by going to the profile section of [zoom.us](https://zoom.us) or, in a live meeting, using the video settings tool to navigate to the profile settings. Some smiling faces, even still pictures, may help you feel more comfortable teaching in the synchronous online environment.

Second, **begin class sessions with a breakout room activity**. Students are more likely to turn on their cameras when doing a small group activity like discussing a question, reviewing prior material, or completing an activity. Some of those students may leave their camera on when they return to the main room, and regardless, students will have had a chance to warm up to class time.



Third, **consider warm-calling**. This strategy lets students know that they are expected to participate during class. In warm-calling, students reflect quietly on a question or chat together, before the instructor randomly calls on names. While reducing stress by giving students time to sort their thoughts, this strategy also maintains the expectation that students be focused and attentive to class lecture or discussion.

Fourth, **practice screen rest**. For long synchronous classes, consider a “screen break” or encourage all students to turn their cameras off during a reflective moment. This practice helps students suffering from [Zoom fatigue](#) and can reenergize everyone’s focus and attention.

Finally, we acknowledge that different types of courses require different levels of camera use. An acting instructor, for example, needs to see the faces of students performing a scene. **If you need cameras on, make your case to the students**. Explain how the camera helps them achieve the learning goals of the course. Specify when cameras must be on--such as when giving a presentation--and when it is okay to have them off. Review this policy with the students early in the course, remind them of it regularly, and incorporate these rules into your syllabus. Whatever approach you take to the use of cameras, make sure the students know what to expect from the beginning of the course.

#### Additional Resources

- [“Should Showing Faces Be Mandatory?”](#) Matt Reed, *Inside Higher Ed*
- [“Should We Require Students to Turn Their Cameras On in the Zoom Classroom?”](#) Anna Lännström, *Wabash Center*
- [“Please, let students turn their videos off in class.”](#) Vincent Nicandro, Aditya Khandelwal, and Alex Weitzman, *Stanford Daily News*.

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## Class-Sourcing Interaction: Online Agendas, Notes, Discussions

The global pandemic of 2020-2021 forced instructors to pivot pedagogy in unprecedented ways. Many of us experimented with new strategies and approaches to engaging with students online (both synchronously and asynchronously). Some of these experiments are worth carrying forward. One that I will be carrying forward is using a single online shared electronic document (e.g., Google Docs) to engage students with course materials, instructional questions and discussions, and class notes.

For a fully online and asynchronous course, I drafted a weekly template of a class session in a Google Doc (see here for inspiration: [https://bit.ly/workingopen\\_gdoc](https://bit.ly/workingopen_gdoc)). Every week, I updated the template to include wrap up information from the prior week, general announcements for all, this week's agenda, discussion questions, and other activities – all completed within the Google Doc as a home-base. Activities included things like a section to add their main takeaway (and their main “remaining question”) about that week's readings, applying their understanding by contributing an example of their own lived experiences to a topic from that week, and responding to other students' ideas and writing. Each week, students engaged in the Google Doc at their own convenience with respect to timing. By the end of the week with a class of about 20 masters-level students, the Google Doc often grew to 50 pages or more in one week!

To facilitate navigating the growing document each week, I relied on using the Google Doc's heading structures and styles, and features such as the built-in Table of Contents tool (information here: <https://support.google.com/docs/answer/116338?co=GENIE.Platform%3DDesktop&hl=en>). Additionally, I built this in to the learning goals of the course for students to gain facility in using these accessibility tools, in an effort to increase their skills at creating online digital content that is accessible.

As with all experiments, I would make changes in the next iteration. For one, some students were challenged with the sheer quantity of interaction in a written modality. On the one hand, it was primarily more “conversational” and “informal” interaction (akin to active class discussions, whilst being asynchronous and online). On the other hand, it was a lot of text every week! That said, I will definitely be carrying this approach forward in my someday “post-pandemic” teaching. While I may not use this approach every week and/or with so much in each online Google Doc assignment, it was a valuable way of facilitating student interaction in a fully asynchronous way.

### Reference:

Schley, S., Duckles, B., & Blili-Hamelin, B. 2021. *Open Knowledge* and collaborative documents. *Journal of Faculty Development*, 34(3), 94-95.

Thanks to Drs. Borhane Blili-Hamelin, Beth Duckles, Carol Marchetti, and Eleanor Feingold for copious discussion expansion of these ideas in practice.



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## Two innovative strategies for interactive online classes

This teaching tip has two innovative and creative ideas that you can use to increase interaction and participation in your classes. If you happen to be teaching in person, there's plenty here for you too.

Tip 1: Randomize Participation using [RANDOM.ORG](https://www.random.org).

This online randomizer site has several free options that you can use to generate student engagement.

[Draw cards from a shuffled deck](#): create different questions for each card number, suit or color. The shuffler will select the cards and away you go!

[Flip a coin](#) (in lots of currencies!) You can have the flip a coin function do exactly that - instruct students to answer one prompt for heads and another for tails. You could also use the flip a coin option for deciding which partner will go first for their lab session.

[Roll dice](#): You can have a list of 6 discussion prompts that correspond to the numbers on dice, you roll the dice to see which 1 or 2 prompts a student will answer.

Pro tip: you can combine multiple online randomizers – use [this wheel of names](#) to randomly select a student to answer...or put your discussion topics on the wheel and give it a spin – whichever topic it lands on, you select a student to answer.

All of these randomizer options are great for encouraging student participation. The questions that you choose as prompts could be icebreakers or they could be topically oriented to your class content. This could be great for exam review too, it is a creative way to support [retrieval practice](#).

The randomizers work equally well if you're teaching in-person. I used to bring decks of cards and dice in many sizes and colors to class but in order to avoid high-touch situations, I'm now using the online versions in my in-person classes. I show the site on the screen instead of distributing the items.

One great strategy to keep all of these activities moving quickly is for the person who just answered to select the next person (if I answer first, I select person B to go next, person B picks person G, etc.) This minimizes the amount of time spent awkwardly staring at Zoom screens, waiting for someone to volunteer.

Tip 2: Use Social Media (specifically Instagram stories).

If you aren't familiar, [Instagram Stories](#) is a feature that lets users of the Instagram app post photos and short videos that disappear from feeds in 24 hours. The posts appear at the top of each follower's feed, with a ring around the profile image to let users know that there is content to view. Viewers can respond to Stories (which can contain short polls, questions, or



surveys, among other things), but unlike likes or comments in the main Instagram feed, these responses are not public—they go directly to the person who posted the Story. [This link](#) will tell you everything you ever wanted or needed to know about creating Instagram Stories.

This tip is adapted from [Christine Novak, an accounting professor](#) who began using Instagram Stories to keep students engaged in learning outside of class time. If it works for engaging students in accounting courses, I am confident that all disciplines would be equally able to use it!

Here are a few of her suggestions:

Create a public Instagram account separate from your personal Instagram account (Instagram makes it easy to toggle between accounts - which I know because my dogs have their own Instagram account, which I manage for them since they don't have opposable thumbs...but I digress...). This, along with not following students on Instagram, helps maintain boundaries and keeps the focus on the topics of the course.

No more than once a week (and avoiding weekends, holidays and school breaks), post a short video with content related to concepts taught in class—each video should review one concept and should be followed by a question for students to answer. The survey/poll option in Instagram Stories is great for this. You can make the poll response options basic (true/false) or punch it up a bit (no way/absolutely).

Emphasize authenticity, not perfection – students who use Instagram stories know that these are not professionally edited documentaries! By recording and posting without a lot of self-critique, you're demonstrating your authentic self, which helps humanize you to your students. If there's one thing we've learned this during our year of remote teaching it's that we should embrace as many opportunities to humanize remote learning as possible. Novak states that "Students want you to be a person, and they want you to connect with them on a different level, so I'm like, 'Here I am in my backyard!' I think it makes them more comfortable with me."

Offer extra-credit points for students who respond to video questions. After viewing the video question in the Instagram Story ([click here](#) to see Professor Novak demonstrate this) each student can respond privately with their analysis and answers. Correct answers earn students extra-credit points. If they know the answer, they can easily type their answer as a comment in the Stories and if they don't know the answer, it can prompt them to review their notes or the recorded lectures to find the answer.

Keep Instagram responses private to make it OK for students to fail. This simply means that you don't repost the student responses to your Instagram stories and you only save *your* videos or photos with the course content to the [highlights tab](#) in Instagram.

This interactive Instagram technique has demonstrated positive academic outcomes for Novak's students. She reports that students who followed the Instagram account on average had a higher overall course grade—by 8.86 points.



I hope these innovative strategies will help you create student engagement and connection online or in person.

Happy Teaching!

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## Multiple Prompt Online Discussion Style

Designing discussion topics that engage all members of the class is difficult, especially with the additional challenges in creating a sense of classroom camaraderie that the digital divide may present for some. Often, we see online class discussion boards designed with a single prompt, sometimes with multiple parts to generate appropriately thorough responses from students. All students respond to the same prompt and occasionally comment on the responses of their peers. While this style gets the job done, it does not allow for diverse interests; students who do not find the prompt that week particularly interesting are likely to glean very little from the academic discourse.

Using the multiple prompt style is a clever way around this issue. In this style, we instead see the instructor post multiple prompts that focus on various subtopics in the overarching theme of that particular week or module. The prompts may present different questions or different learning tasks for students to complete and the instructor will often set a minimum number of posts for satisfactory participation. The defining feature of this approach is that students get to choose what they want to investigate based on what stands out to them the most. By utilizing this technique, we as educators hand students the reins to their discussion-based learning by allowing them to take an exploratory approach to the task. They are free to choose the aspects of the topic that appeal most to them—perhaps some aspects are more in-line with their learning goals while others are not. Whatever the case, students may choose the educational threads they wish to follow and may therefore have an easier time with finding relevance and satisfaction in the topic.

More information about how to design and facilitate this discussion board style is presented in this video, created by PIE Assistant Director Caity Kelly, M.S.: <https://youtu.be/F8fuhB8sYyo>

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## Intentional creation of an inviting course culture

*We teach who we are*

John W. Gardner

As humans we learn best in community with each other. Each of our courses is an invitation to community. It happens well when we create an intentionally inviting (Purkey, 1987) course culture. Without fail these culture-building intentional efforts come back manyfold by increased student interest, motivation, enthusiasm, unexpected learning (beyond the intended outcomes of the course), sense of belonging and even better, attendance. Learning to know each other in order to build a functioning learning culture leads to better student outcomes due to increased positivity and absence of perceived social-emotional threat. Thoughtful and compassionate teachers model learner dispositions such as initiative, resilience, intellectual curiosity, flexibility, self-confidence, courage to confront complexity and uncertainty, building stronger understandings through mistakes, perseverance, wonderment and a sense of humor. We teach not only what we do and how we do it but who we are. Every course experience is a meta-level experience, where our students are learning to learn while building their own repertoire as learners (and the same is true for us as instructors in learning more about the effects of our teaching) and their beliefs about who they are and can yet grow to become.

