



Teachers' Grab Bag: Best Teaching Practices

Former TA Mentors Cheryl McCormick and Jennifer Walker compiled this list from award-winning faculty and TAs at UGA for a presentation at the 2000 Lilly Conference on Teaching. Enjoy these gems!

Effective Lecturing Strategies

Dr. Steven P. Lewis, Professor, Physics and Astronomy

Class Notes: Although I prepare detailed, well-organized lecture notes, I do *not* make them available to my students. The argument in favor of giving out lecture notes is that the students are freed from having to take notes and can, therefore, focus on listening to the lecture. This argument, I feel, is completely backwards. There is ample pedagogical research to demonstrate that students assimilate and retain information better when they are actively engaged in their own learning.

J. Michael Bitzer, Graduate Teaching Assistant, Political Science

Current Events: I ask one student per class to present a "current event" prior to class. They give a 5-minute presentation, after which I ask questions. This usually encourages questions and discussion from the class. I end the discussion with the question, "How is government involved in this event?"

Dr. Lynda Walters, Professor, Department of Child and Family

Web CT Notes: I use WebCT as a way to distribute lecture notes. I include a copy of the schedule of classes on the Web with links to notes. The "bare bones" notes are spaced such that students can easily write on them. My overheads match the Web notes, but add more information, which are intended to be further supplemented by lecture material. Feedback concerning this technique is quite positive.

Dynamic Learning Tools

Jennifer Walker, Graduate Teaching Assistant, Microbiology

Teaching for 100, Alex!... During review sessions, I provide a game similar to *Jeopardy*. On the board I list 5 to 7 categories depending on how much material I've covered before the exam. Under each category are points ranging from 100 to 500. The class can be divided into smaller teams, and answers can be discussed among the teams – a representative is chosen to present the agreed-upon answer, or any team member can answer.

Dr. Deborah Martin, Assistant Professor, Geography

"Brainstorming": In large lecture classes, I do a "brainstorm" exercise. To introduce a topic, say on "globalization", I ask students what they think of when they hear the term. Spend a good 5 or 10 minutes allowing them to think about it and shout ideas out. Write all the ideas on the board, and then when presenting the "proper" or "disciplinary" meaning of the term, try to incorporate their ideas --the things they shouted out and that were written on the board-- into the subsequent lecture.

Andrew Osborne, Graduate Teaching Assistant, Chemistry

Accommodate Different Learning Styles: I use everyday objects, such as erasers and pencils, to visually illustrate conceptually challenging material. For example, I'll use colored erasers, and assign each eraser a letter that corresponds to its color (e.g., "Y" for yellow, "G" for green, etc.). The pencil represents a chemical bond.

Project Plan Reviews: I teach a laboratory-based course in which the students are required to do research projects. Each student (or team) turns in their project plan to me