Creating a culture of learning can come in many forms by using our creativity and our own learning experiences. Some ideas worth trying:

- Have students create a short 1-2 minute video to submit on the Learning Management System about who they are and why they are in your course. You can be brief: name, major, one interesting fact about you. Have students give written feedback to 1-2 colleagues/peers in the course to their initial video. This builds an expectation that interactions are a normal part throughout the course.
- Designate an area (a 'playground' of sorts) in the LMS where students can work on their metalearning awareness: Have students share a funny/worst/best learning memory from their journey as a learner. Share short snippets what you are learning from everyone in class.
- Have students create a playlist of music that relates to the concepts taught and processes experienced during the course
- Invite students to bring artifacts representing their experiences, background or future dreams and show (or write a paragraph) how that artifact is related to the major topic in the course.
- Have students create a team motto for the course and revisit them during the course. Here is something in a recent classroom visit: *Try your best, Love yourself, Smile often, Keep on going, Be brave*
- Trust your own instincts of how to create a supportive culture: sharing something about yourself that is interesting, and encouraging to your students. Or have them ask you a question.
- Successful learner attitudes include many ideas that build capacity for adult living and citizenship such as vulnerability (Brene Brown), self-compassion (Sue Neff), grit



(Duckworth), growth-mindset (Zweck), how to understand the brain and earning better (Doyle, T. & Zakrajsek, T.), importance of sleep hygiene and self-care ideas. Have students create ungraded mini-presentations for course colleagues and have periodic discussions about how these have helped in understanding class material better. You could also offer as a service project to have students visit a Pre-K-12 class about learning in college.

- There is a great list of *101 things* to do in the first weeks of class created by Joyce Povlacs Lunde ideas are sorted into the following: helping students make transitions, directing students' attention, challenging students, providing support, encouraging active learning, building community and soliciting feedback for your teaching.  
<https://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/professional-development/first-3-weeks>

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## Design courses for equity in teaching and learning

As faculty adopt new formats and strategies to teach in classrooms modified for health and safety during a global pandemic, we should give some thought to how students will access and use learning resources. Select tools, materials, platforms, and learning activities with inclusion and equity in mind. What does this mean?

### ***Consider how students will access instructional materials.***

Is the revised course ***digitally inclusive***? What resources must a student have to access the learning materials? Will students from all populations and backgrounds have equal access to the digital tools required to participate fully in learning activities? Several obstacles can limit student access to course materials and learning activities:

- Status of internet and technology in the student's home (low bandwidth, multiple users)
- Cost of materials (textbooks, specialized equipment or software, fees for an exam proctoring service)
- Physical limitations (for students with documented needs for accommodation for vision, hearing, mobility, or other accessibility issues)

### ***Consider whether design assumptions might create course structures that limit equity***

We often talk about social interactions and microaggressions as sources of bias and discrimination. However, implicit biases can underly decisions about course structures and policies that create unintended obstacles to an equitable and inclusive classroom. Wheaton College describes strategies instructors can use to reflect on how best to promote equity and inclusion in their courses and teaching strategies.

***Examine assumptions about the “ideal student.”*** We often complain about underprepared students, which implies that the students in our classes do not have all the background knowledge or skills we would like them to have. How can we address the needs of the students we have in our classrooms?

One solution might be to begin instruction at an earlier point in skill development, meeting students where they are rather than where we wish they were. However, many instructors may not be able to begin instruction at such an early point in skill development and still meet the advanced learning goals for their course. An alternative strategy is to direct students to tutorials and other resources that will enable them to develop these skills outside of class and meet expectations for assignments and learning in our class.

- ***Create a pre-test or skill diagnostic to identify and assess skills required to meet class expectations.*** Students don't always know what they don't know. Students may arrive on campus with high confidence because their high school didn't demand much and they are accustomed to earning top grades without much effort. They are misinformed



but not to blame. Offer a low-stakes or no-stakes assessment to calibrate their skills. Direct students to tutorials and other resources that will enable them to develop the skills they need to meet expectations for assignments and learning in your class.

- **Select inclusive learning materials.** Consider the cultural accessibility of the reading materials you assign in your courses. Materials might be culturally inaccessible for a variety of reasons. Sometimes we can choose between two or more options that deliver the same content when we select course readings. For example, a classic film and a more recent film might both address the same cultural issue but the classic film might rely on characters that conform with negative cultural stereotypes whereas the contemporary film might tell the same story with characters that do not perpetuate negative stereotypes. The contemporary film will serve the same educational purpose and do so in a more inclusive manner.

## Resources

Bree Picower (2009) The unexamined Whiteness of teaching: how White teachers maintain and enact dominant racial ideologies, *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 12 (2), 197-215.

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## Fostering Student Engagement and Interaction Through Collaborative Annotation and Note-Taking

[See this tip online here.](#)

Working in hybrid, online, or asynchronous modalities can make it difficult to foster student engagement and interaction. One partial solution to this problem is to make collaborative digital annotation or note-taking projects part of the course requirements. At the most basic level, these activities ask students to work together to create or comment on a shared course text. This can be done in pairs, with small groups, or with the entire class. And the collaborations might take a number of forms:

Students could collectively annotate a course reading with questions, clarifications, or comments. The shared reading might be a primary or secondary work, the course textbook, or any challenging text that students need to understand for the class. Students could engage in a peer review of others' work, providing suggestions or asking questions about the shared document.

Students could work together on lecture notes, taking notes live in class or compiling a shared study document at the end of a course unit.

These kinds of collaborative activities are incredibly flexible. You can use them to help students close read an intricate poem or solve a complicated equation. They can be done in or outside of class, synchronously or asynchronously. And they can be loose and informal or highly structured, with templates and individual student responsibilities.

Moreover, these collaborative activities have several advantages:

They deepen engagement with course material, making students active rather than passive listeners, readers, and note-takers.

They encourage students to interact with one another at times when student interaction can be difficult to facilitate (like during a pandemic!).

They help students learn from one another, exposing them to the wide range of perspectives, approaches, and strategies that their classmates bring to the table.

They can help level the playing field, leading to more equitable and inclusive learning environments (see M. Brielle Harbin's work below).

They allow instructors to easily track student comprehension, often in real-time.

If you're eager to get started on collaborative annotation or note-taking, check out the resources below to read more about these activities and the digital tools that can help facilitate them.



## Resources

[The Power of Group Note-Taking](#), from *The Chronicle of Higher Education's* Teaching newsletter

[Collaborative Note-Taking: A Tool for Creating a More Inclusive College Classroom](#), by M. Brielle Harbin

[Online Annotation Tools](#), from the Center for Teaching and Learning at Washington University

[Collaborative Note Taking](#), from Pacific Lutheran University faculty resources

### **Submitted by:**

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## Padlet with Purpose and Collaboration

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“Purposely incorporating technology tools in online classes can have a significant positive impact on student learning.” Flower Darby with James Lang, *Small Teaching Online, Applying Learning Science in Online Classes*

If you asked me in January of 2020 if I would consider teaching my studio classes online, as a Professor of Visual Arts, I would have given you a resounding “NO! We don’t do that in the studio.” When COVID hit in March and we moved to emergency remote teaching, we had to re-examine how we could recreate the experience of critique in the studio classroom. There were many challenges for our hands-on studio classes but critique was one of the most difficult to resolve. For my students, Spring 2020 ended without any meaningful critique in my studio classroom and a loss of the benefits that come from interactions with their studio peers. The final class critique (where I downloaded everyone’s work into a PowerPoint) was very successful and students expressed how they missed the interaction and discussion that occurs when sharing their work and the benefits that they gain from the experience. However, the PowerPoint did not mimic the studio wall where students can see their work next to another work or allow for collaboration among students. Teaching at a community college, we do not require our students to have their cameras on and it was a challenge to share work in a collaborative way.

How did I resolve this moving into the Fall 2020 semester? For fall, I discovered Padlet which allowed students to upload images of their work, both work that was in progress and complete, and share them with their peers for meaningful learning and conversation. Using Padlet (or other interactive boards such as Jamboard or Miro) to present work digitally mimicked the classroom wall where art students traditionally hang their work for both in-process and final critiques. Students could review visual images in real time as well as post comments outside of the classroom, something that is not available during an in-person class.

Advantages of Padlet: The main advantage for studio art classes is the ability to show work in progress and mimic the traditional studio wall where work is presented and viewed with other responses to the project. While we used it as a way to show work during class, an added benefit was the ability for students to interact with each other outside of regular class time and post work whenever they needed advice from their peers. While I use the “wall” feature of Padlet for showing work, there are numerous options for presentations, including a shelf, maps, and timelines. While I use it for studio classes, it can easily be incorporated across the disciplines allowing students to publish their work and collaborate in real time. Students can write comments or use reactions, and post their own responses to content. Students can work together to create collaborative documents (or notes), brainstorm ideas, or post their research for group work. Padlet accepts a variety of types of content including images, videos and text. Faculty can post resources or hyperlinks for students and students can add their own resources





that can be moved around and organized visually. Students with the Padlet links can refer back to the content when needed and continue collaborating forward. Posting to Padlet can be done with names or anonymously and can be used as a way to assess learning by creating an exit ticket or by having students post a muddiest point at the end of class. Padlet allows for active engagement and learning among students in an online environment.

Disadvantages of Padlet: While I found no pedagogical disadvantages to using Padlet, there are some restraints on usage. The free version allows users to create three Padlets at a time that can be erased and reused to stay within the limit. For unlimited Padlets (and to retain the posted content) there is a monthly fee although institutions can buy an institutional license to provide access for faculty. Institutions that use Google may find Jamboard as a viable alternative, although I find the set-up of Padlet is well organized visually and user friendly with a simple plus sign to add content.

What will I bring forward when we return back to the face-to-face classroom? Padlet will continue as a teaching tool even when we return to the in-person studio classroom. The opportunity for students to virtually “hang” their work for responses from their peers while in process, and engage in meaningful conversation both in and out of the classroom is a valuable addition to their learning. Using Padlet allows me to purposely incorporate technology into my classes and as Darby and Lang states, “have a significant positive impact on student learning.”

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## Recommendations for Mobile-Friendly Instruction

Today's students are frequently on the go. Providing mobile-friendly course materials through your campus learning management system (LMS) makes it possible for students to continue learning whenever and wherever they need to.

**Focus on learning goals.** Describe key learning goals early in each unit. Communicate them succinctly – preferably in chronological order.

**Support student planning.** Early in each unit, estimate time on task for each activity. Point out how students should approach the content (e.g. skim, read critically, etc.). Identify optional content.

**Streamline design.** On a mobile device, screen size and network bandwidth are limited. Try to:

- Crop graphics and [compress content](#) so that resources load faster.
- Make sure it takes no more than three clicks to access essential content.
- Simplify where possible.

**Know your Audience/Medium.** Students use their phones between other tasks, or when multi-tasking. Design bite-sized formative activities to keep them on task. Design activities that work on phones as well as laptops. For longer tasks, explicitly recommend using a computer.

**Proofread.** Use your mobile device or a simulator to preview the student experience.

**Ask for Feedback.** Regularly ask students for feedback on their learning experience.

The goal is to create a course that can be largely completed on a mobile device. Smartphones and tablets are great for low-stakes tasks: checking grades, communicating with peers, and completing bite-sized activities. For other tasks – e.g. essay writing, graphic design, or computation – a computer is often best. In short, use mobile-friendly activities when you can and computer-dependent exercises where you must.

### Additional Resources

[A comprehensive guide to mobile course design](#)

[Best design for mobile users](#)

### Submitted by:

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## Honor Pledges

In 2014, the UT Dallas Student Government approved the Comet Pledge: **As a Comet, I pledge honesty, integrity, and service in all that I do.** It is not surprising that students endorsed this pledge nor that overwhelmingly, students say that cheating is wrong. What is surprising is that in spite of this, upwards of 70% of students at various universities report that they cheat anyway. Research on the effects of invoking self-awareness suggests a simple way to reduce the likelihood that students will cheat on an exam. In a series of experiments by Shu et al. (2012), students were given the opportunity to cheat by reporting incorrect information on several types of tasks. Students who signed their names at the top of the report were far less likely to cheat than were those who either signed at the bottom or did not sign at all. Asking for their signature reminds students of their values at a moment when their adherence to those values is about to be tested. Consider adding the Comet Pledge and asking students to sign it before beginning their exams.

You can read more here:

Shu, L. L., Mazar, N., Gino, F., Ariely, D., & Bazerman, M. H. (2012). Signing at the beginning makes ethics salient and decreases dishonest self-reports in comparison to signing at the end. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 109(38), 15197-15200.

**Submitted by:**

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## H.O.N.O.R. Model to Enhance Academic Integrity and Reduce Academic Dishonesty

### H.- Honor academic integrity campus-wide

- Consistent messaging from faculty, advisors, Dean of Students Office,
- Academic Integrity Statement or pledge on syllabus, assignments and tests

### O.- Opportunities to teach

- Teach, practice and demonstrate appropriate learning strategies for students to enhance their academic integrity
  - Support and teach students based on research of why students cheat
  - Teach effective writing and research skills, style and format- Library Tutorial
- Provide resources for improving study skills
- Model and practice appropriate teaching that focuses on “learning” and the value of learning rather than on “getting the good grades”

### N.- New assessments that foster learning

- Reframe focus towards learning mastery, competency
- Range of low-stakes assessments
- Alternative and authentic assessments
- Rethink and allow for “open book” tests and assignments
- Support compassion and student success

### O.-Oversee and monitor

- Create a system to monitor students work for in-class tests (i.e. physical proctoring, not allowing laptops or advanced calculators)
- Monitor for dishonesty: methods for remote proctoring (Copyleaks, ProctorU)

### R.-Report and Respond and Responsibility

- Campus-wide system: Dean of Students and Academic Conduct Committee
- Reward and incentivize academic integrity
- System to respond to “potential” academic dishonesty with range of consequences/responsibility
  - Academic Conduct Committee Process

### [International Center for Academic Integrity](#)

Lang, J. (2013). *Cheating lessons: Learning from academic dishonesty*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Press.  
 McCabe, D., Butterfield, K., & Trevino, L. (2012) *Cheating in college: Why students do it and what educators can do about it*. John Hopkins Press

### Submitted by:

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 Oakland University



## Examining What You Didn't Know They Knew

*“That awkward moment in an exam, when everyone is using a ruler to draw something and you don't know why.”— Author Unknown*

An exam is one of the more traditional ways to measure whether a student has met one or more learning objectives. These summative assessments typically use one or more question types (multiple choice, essay, matching, etc...), and they usually cover multiple class readings and learning modules. Naturally, because of this, it can be difficult to address all the content learned in a given period of time in a single exam. This poses a challenge for instructors who are tasked with creating the exam, as well as for students as they determine what content will potentially show up on it.

One simple way for an instructor to ascertain additional information that a student might have known on an exam is to allow learners the opportunity to demonstrate that knowledge in the form of a bonus question. For instance, below is a prompt I use on my own exams.

**Bonus Question:** Think about what we have covered since your last exam. In the space below, list up to three concepts you learned that did not appear on this exam, and briefly describe (2-3 sentences) its importance. Each concept and its description are worth two points for a maximum total of 6 bonus points.

This simple technique benefits both the student and the instructor. From the learner perspective, it provides a small reward for demonstrating an understanding of a concept covered in class that was not asked on the exam. As for the instructor, it can be used as a tool for discovering trends about what students perceive to be the most important concepts covered. In turn, this can be used to adjust lessons and learning activities to ensure that the most salient concepts are covered adequately.

**Submitted by:**

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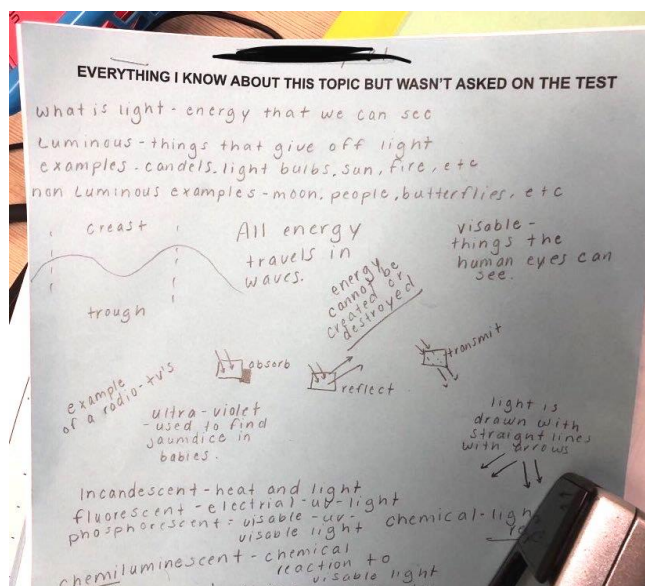


## A Small Change Made a Big Difference on My Assessments

Originally published on March 19, 2019 at this link on Teacher2Teacher.

This year, I changed my assessments by adding a piece of paper at the end, asking, “What else do you know about the topic, that I didn’t ask you about?”

Another teacher suggested this idea online about a year ago – I wish I could remember who it was! – and I thought, “BOOM. I want to do this.”



Answering the question is completely optional, and when students do show more understanding on the sheet than they did on their assessment, I’ll point it out to them. Sometimes I’ll write, “The learning wasn’t shown in your assessment, but I can see you do know this from what you wrote at the end.”

Afterward, I’ll follow up with them about how to recognize and answer test questions asked in different ways. Clearly, in cases like this, they understand the material but aren’t able to formulate an answer in response to the way I posed the question. I’ll point out to them that while it’s great that they’ve shown me their learning, they won’t always have a chance to answer assessment questions in an open-ended way, and I want them to succeed when they encounter assessment-style questions in the future.

I love what this change has done. This strategy has made my assessments more inclusive. It helps me communicate to my students: When I assess your understanding, I’m looking for what you DO know.

### Written by:

Julie Arsenalut, Twitter [@SciGeekJulie](https://twitter.com/SciGeekJulie)



## Two Buckets Assessment Activities

For my online courses I like to design the final project using a strategy I borrowed from my Creative Commons certification courses. This also plays into strategies I have collected over the years to design and develop more applied and project-based learning activities.

The assessment design uses two “buckets”. They are instructed to pick one activity from each bucket.

**Bucket one** has a choice of two activities. Normally these are a) building a series of knowledge check questions that I can add to my assessment bank. I only use these for knowledge comprehension. They are required, but not graded; or b) using an annotation tool such as Hypothesis, annotate and add to my annotated course bibliography. I create a one-page Bib with all my course resources broken down into each module. This is in a PDF format that they add to. This bucket is worth 10-40 points depending on the course.

**Bucket two** has a choice of three activities. Normally these are either a) a 500-word paper that illustrates the basic concepts covered in the course; or b) a presentation using a medium of your choice that illustrates the concepts in the course (infographic, video, audio slide deck, etc.); or c) A self-directed presentation or project. This bucket is worth 25-75 points depending on the course.

This assessment approach plays to the students’ strength. If they feel they are better writers, they may opt for that option. If they feel they are better presenters, they may opt for that option. Given that they can pick the medium I am not limiting their creativity. If they prefer a self-directed activity, they may opt to design and develop something completely different, such as conducting an interview or developing a web site. They need my permission before proceeding with this option.

The key is that the grading rubric must be structured with equity. If a student chooses a paper over a presentation, for example, the rubric language must be tailored to accommodate either. Therefore, I avoid language such as “minimum of 500 words” and choose instead “creative”, “organized”, well-presented”, “original”, “uses proper citations” and so forth.

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## Meta-Teaching

There is a push in the teaching and learning literature to engage students in activities to improve meta-cognition (see <https://www.improvewithmetacognition.com/>). This is, undoubtedly, important. There is a bevy of research supporting the idea that understanding student learning abilities is important to structure effective learning environments (see [https://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1286&context=psych\\_facpub](https://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1286&context=psych_facpub)). Equally important, I would argue, is meta-teaching.

Meta-teaching involves transparency and clarity not only about content, but about why a faculty member might choose to engage in content through the pedagogical practice they have chosen. If a faculty member wants students to discuss, talk to students about why they are discussing and what you expect them to derive from that. After the discussion, talk about the content discussed, and the process to help develop better approaches to assigning discussions. The goal is to help faculty be more effective developers of learning experiences by talking about the process with students.

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## The Powerful Question

Educational psychologists study how people learn, and therefore how best to teach. One bedrock principle is that if a learner is asked to try to recall what they know about a topic just prior to be taught about that topic, the presented material is much more likely to stick. The explanation for the phenomenon is that by accessing that prior knowledge, those areas of the brain are activated, and the newly presented material is more easily connected to the prior knowledge that is safely embedded in memory. It seems simple and sensible, and it is, but how often do we teach by immediately diving into communicating information instead?

In addition to making new knowledge sticky, starting with a question allows for assessment of what the learner knows, so that the teaching can be adapted accordingly. And for the learner, the very act of having to first assess self-knowledge helps promote development of meta-cognition. Psychologists use the term *meta-cognition* to refer to the set of abilities and skills related to accurate self-assessment of knowledge and how to most learn most effectively. So questions prompt assessment that is helpful to both the teacher and the learner.

Are some questions more effective than others? The title of this *Teaching Tip* refers to “The” powerful question. Of course that is a judgment, but the general question “What do you know about X?” seems like a powerful and universally applicable one to pose. Being so broad, the question prompts learners to access their prior knowledge and attempt to summarize it in an efficient way. Assuming a fair degree of prior knowledge, their response will be less than elegant, but still useful for the reasons described above. Questions such as “Do you know about X?” or “How much do you know about X?” allow for legitimate answers such as “yes” and “not very much” or “quite a bit.” By now we can see why those answers are not useful. How might you begin training yourself to start your teaching interactions with the most powerful question?

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## Internationalizing Your Course without the Travel

The pandemic has made many students eager to get back out and explore the world. While physical travel isn't possible to include in every course, we can always bring a global approach to our course design and materials. In fact, an international lens [can be incorporated into any discipline.](#)

By bringing a global perspective into our classrooms, our students develop a more comprehensive and sophisticated perspective of the subject matter through cross-cultural viewpoints. By incorporating new content and perspectives, you also support students in developing critical skills such as cultural competency, communicating with global audiences, adaptability, and empathy. There are a range of ways to internationalize your curriculum, from small tweaks to designing more immersive global experiences for your students.

### Small Tweaks Can Have a Big Impact

You don't have to start with an overhaul of the course. A few small tweaks can make a difference in internationalizing your course content. For example, [consider devoting a class or two to exploring what your discipline looks like in other parts of the world.](#) For example you might:

- Add readings from international authors or authors researching in an international context.
- Incorporate international media such as films, television, news, and podcasts.
- Use international research, cases, or datasets.
- Invite international guest speakers.
- Create spaces for international students and students with experiences abroad to share their knowledge.

### Taking the Next Step Toward Global Engagement

After taking some initial steps to internationalize your curriculum, you might consider adding another global dimension to your course. A few additional modifications to your syllabi and assignments can increase students' value for taking a global perspective. For example, you might:

- Assign students to attend local or campus events focused on global engagement.
- Encourage students to attend virtual international conferences.
- Take students on virtual field trips with international institutions, museums, and other non-profit organizations abroad.
- Create opportunities for students to interview or research international knowledge producers.
- Develop a global classroom in which students' partner with peers at a university abroad through project-based learning.

Regardless of which of these you choose, these strategies are a great way to bring an



international perspective and experience to your classroom when a more immersive study abroad experience is not an option.

**Submitted by:**

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## Classroom Equity Audits

As a classroom teacher, have you ever wondered about questions such as these?

- Do I encourage students in the front to participate more frequently than those in the back?
- Are my expectations for some student groups lower than my expectations for others?
- Are first-generation students having more trouble mastering key concepts compared to other students?
- Are the commuter students in my class struggling to fit in?

If so, you might be interested in conducting a classroom equity audit to ensure that your classroom offers equitable teaching and learning opportunities for all students.

Green (2017) defines *equity* as “fair access to and distribution of opportunities, power, and resources” (p. 6). *Educational equity* is achieved when “all learners are able to participate fully in quality learning experiences” (Poekert et al., 2020, p. 542). At the classroom level, educational equity is the responsibility of the teacher. Bombardieri (2019) describes *equity audits* as “internal reviews of key policies and practices to identify those that fail to effectively serve underrepresented students” (para. 4). Similar to the questions posed earlier, the need for an equity audit often emerges from a teacher’s need to investigate a specific question, or area of concern (Harris & Hopson, 2008).

Classroom equity audits are simple and straightforward. Once you have articulated the question you wish to investigate, just follow these steps:

1. **Observe.** Begin by looking and listening. You can learn a great deal by simply becoming more aware of what is happening before, during, and following class time. For example, if you are wondering which student groups are having trouble fitting in, observe where students choose to sit and how they interact with one another. Make note of patterns over time to confirm or disconfirm your interpretations.
2. **Collect data.** Is there data available – or easily gathered – that can help answer your question? Gradebook and attendance records may shed light. Student logins and time spent online may be useful as well. Checklists, seating charts, and video/audio recordings work well for “in the moment” data collection. For example, to clarify which students are participating in class discussion, create a class seating chart and record a tally mark each time a student speaks. If you audio record the discussion (with notice to students beforehand and for your ears only), you can analyze the recording later to assess, for example, the types of questions you ask – or responses you give – to different students.
3. **Ask questions.** You can also ask direct questions of your students. If you are wondering how comfortable students feel approaching you with questions, set up a one- or two-



item, anonymous survey and ask students to complete it during class time to ensure a high response rate. Or try an exit slip. For example, to gauge how well students grasped the day's content, use the last few minutes of class time to have each student summarize or illustrate a foundational theory or concept and collect the slips as students exit the room.

4. **Reflect and adapt.** Whether you choose to observe, collect data, ask questions, or all three, reflecting on your findings and adapting appropriately is crucial. If you have confirmed that your classroom includes “insiders” and “outsiders,” consider introducing activities that require students to group and re-group more often. If the data show that you frequently overlook students on the left side of the classroom, stand nearer that side of the room during discussions. If a student survey indicates that students perceive you as not easily accessible, ask what you can do to better accommodate them.

By conducting simple classroom equity audits, you can quickly and easily improve your teaching practice and your relationships with students. You can also make great strides toward narrowing gaps that might be keeping some students from getting the most out of your class.

### Resources

- Bombardieri, M. (2019, April 3). Equity audits: A tool for campus improvement. Center for American Progress. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-postsecondary/news/2019/04/03/465193/equity-audits-tool-campus-improvement/>
- Brown, K., & Williams, D. (2019). Equity audits: A powerful tool to transform teaching and learning. *TEPSA Instructional Leader*, 32(2). <https://www.tepsa.org/resource/equity-audits-a-powerful-tool-to-transform-teaching-and-learning/>
- Green, T. L. (2017). Community-based equity audits: A practical approach for educational leaders to support equitable community-school improvements. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 53(1), 3-39. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0013161X16672513>
- Harris, S., & Hopson, M. (2008). Using an equity audit investigation to prepare doctoral students for social justice leadership. *Teacher Development*, 12(4), 341-352. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13664530802579926>
- Katz, S. (2018). Plan, Act, Assess, Reflect. *Leaders in Educational Thought*, 2(1). <https://thelearningexchange.ca/videos/plan-act-assess-reflect/>
- Poekert, P. E., Swaffield, S., Demir, E. K., & Wright, S. A. (2020). Leadership for professional learning towards educational equity: A systematic literature review. *Professional Development in Education*, 46(4), 541-562. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2020.1787209>

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## Faculty Feedback Forms (F3)

Sometimes we find ourselves teaching classes where there might be a wide range of topical knowledge among our enrolled students. This may limit them to asking questions in class or engaging as much as faculty would like. And in other cases, as faculty, we are looking to gauge the academic temperature to see how things are going in class. Variations of the one-minute paper provide useful check-in points.

My own research on these short check-ins led me to create the Faculty Feedback Form. I use three standard questions and usually have 1 wild-card question which changes based on where we are in the semester. I hand them out at the beginning of class and collect them at the end (bonus: serves as an attendance method).

I review the responses and often address lingering questions or suggestions at the next class. These can be emailed back as well, useful in on-line courses. In some cases, I responded to each student individually and while much more time consuming, works well with smaller class sizes and provides personal and consistent engagement with every student.

Here are the basic three questions:

1. *One thing I learned from my readings:*
2. *One thing I learned from today's class:*
3. *I am unclear or would like to know more about:*

And here are some wildcards you can use:

1. *What are you most anxious about in this course (first day of class – it's very useful!)*
2. *How is your project going?*
3. *How are your other classes going?*
4. *What is one short answer question that we could include on your next exam?*

Please see these two articles for a more expansive 'how to' article and the original research article.

Fishman, S. M., & Wahesh, E. (2020). The F3: A faculty feedback form for students. *College Teaching*, 69(2) [Doi: 10.1080/87567555.2020.1814685](https://doi.org/10.1080/87567555.2020.1814685)

Wahesh, E., Fishman, S. M., & Moreton, A. (2020). Perceptions of the One-Minute Essay in a counseling research course. *Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision*, 13(2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.7729/42.1363>

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## What is instructor presence and why is it important for learning?

We understand intuitively what it means to be **present** in a face-to-face class. We are regularly in the room when class meets. We engage with ongoing discussion and learning activities. We interact with one another. In an online course, instructor presence describes how an instructor communicates, interacts with students, and engages students in meaningful and effective learning activities (Sheridan & Kelly, 2010). When instructors create a strong presence in an online class, students experience their learning activities as social interactions with a real human being rather than an impersonal automaton (Martin, Wang, & Sadaf, 2018). More importantly, instructor presence and active learning strategies improve student academic success, especially for students from at-risk, underserved populations (Hanover Research, 2020).

Social interaction creates a sense of community within a class and contributes to a productive learning environment. However, remote instruction and the “social distancing” required as responses to COVID-19 increase students’ experience of isolation and disengagement, which can undermine the learning environment and create obstacles to learning. Oyarzun, Conklin, and Barreto (2017) argue that instructors can offset the negative effects of physical distance created by remote instruction if they adopt strategies that reduce the psychological distance between instructors and students. Collectively, these strategies contribute to an increased sense of presence in the classroom.

### Strategies that increase presence

Instructors can create presence in a class in several ways. First, they can design and structure the course to clearly communicate expectations and describe pathways to success. Once the course begins, instructors can enhance presence by sending clear, explicit messages about assignments, due dates, and course expectations. They can provide students with feedback, encouragement, and helpful nudges that prompt students to engage in behaviors that benefit their learning. Responsibility for presence also falls to students, who must engage with course materials and classmates as well as with the instructor.

### Teaching Presence

- Be intentional about course design. Establish course goals and select assignments and learning tasks that support (and assess) course learning outcomes.
- Define boundaries for student and instructor interactions. Establish clear “ground rules” to promote a respectful and productive learning community. Describe expectations for language used in discussion posts, conventions for email communication about the class, and responsible behavior during collaborative work.
- Use Canvas course tools to make the course easy to navigate. Consistency and predictability within the course minimize confusion. Organize learning modules so that students can easily find things as they move through the course. Avoid making students hunt for drop boxes, reading materials, links to resources, and other tools.
- Use clear communication throughout the course. Explain expectations for participation and course activities. Set specific deadlines for activities, assignments, and exams. Students will be more likely to meet deadlines that are predictable and consistent (e.g., discussion posts are always due on Wednesday, deadlines for written assignments are set to the same time on their due dates). If we



know students procrastinate and refuse to submit work “early,” does it make sense to set a submission deadline at midnight? Nudge students toward healthier work-life choices and set deadlines during “work hours,” when campus technology support will be available to resolve problems.

### Instructor Communication Strategies

- Tell students how and when you will communicate with them. Tell them how you prefer that they communicate with you. Expectations may vary with different types of communication. Assume nothing. Describe expectations for discussion posts, email communications, and other types of messages.
- Tell students how long they should expect to wait for you to respond. Respond promptly. Many instructors promise to respond to an email within 24-48 hours (perhaps with a slower response time on weekends). Responses to a message left in a discussion thread might occur more quickly (e.g., once a day).
- Consider posting “virtual office hours” when students can expect a faster response (maybe even an immediate response) to an email, instant message, or discussion post. Tell students when you will be online and available for rapid responses to student questions. Virtual office hours should be predictable.
- Schedule virtual office hours at times of the day that will be accessible to students in the course. Gather information from students early in the term to learn about their schedules (and the range of time zones reflected among them) so you can schedule virtual office hours when student might actually attend them.
- How quickly will you provide feedback on assignments? Expectations about when students can get feedback and grades will vary with the type of assignment. One week is a common response time for written assignments (e.g., short papers and projects). Quizzes and exams might be graded automatically in Canvas and could generate immediate feedback about students’ scores. (You should probably delay access to correct answers until all students have completed the exam to protect the integrity of the questions.)
- Instructors should engage with discussion threads as frequently as they expect students to engage with these discussions.

### Communication strategies for students and instructors to build community

- Communications should use appropriate titles for the instructor and for students. Spend time early in the term to describe how students should address you (give them options if you can). Ask students how they want to be addressed (including nicknames, clarification of pronunciation, and preferred pronouns). Address people by name when directing a message to a single individual.
- Use professional but conversational language in course communications such as discussion threads, emails, and verbal communication during synchronous sessions.
- Instructors should initiate conversations with students. Students should initiate conversations with the instructor and each other. Encourage and remind students to ask questions if instructions and expectations are not clear.
- Share appropriate personal experiences and stories that connect to course content.
- Use appropriate humor.
- Use emoticons in verbal messages to compensate for the absence of nonverbal cues.





- Always maintain a respectful tone.

## Resources

Hanover Research (2020, April). *Best practices in online learning for at-risk students*.

<https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/3409306/Best-Practices-in-Online-Learning-for-At-Risk-Students.pdf>

Oyarzun, B. A., Conklin, S. A., & Barreto, D. (2017). Instructor presence. In Vu, P. Fredrickson, S., & Moore, C. (Eds.), *Handbook of research on innovative pedagogies and technologies for online learning in higher education* (pp. 106-126). IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-1851-8.ch006>

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Sheridan, K., & Kelly, M. A. (2010). The indicators of instructor presence that are important to students in online courses. *MERLOT Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, 6(4), 767-779.

[https://jolt.merlot.org/vol6no4/sheridan\\_1210.pdf](https://jolt.merlot.org/vol6no4/sheridan_1210.pdf)

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## Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI) and Effective Online Teaching

*“substantive interaction is engaging students in teaching, learning, and assessment”*

Excerpt from the U.S. Department of Education’s definition of [Distance Education](#)

Earlier this year, the updated definition of distance education and the requirement for regular and substantive interaction (RSI) went into effect on July 1, 2021. The instructor’s role was brought to the forefront with online learning. A wealth of institutional and professional resources were developed in response to help guide faculty with navigating the new requirement for compliance, such as the [Regular and Substantive Interaction Primer](#) from Everett Community College.

The confluence of RSI and the lessons learned from remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the necessity to refocus on quality and effective online teaching. Again, a wealth of institutional and professional resources emerged to help guide faculty, such as the [Quality Matters Emergency Remote Instruction Checklist for Higher Ed](#). Additionally, the resources below are valuable with defining quality when it comes to online (not remote) learning and distance education.

*“The shift to online learning in response to COVID-19 has revealed pedagogical benefits that will carry on into the future.” (Hubbs, 2020)*

### Resources:

- [Association of College and University Educator’s Effective Practice Framework](#) and a series of courses on Effective Online Teaching practices, \$600/course
- [Dallas College Best Practices for Teaching Online](#) (officially recognized by the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development), free course
- [OLC Quality Course Teaching and Instructional Practice Scorecard](#), free download

### References:

- Hubbs, M. (2020). Remote learning in the pandemic: Lessons learned. Retrieved from <https://campustechnology.com/Articles/2020/12/16/Remote-Learning-in-the-Pandemic-Lessons-Learned.aspx?Page=1>
- Online Learning Consortium, University Professional and Continuing Education Association, and WICHE Cooperative for Education Technologies. (2019). Regular and substantive interaction: Background, concerns, and guiding principles. Retrieved from [https://www.insidehighered.com/sites/default/server\\_files/media/Regular-and-Substantive-Interaction.pdf](https://www.insidehighered.com/sites/default/server_files/media/Regular-and-Substantive-Interaction.pdf)
- Poulin, R., & Davis, V. (2016). Interpreting what is required for “regular and substantive interaction”. WCET Frontiers. Retrieved from <https://wcetfrontiers.org/2016/09/30/interpreting-regular-and-substantive-interaction/>

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## The Teaching Goals Inventory

Whether I am creating a course from scratch or revising an existing course, I rely on the Teaching Goals Inventory (<https://tgi.its.uiowa.edu/>) which is a self-assessment of instructional goals to help me better understand what I want to accomplish in the course as well as assemble assessment techniques.

You can find several varieties of this survey online. As a backup, I also rely on *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers* by Cordelia Bryan for specific assessment suggestions and techniques.

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## Turning Large Class Challenges into Opportunities

Universities don't brag about how large their classes are, but with conscientious design and implementation, an excellent instructor will still be excellent regardless of class size, and students will still learn. Many of the challenges of teaching large classes can also be opportunities. For example:

1. Large classes can make students feel lost and anonymous. Promote a sense of belonging by organizing students into small learning groups. Groups can work together on a problem or discussion for a single session or a longer project. Use the photo roster to learn students' names, and spend a few minutes before each class begins to call out a few names and test yourself. Students will appreciate your effort and will respect you for learning correct pronunciation as well.
2. Large classes don't have to be lecture-driven. Integrating active learning, classroom response technology (such as clickers or polling software), and peer instruction can be effective.
3. Early, frequent low-stakes assessment can help both instructor and students identify how well students are learning. Instead of extra, optional tutoring outside of class, which is sometimes out of reach for students who need it most, integrate remedial activities into the course design. Give students extra chances to redo a specified number of assignments or exams, for example.

For more on this topic, see:

Mulryan-Kyne, C. (2010). Teaching large classes at college and university level: Challenges and opportunities. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 15(2), 175-185.

Singer-Freeman, K., & Bastone, L. (2016). *Pedagogical choices make large classes feel small* (NILOA Occasional Paper No. 27). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois and Indiana University, National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment.

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## Large Class Teaching Strategies

Teaching a large class is an exciting challenge. While most instructors feel relatively confident of reaching every student in a class of 30 or even 60, classes of 100, 200, or even 300+ students can seem inevitably impersonal. However, even though conditions that allow anonymity and passivity often exist in large classes, they can be overcome. Divide your photo roster into groups of ten and then use it to learn 10-20 names per week. By the end of the semester, you will know the names of all or almost all of the students in your class.

Use active learning strategies such as Think-Pair-Share to get students thinking and talking about course material rather than just passively receiving it. When you use this activity, even if it is once per class, it will allow you to see how students are thinking through a problem. Follow the paired discussion with instructor-led debriefing of the whole class to provide feedback, correct misconceptions, elaborate, re-explain, and connect material they are learning to other concepts.

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## Rewarding Student Growth and Improvement in Learning

I recently had a conversation with a student who was taking a specifications-grading based English course with a colleague. I asked her how she was finding the course with it being a departure from traditional grading in that department and her exact words were “Oh it’s great, if you don’t get an A in that class it is because you didn’t care to take the time to keep revising your writing until you got it right.” It struck me that her focus was entirely on the development of her writing rather than the grade although she was obviously pleased to have earned the A with the work she had put in. I had always worried that the time I spent writing comments on written work were a waste of time and did not help further my students’ abilities in writing because when I hand back work the vast majority will take a quick look at the grade they scored and then tuck it in a folder and never look at it again. The same has been true of extensive written and recorded comments online as students continue to make the same mistakes with their writing time and time again.

John Orlando recently wrote about this in *Faculty Focus* (Orlando, 2021), that we need to encourage students not to focus on their grades but on the development of their abilities. Faculty sometimes offer extra credit in response to lower student achievement or student requests as a way to continue to encourage their effort in the course. However, doing some new or different does not guide them in addressing the reason for the deficiency in their performance or help to correct the problem in the future. If a student did not put the effort in to learn the bones of the skeleton for a test, it makes sense to ask them to go back and learn those and try again at the same task than offer them course credit for doing something different focusing more on the effort than the effective work of learning. Offering extra credit puts the focus on the final course grade not the achievement of learning as much as it may motivate students to keep working. John uses a useful sports analogy in his piece; *“if a football coach tells a running back that he is not starting because his receiving skills are poor, it will not help to offer the running back time after practice to work on his blocking skills. The coach will tell him that his blocking is not the problem; he needs to improve his receiving skills.”*

The very purpose of grades is to measure learning rather than to reinforce the perception that grades reinforce a focus on grades for extra work and not for the learning that we expect in higher education. John adds another helpful analogy here; *“If a business hires an accounting graduate who received all As in their classes, but learns that they did not understand accounting because the student relied on a lot of extra credit to boost their grade, the employee might feel cheated by the institution, and that would likely be the last graduate of that institution they hire.”*

Specifications-grading (Nilson & Stanny, 2014) is one way to ensure that students expect to keep working until they meet a clear standard. Allowing them to revise and resubmit work within this context allows for the focus to be on development of skills and achievement of the necessary standard. For many faculty this brings a concern of additional work but if a clear rubric is provided to them then it is ideal to guide students in identifying and correcting their



own issues rather than doing the work in grading them essentially pointing out the errors for them which is less effective at helping them identify and avoid making the same mistakes again. For these reasons having students revise and resubmit work is a far more effective way to produce learning than extra credit. An assessment is intended to be a measure of learning, and if so, then a student needs to improve on *that* assessment to demonstrate their understanding, not something else. If instead we provide feedback to allow students to revise and resubmit their work until they achieve an A then everyone gets A's which helps us get away from the grading bell-curve some will not pass this class mentality that can be detrimental to a student's belief that they will ever succeed and add unnecessary competition between students.

Students are not demotivated by failure itself but failure where it feels hopeless to move forward because they cannot see what they need to do differently to succeed. A lot of students enjoying video gaming in which they constantly experience failure to move to the next stage but they keep playing so that they can learn from mistakes and get beyond that point of failure thereby feeling motivated by successfully increasing their ability. Similarly, students who know that they have the opportunity to learn from their mistakes and fix their problems will not be demotivated by their failures

This teaching tip was crafted by Marina G. Smitherman of Dalton State College who can be contacted at [msmitherman@daltonstate.edu](mailto:msmitherman@daltonstate.edu) for questions. For more creative ways to innovate in your classroom from award-winning faculty across the University System of Georgia, please visit [https://www.usg.edu/facultydevelopment/engaged\\_student\\_learning/volume\\_2](https://www.usg.edu/facultydevelopment/engaged_student_learning/volume_2).

## References

Nilson, L. B., & Stanny, C. J. (2014). *Specifications grading: Restoring rigor, motivating students, and saving faculty time*.

Orlando, John. (2021) *Use Revise and Resubmit instead of Extra Credit*. Faculty Focus. [Article Linked Here](#).

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## Are Professors' Views Influential?

In 2017, Betsy DeVos made news when she asserted that professors tell students what to think, and more specifically that liberal professors try to indoctrinate their students to adopt similar views. More recently, legislators across the country are taking action to curb “Critical Race Theory” and other discussions of race and racism in classrooms. Research does not back up these claims. Conservative students report that their college experiences shape their conservative political identities, and even where they encounter largely liberal ideology, they feel challenged to clarify their ideas and values in a way they find both positive and beneficial. Simply being aware that professors’ views differ does not cause students to adopt or acquiesce to those views. Additional research shows that students more likely to be bothered by perceptions of instructor bias are those who tend to be performance-oriented and have more consumerist attitudes (summarized here <https://www.eab.com/daily-briefing/2016/10/13/certain-students-more-likely-to-accuse-professors-of-bias>).

What, then, should instructors do to promote the likelihood that students will learn to think for themselves? Budesheim and Lundquist (1999) assigned in-class debates in which students argued a position that was either consistent or inconsistent with their own expressed prior beliefs. Students arguing for their own position tended to become more confident that they are correct. Students arguing against their own beliefs were unlikely to strengthen their prior position and were more likely to adopt the position they defended. Consider asking students to prepare to debate both sides of an issue, or even argue one side orally and a different side in a written assignment. The main objective is to get students to consider more than one side of an issue and therefore become more open to different perspectives and evidence.

For more on this topic, see:

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/02/27/research-confirms-professors-lean-left-questions-assumptions-about-what-means>

Budesheim, T. L., & Lundquist, A. R. (1999). Consider the opposite: Opening minds through in-class debates on course-related controversies. *Teaching of Psychology*, 26(2), 106-110.

Linvill, D.L., & Grant, W. J. (2017). The role of student academic beliefs in perceptions of instructor ideological bias. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 22(3), 274-287.

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## Combatting Myths and Misconceptions

In every discipline, students are likely to come into our classes believing common myths and misconceptions. Students may think, for example, that rest is the natural state of all objects, that roots allow plants to take in energy from soil, that people use only 10% of their brains, or that people can be right-brain or left-brain thinkers. What is more troubling, however, are the persistent findings that students often leave our classes with their incorrect beliefs intact.

To overcome these misconceptions, it is not enough simply to present students with correct information. Instead, we must directly refute students' erroneous beliefs. Kowalski and Taylor (2009) compared the effectiveness of these approaches and found that not only was refutation far more effective than mere exposure to correct ideas, it was far more effective when presented in lecture rather than just in assigned readings.

For more on this, see:

Kowalski, P., & Taylor, A. K. (2009). The effect of refuting misconceptions in the introductory psychology class. *Teaching of Psychology*, 36, 153-159.

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## Get Students to Use Study Strategies

Getting students to use study strategies more effectively is more complicated than simply telling them about those strategies. Here are some factors that make a difference in whether or not students use effective study strategies:

1. Teach appropriate study strategies—such as those described by Dr. Stephen Chew—as part of your course. Students are more likely to use study strategies that they learn within the context of a course or content area. Do you expect them to memorize, summarize, apply formulas, or solve new problems? Whatever you want them to be able to do, give them opportunities to practice doing it.
2. Guide students in developing proficiency in these sophisticated ways of thinking. Many effective study strategies involve elaborating, summarizing, monitoring comprehension, and so forth. Model effective strategies and tell students *how* specific strategies should be used.
3. Teach students a wide variety of strategies, and help them understand *why* those strategies are effective.
4. Help students understand *when* specific strategies are likely to be effective. When should they summarize, elaborate, or use mnemonic devices? This will depend on the learning outcomes you want your students to achieve. Give students plenty of opportunities to practice these strategies over a long period of time and across a wide variety of tasks.
5. Students will only use the strategies we teach them if they believe it will be worth their time and effort to do so. Help students see how using the strategies helps them learn.

For more on this, see:

Hattie, J., Biggs, J., & Purdie, N. (1996). Effects of learning skills interventions on student learning: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 66, 99-136.

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## Learning preferences are not learning styles . . . and why the language we use matters

Let's begin with debunking a persistent misconception about learning: Learning styles do not exist. Moreover, matching instruction strategies to a particular learning style, such as using visuals to teach a "visual learner," does not improve learning for that particular student (Pashler, McDaniel, Roher, & Bjork, 2009). Worse, using the wrong sensory modality for instruction for some content may impair learning if the content is better suited to learning strategies delivered in another modality. For example, providing a lecture on knitting to an "auditory or verbal learner" will not improve learning if this is the only form of instruction. All learners will benefit from visual instruction and will require hands-on practice (kinetic learning strategies) to learn to knit.

### Why the language we use matters when we talk to students about learning strategies and learning preferences.

The myth of "learning styles" persists for several reasons. One source for this misconception is the genuine need to accommodate individuals who cannot access materials in a particular modality. A second source is based on personal experiences with preferred activities. Some people prefer to read a book whereas others prefer to watch a film. If we talk about "learning styles" when we mean to talk about preferences, we inadvertently reinforce the false belief in "learning styles." Language matters.

Certainly, some individuals have physical or cognitive characteristics that impair **accessibility** to learning in that modality. Hearing impairments create obstacles for lecture-based instruction. Dyslexia and other reading disabilities limit the accessibility of written materials. Visual impairments (blindness, or, in some cases, color blindness) interfere with learning from images. Limitations on mobility or fine motor skills make hands-on learning activities less effective. The fact that a particular modality is not accessible to a student does not mean that the student has a "learning style." Materials presented through one sensory modality are simply not accessible to them for learning.

Similarly, **preferred activities** are not "learning styles." We may enjoy some activities more than others, but our preferences do not mean we cannot learn if we use a less preferred activity. We might be more motivated to engage in a learning strategy that uses our preferred learning activity. If I like to watch videos more than I like to read, I might be more likely to complete an assignment that requires watching a video than one that requires reading a text. However, my preferences do not mean I will learn more by watching the video than by doing something else (e.g., reading or hands-on practice).

Different content and skills are sometimes learned best when students use specific modalities to interact with the content, regardless of the learner's preferred activities (Bruff, 2019). For example, botany students will learn to identify plants more accurately if they study pictures

than if they listen to a lecture or read verbal descriptions. Students in a poetry class will learn more about writing poems if they listen to poems read aloud than if they study images that depict the meanings of poems. Students of piano or dance must engage in physical activity to learn to play piano or dance. Interestingly, for all disciplines, students learn even better if they engage with the content and skills using a variety of modalities and learning activities (e.g., viewing images of art and reading verbal descriptions and analysis of the work).

Research on how people learn indicates that people learn best when they use *multiple* modalities to think about, practice, and encode new content and skills (Ambrose, et al., 2010; Bruff, 2019). If I read content, listen to a lecture, and study images and graphs related to the content, I am more likely to remember than if I think about the content in only one way. Research on memory and cognition refers to this phenomenon as the benefit of dual coding (Paivio, 2007) or breadth of processing (Anderson & Reder, 1979). If memory for new information uses both images and words, I have two ways to remember the information. If I forget the information coded in one modality, I might still be able to remember it by using the other encoding modality. Redundant systems work more reliably than a system that operates correctly with one procedure only.

### **Application: Effective Learning Strategies**

- Present material in a variety of modalities: visual (pictures and graphics) and verbal (written and spoken).
- Provide concrete examples as well as abstract explanations of concepts. Discuss the connection between characteristics of the concrete examples and key elements of the abstract representation.
- Distribute learning activities over time. Repeated exposure and practice of new material spaced across intervals of time (a few weeks) produces longer-term learning. The passage of time between each exposure creates a different learning context. Variations in learning contexts create multiple cues that students can use to help them remember.
- Interleave review of examples of solved problems with activities that require students to solve problems independently. As expertise and problem-solving skill increase, ask students to spend less time studying examples of solved problems and more time working independently to solve new problems.
- Use quizzes and exams as opportunities to learn. Tests require students to practice retrieving information from memory. Students get feedback about retrieval success during the test and from their test scores. They can learn about how well the strategies they used to learn new material worked. Ask students to reflect on how they prepared for an exam and ask them to consider whether using a different study strategy might improve future test performance. Post-exam reflections (exam wrappers) help students calibrate their judgments about how well they prepared and how much they learned. These insights can guide their choices for future study activities.

## Resources

- Ambrose, S. A., Bridges, M. W., DiPietro, M., Lovett, M. C., & Norman, M. K. (2010). *How learning works: Seven research-based principles for smart teaching*. Jossey-Bass.
- Anderson, J. R., & Reder, L. M. (1979). An elaborative processing explanation of depth of processing. In L. S. Cermak and F. I. M. Craik (Eds.), *Levels of processing in human memory* (pp. 385-404). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
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## Learning without Learning Styles

Now that you know there is no evidence to support the concept of “learning styles,” what can you do to help students learn? Dan Willingham suggests that utilizing strategies that work with how everyone learns will be more successful than attempting to hyper-individualize our approaches. All students have certain things in common. For example, they need to develop their domain-specific knowledge, they benefit from practice, and they benefit from feedback from a knowledgeable source.

Students also all will learn more when study time is distributed rather than massed, when they can practice repeated retrieval (as opposed to review) in those times, and when they are given examples that are both abstract and concrete.

See more about these strategies here:

[http://www.deansforimpact.org/pdfs/The\\_Science\\_of\\_Learning.pdf](http://www.deansforimpact.org/pdfs/The_Science_of_Learning.pdf).

Reference:

Willingham, D., & Daniel, D. (2012). Teaching to what students have in common. *Educational Leadership*, 69(5), 16-21.

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## Minute Papers

How can you know whether your students benefitted from their time in class? You know what you painstakingly prepared and presented, but how can you be sure of what they learned, or found exciting, or in what ways they may have missed your points entirely? Consider the *minute paper*. In the last few minutes of class, ask your students to take out a piece of paper, write their name and the date at the top, and then answer a general question like any of these:

1. What was the most important/interesting/surprising thing you learned today?
2. What did you find confusing, or what are you not sure you understand?
3. What did today's class make you wonder about, or what do you want to learn more about?

Another approach is to ask students something much more specific. It may surprise you to see the variety of responses to a seemingly simple question such as:

4. What was the most important point of today's lesson?

You may find that students who are otherwise reluctant to speak up in class will have quite a lot to say in their minute papers. You can use their responses to identify points you wish to go over, or to plan alternative ways to present course material. If you explain to students that this is what you are doing, they are likely to appreciate that you are responsive to their needs as learners.

For more on this approach, see Mosteller's 1989 article, "The 'muddiest point in the lecture' as a feedback device," <http://bokcenter.harvard.edu/files/bokcenter/files/otl3-mosteller-muddiest.pdf?m=1407245503>.

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## Who Gets the Credit and the Blame?

Attribution theory... fancy words for “Who do I blame?” (Snowman & McCown, 2015). In this case blame isn’t always a bad thing. More accurately, it’s a matter of asking, “To what do I attribute my successes and failures?” When working with pre-service teachers, I try to help them understand the value of encouraging their future students to attribute accurately. If a student succeeds, we want them to attribute their success to hard work and strategic thinking, not luck. If a student fails, we don’t want them to attribute failure to lack of intelligence. It’s an uphill battle to move students from a place of, “I failed because I’m dumb,” or, “The test wasn’t fair,” to, “I failed because I didn’t understand it this time, but with different strategies I can succeed next time.”

For faculty, accurate attributions are important too. Professors need to accurately understand the relative successes of their students and the causes of those successes. Sometimes, we have a tendency to assume that students passing our exams and giving us positive course evals are all based on our brilliance, and failures of our students are based on their inability to think and follow directions. This is myopic and potentially harmful to our students. The former attribution smacks of hubris and prevents us from understanding how to recreate quality learning when our audience or circumstances change (and they are changing rapidly). The latter attribution is really a circular argument (they can’t learn because they don’t know how to learn) and won’t do anything to improve outcomes for those students or the future ones who will enter our classrooms.

I have found myself repeatedly referring to John Hattie’s (2015) Visible Learning Research, and particularly his examination of the impact of educational interventions on student achievement in higher education. According to Hattie’s study, the greatest influence on achievement is a teacher’s desire to understand her impact on student learning. So, attempting to correctly attribute successes and failures is the key element in improving learning. Some tools I used in pursuit of this goal in my classes were mid-term evaluations of the course. In one instance, I asked students to tell me what they thought of as the most important concept or skill they had learned, how confident they felt in their mastery of that skill, and what helped them or hindered them from ‘getting it’. These formative assessments allowed me to see the course, eight weeks in, through my learners’ eyes and better understand what was working for them and what wasn’t, specifically related to the learning outcomes of the course. There was still time to revisit important skills and concepts, and to try new strategies if the previous ones weren’t working.

I started off this note with the word ‘blame’ and I really don’t like that connotation, but what I especially don’t like is when we as educators tend to blame someone else for our failures while simultaneously owning our successes. Better to own them all equally, and while we are at it, use what we learn from formative assessment to improve learning outcomes for our students in the future.



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Hattie, J. (2015). The applicability of visible learning to higher education. *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology*, 1(1), 79-91.

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## Beware the Curse of Knowledge

How can knowledge be a curse? The term is used by psychologists to refer to the human condition wherein once we know something, or how to do something, it is impossible to re-experience what it was like to be ignorant of it. The result is that we tend to overestimate how common the knowledge is that we now possess, or how easy it is to be able to perform the activity we now know how to do. This curse of knowledge tends to leave us assuming learners know particular things that we now consider basic yet the learners have yet to grasp. Learner may be confused by our instruction, which leaves out important information assumed to be “common knowledge,” and we may be frustrated by the learner’s apparent inability to perform at a level we assume to be appropriate.

To circumvent the curse of knowledge you could develop the habit of asking learners what they know about the topic or ability at hand, before providing instruction or guidance that is based on the response. Be sure to ask the question openly: “Describe for me what you know about X,” rather than, “Do you know about X?” The latter is likely to elicit a “yes” response, either out of a sense of performance pressure or because the learner does not recognize what they don’t know about X.

Another approach to address the curse of knowledge is to consistently start your teaching or demonstrating at a bit lower level than you naturally would. If it seems to you that your starting point is a bit too basic, you likely are starting at an appropriate place. If it turns out to be a bit below the actual knowledge or ability of the learner, the worst case may be simply that the learner feels somewhat reassured in their recognition of a baseline level of competence. What might you do a little differently now that you’re aware of the curse of knowledge?

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## Journaling for Professional Development

As educators, many of us want our students to become more nuanced, reflective thinkers, but we do not always take the time necessary to apply the same standard to our teaching. Improving your classroom practice isn't always about finding the right technological tool or incorporating the latest pedagogical fad. Deeper, more meaningful change often originates from within.

Writing about your teaching is perhaps the single most powerful first step you can take on the road to becoming the kind of instructor you wish to be. Documenting your thoughts, feelings, and observations can help you to better understand what is happening in your classroom as well as provide a solid baseline for introducing changes in your practice. Having a single place for this writing (like a journal or word document you regularly update) makes it easier to view the big picture of your growth as an educator.

### Getting Started

Although the first week of a new semester seems like the right time to begin a new teaching journal, in reality there is no better time to begin than today. Is it the middle of the semester? Make your first entry an overview of what has happened so far. Are you beginning your journal during the summer or winter break? Begin by brainstorming some ideas you'd like to try in the upcoming semester. The end of the semester is a great time to start, as you can begin by looking back on what has just happened in your courses and make some notes towards future improvements. Whatever point in the year it is, just do yourself a favor and start writing.

### Practical Considerations

Before you begin your journal, here are a few things to consider.

#### Who?

As you write, try to keep in mind that your goal is to help you become a better instructor. Resist the urge to waste ink bemoaning bad student behaviour or intractable administrators. Focus whenever possible on your own behaviors and how you can improve them. That's what you have the most power to change in the classroom.

#### What?

When you journal, you can write about whatever you want, but try to focus on three things. 1) What worked in the classroom that you'd like to do again. Make sure you're specific enough that you can reproduce it in the future. 2) What didn't work out the way you wanted. Write about what you think went needs improvement. 3) What didn't work that you think should be cut from your future practice. Write to yourself why you are abandoning this practice. In all three cases, you want to be able to go back years from now and understand what happened and what your thoughts were at the time.



### When?

Ideally, we'd all have the time to write a lengthy journal entry after every class meeting, but many of us live such hurried lives that one substantial journal entry a week is more practical. Block the time out in your calendar/planner and commit to it. Journaling isn't a frivolity; you're making a concerted effort to become a better you! Surely, that's worth at least 30 minutes out of your week.

### Where?

This question covers both where you are writing and where your writing goes--that is, what you will write in. The location where you write matters; you need a place where you can concentrate, whether it be your office or your favorite cafe. The place where you put your writing needs to be convenient for updating, storage, and retrieval. That could mean a fancy blank journal from a stationery store, an ordinary composition notebook, a word processor file, or even a public-facing blog. Choose the venue that you find most welcoming, that makes it easiest for you to engage your own thoughts.

### How?

For many people, starting can be the hardest part of journaling. The desire to write something both deeply insightful and grammatically perfect results in nothing but writer's block. Give yourself permission to be an imperfect writer! No one is evaluating this writing and no one needs to be able to understand what is written but you.

### Why?

Although the simple act of writing about your classroom experiences can help you feel more in control of the situation, remember that the main purpose of your teaching journal is to provide you with a record that you can consult at a later date. Go back and reread at least some of your journal entries a couple of times a year, particularly at the start of a semester, or when (re)designing a course.

### Final Thoughts

Most entries in your teaching journal should arise out of your experiences in the classroom, but don't hesitate to add other things that are relevant, such as feedback received from classroom observations, thoughts generated after reviewing end-of-the-semester student evaluations, or notes taken at a professional development workshop. If reviewing it could help you think and grow as an instructor, there's room for it in your teaching journal.

### Resources

Brookfield, Stephen D. *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*. Jossey-Bass, 1995.  
Stevens, Dannelle D. and Joanne E. Cooper. *Journal Keeping: How to Use Reflective Writing for Learning, Teaching, Professional Insight, and Positive Change*. Stylus, 2009.

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## How Mindfulness Meditation May Benefit You *and* Your Teaching

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this past year was particularly challenging for faculty and their students. Mindfulness meditation is one helpful practice for reducing stress and anxiety and improving well-being. Kabat-Zinn (2003) defines mindfulness as “paying attention in a particular way – on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.” Researchers have documented the benefits of mindfulness for various populations, including educators (Matiz et al., 2020; Zarate, Maggin, & Passmore, 2019).

### Value of Mindfulness for the Academic Community

Benefits of mindfulness meditation include increased attention, stress recovery, improved physical and mental health, and enhanced relationship satisfaction (Creswell et al., 2019; Gu, Strauss, Bond, & Cavanagh, 2015; McGill, Adler-Baeder, & Rodriguez, 2016; Sumantry & Stewart, 2021).

In order to engage in self-care during the pandemic, a group of psychology faculty gathered virtually to practice mindfulness meditation. During a socially isolating time, this helped increase our faculty connections across campuses, led to helpful and honest discussions about teaching/learning issues, and deepened our friendships and creative collaborations. This also strengthened our broader academic community, as we brought greater creativity and empathy to our work with students.

### How to Get Started with a Mindfulness Meditation Practice

- **Experiment with different practices.** - It is helpful to try different types of practices to determine what works best and fits your lifestyle.
- **Connect with others practicing mindfulness meditation.** - Having a group of supportive individuals engaging in the same practice as you can be helpful in sustaining your practice, even early on. This could include other faculty (e.g., starting a campus group, etc.).
- **Be kind to yourself and remember it is a practice.** - Establishing and maintaining a practice is a journey. Don't criticize yourself if you miss a session or your mind wanders during one.

### Common Barriers and How to Overcome Them

Table 1 provides strategies that may be helpful in addressing potential barriers to your mindfulness meditation practice.

**Table 1**

#### *Strategies to Overcome Barriers to a Mindfulness Meditation Practice*

Barriers	Strategy
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Restlessness (e.g., stress, anxiety)	<p><b>Compassion for and trust of self:</b> Acknowledge your feelings of restlessness and commend yourself for just showing up.</p> <p><b>Be open-minded:</b> Recognize and acknowledge the thoughts that occur or where your mind may wander during your practice and allow yourself to return to the meditation.</p>
Doubt (e.g., imposter syndrome, perfectionism)	<p><b>Focus on the process, not perfection:</b> Meditation is a practice, which means you do not have to be perfect at it. Everyone's skill for the practice develops at a different rate. Accept where you are in the process.</p>
Feelings of not having enough time	<p><b>Building consistency and scheduling:</b> Making meditation a part of your weekly or daily schedule can help ensure you stick with the practice. Remember that even five minutes of meditation has benefits.</p>
Thinking Meditation is "not for me"	<p><b>Finding the best-suited types for you, i.e., shorter practices, movement practices:</b> Incorporate meditation into activities you do regularly.</p>

## Conclusion

Practicing mindfulness meditation has both personal and professional value. Table 2 provides some resources to help you get started. As you incorporate mindfulness into your life and your teaching, gently remind yourself that adopting and refining a mindfulness practice is a process. The techniques and skills you develop by adopting a mindfulness meditation practice could be an effective enhancement to your academic life.

**Table 2**

### *Resources to Help You Get Started*

Books	Sample Meditations	Websites & Apps
<a href="#">Full Catastrophe Living</a> by Jon Kabat-Zinn	<a href="#">Breath Meditation</a>	<a href="#">Headspace</a>
<a href="#">The Issue at Hand</a> by Gil Fronsdal	<a href="#">Body Scan</a>	<a href="#">Insight Timer</a>
<a href="#">Transforming Suffering</a> by Thich Naht Hahn	<a href="#">Hatha Yoga</a>	<a href="#">Smiling Mind</a>
	<a href="#">Loving-Kindness</a>	<a href="#">Jon Kabat-Zinn</a>
	<a href="#">RAIN</a>	<a href="#">TaraBrach.com</a>
	<a href="#">Mindful Eating and Experiencing Chocolate</a>	<a href="#">Thich Naht Hahn</a>
	<a href="#">Gratitude Walking Meditation</a>	<a href="#">Mindful.org</a>
	<a href="#">Self-Compassion Break</a>	



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- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). Mindfulness-based interventions in context: Past, present, and future. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 10(2), 144–156.
- Matiz A., Fabbro, F., Paschetto, A., Cantone, D., Paolone, A. R., & Crescentini, C. (2020). Positive impact of mindfulness meditation on mental health of female teachers during the COVID-19 outbreak in Italy. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(18), 6450.
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- Zarate, K., Maggin, D. M., & Passmore, A. (2019). Meta-analysis of mindfulness training on teacher well-being. *Psychology in the Schools*, 56(10), 1700-1715.

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## Make Professional Development Personal

When faculty are asked what they enjoy most about teaching conferences or workshops, they often say that the best part was time spent talking about teaching with other faculty. Teaching can be a remarkably isolated, even lonely, endeavor, which can leave faculty craving contact with colleagues. Instead of waiting for the next professional development session, however, you can coordinate with faculty in your area or from across campus to get together informally to create your own support network. Such opportunities for sharing can promote a sense of belonging among faculty, shared purpose, mutual appreciation, and collegiality. The general idea here is very similar to what others have described as faculty learning communities (Cox, 2004) or mutual mentoring (Sorcinelli et al., 2016). If you are wondering what it might take to create your own teaching-support community, there is a strong chance that you are not alone.

Cox (2004) suggests two types of faculty learning communities to consider:

1. Cohort-based groups consist of faculty who gather to share general ideas about teaching, such as describing the best thing they've tried in class recently (what Mellow et al. call appreciative inquiry), or the best moment they've experienced. Group members might get together periodically on or off campus for informal conversations, visit one another's classes, or share resources. These might be broadly construed as support groups sharing ideas about problems and solutions, addressing a variety of topics of interest as they become relevant from one meeting to the next.
2. Topic-based groups involve faculty with a common concern, such as a shared course, set of needs, or a specific opportunity. Instructors who teach different sections of the same course could meet to identify shared goals and develop course objectives that will be consistent across sections and support program-level student learning outcomes. Academic freedom is maintained in how course objectives are met, but faculty can reduce each other's workload by developing shared materials, such as lectures, demonstrations, problem sets, or exams.

For more on this topic, see:

Cox, M. D. (2004). Introduction to faculty learning communities. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 97, 5- 23. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/tl.129>

Mellow, G. O., Woolis, D. D., Klages-Bombich, M., & Restler, S. G. (2015). *Taking college teaching seriously: Pedagogy matters! Fostering student success through faculty-centered practice improvement*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Sorcinelli, M. D., Yun, J., & Baldi, B. (2016). *Mutual mentoring guide*. The Institute for Teaching Excellence & Faculty Development. <https://www.rit.edu/nsfadvance/assets/pdf/mutualmentoringguide2016-10-7.pdf>.

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## Student Evaluations of Teaching

One of most controversial areas of research in higher education concerns student ratings of course instruction. Properly interpreted, student feedback provides invaluable information about the experience of a course—information that simply is not available from any other source. Taken as a sole indicator of instructor quality, however, student course evaluations can cause more problems than they are intended to solve. In 2008, Remedios and Lieberman examined the extent to which course evaluations completed by over 700 undergraduates could be predicted by grades, workload, students' expectations, and their achievement goals. Ratings were strongly related to how much students felt stimulated by the course content, but only weakly and indirectly to grades.

You can learn more about the myths and realities of student course evaluations here:

1. Remedios, R., & Lieberman, D. A. (2008). I liked your course because you taught me well: The influence of grades, workload, expectations and goals on students' evaluations of teaching. *British Educational Research Journal*, 34(1), 91-115.  
[http://www.academia.edu/1353446/I\\_liked\\_your\\_course\\_because\\_you\\_taught\\_me\\_well\\_The\\_influence\\_of\\_grades\\_workload\\_expectations\\_and\\_goals\\_on\\_students\\_evaluations\\_of\\_teaching](http://www.academia.edu/1353446/I_liked_your_course_because_you_taught_me_well_The_influence_of_grades_workload_expectations_and_goals_on_students_evaluations_of_teaching)
2. Michael Theall's overview at <http://studentratings.byu.edu/info/faculty/myths.asp>
3. Nira Hativa's 2014 book *Student ratings of instruction: Recognizing effective teaching*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.

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## Garnering Feedback

When I work with faculty in our T&L Center, the number one piece of advice I share is, collect student feedback. I see it serving two valuable purposes. The first is to give you insight into the student experience BEFORE the class is over and you have no opportunity to make corrections. Second, most faculty find that students whose views are solicited via mid-semester feedback feel more committed to the course, engage more actively in it, and consider themselves partners in ensuring successful outcomes for the course.

This feedback is distinct from the course evaluations distributed at the end of the term and is intended solely for your own use, to provide an additional channel of communication with your students. For that communication to be most successful, it's important BOTH to prepare your students briefly and to provide feedback after they respond. When you distribute the questionnaire (paper, Google Form/online survey or text), clarify for your students how you intend to use their feedback. For me, incremental adjustments are possible, but major redesign of a course midway through the semester is not advisable. Being clear about this up front gives students reasonable expectations for the outcome. Closing the loop in this way lets the students know that you value their input, and it can further illuminate your teaching goals and expectations for them. In addition, handing out a mid-term evaluation signals to your class that you are indeed interested in what and how they're learning, and in their responses to your teaching.

My first use of mid-term feedback was inspired by Stephen Brookfield's [Critical Incident Questionnaire](#). From there, I tried a few stripped down simple approaches:

1. Two Questions (Jan Tullis, Brown University)
  - a. What aspects of the course have been especially helpful in terms of your learning?
  - b. What aspects of the course could be improved?
2. Three Things (Craig Nelson, Indiana University - Bloomington)
  - a. What are three important things you have learned so far?
  - b. What are three aspects of the class that have helped your learning so far?
  - c. What are three things that you wish were different?
3. Keep / Start / Stop (NYU Center for Teaching)
  - a. What should we keep doing?
  - b. What should we start doing?
  - c. What should we stop doing?

I ended up liking parts/pieces of several of these approaches, so depending on the class, I pick/choose from a list of questions including the ones listed above:

1. Do you usually understand what is expected of you in preparing for and participating in this class? If not, please explain why not.
2. What aspects of this course and your instructor's teaching help you learn best?



3. What specific advice would you give to help your instructor improve your learning in this course?
4. What steps could you take to improve your own learning in this course?
5. What are the most important things you have learned so far in this class?
6. What would you like to see more of between now and the end of the semester?
7. What would you like to see less of between now and the end of the semester?
8. What do you need to do in terms of understanding the material between now and the end of the semester?
9. What is helping you to learn in this class?
10. What is making learning difficult?

I then sort the responses into three three categories:

1. Things that are going well.
2. Things that we could work on.
3. Things that we can't change.

At the next class I allow about 5-10 minutes and discuss the results. Under “things that are going well,” I remind them that this success requires all of us. For “things to work on,” they often list some things that they are not doing well (not spending enough time on the homework, not particularly adept in an area, lack of sleep, etc.). They also list things that I do that cause them problems such as going over a concept too quickly, not explaining thoroughly what something meant, assigning too much work in a particular week, etc. We briefly discuss ways we both can improve things. Lastly, I talk about “things we cannot change” and often this involves clarifying why we are doing something or why I selected a particular reading. I also let them know that while these are things I cannot change this term, I will revisit their feedback the next time I'm planning to teach the course in case there are other options.

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## Using Student Evaluations to Improve Your Teaching

This tip provides resources on how to interpret student course evaluations and use student feedback to reflect on and improve your teaching.

### Preparing to read the feedback

Sifting through the noise inherent in student perception data is not always easy, especially since we're somewhat hardwired to focus (and dwell) on negative comments and lower-than-expected numbers. The following questions can help you overcome your initial reaction to your student evaluation data and uncover the trends that point to meaningful course improvements.

- Ask yourself: What is surprising? What did you already know?
- Look for patterns: What are the themes that emerge across different responses?
- Make choices: What constructive suggestions seem appealing to you?
- Don't get upset by the few offensive comments from disgruntled students—they happen.

For more information on student evaluations, see these resources from University of Virginia's Center for Teaching Excellence:

- [End-of-Semester Course Evaluations](#)
- [Taking Stock: Evaluations from Students](#)
- [How I Read My Student Evaluations](#)
- [The Course Evaluation Follow-Up Form](#)

### Interpreting the data

Though student perception data can be meaningful and ultimately useful in improving your instruction and future iterations of the course, care must be taken to determine the significance and validity of the data. Here are some general principles and guidelines to help you get the most out of the numerical data and written comments reported on evaluations.

#### Making sense of the numbers

Instead of—or in addition to—looking at the mean scores, look at the distribution of responses. This [helpful resource from Stanford University](#) illustrates how courses with the same mean scores can have very different patterns of evaluation responses and explains how to interpret different response distributions.

#### Making sense of the written comments

It can be difficult to assign meaning to student comments, which can sometimes seem random or contradictory. This [excellent guide from the University of](#)



[Virginia](#) offers a simple set of techniques for analyzing written comments.

### Reflecting on your teaching

Reviewing course evaluation responses is one method for reflecting on your teaching and courses. We've tracked down some additional resources that offer ways to examine your teaching practices. Considering your teaching from more than one perspective can provide a more well-rounded view of instruction.

- [Questions for Bringing Your Instructional Practices into Focus](#)
- [Is My Teaching Learner-Centered?](#)
- [Reflective Teaching](#)

Also **be sure to celebrate your successes!** Did you have a lesson that went especially well? Did you try a new instructional technology or teaching strategy? Did you have a student who achieved a breakthrough in learning? Did you provide support for a struggling student? Did you make it through an entire class without forgetting to unmute?

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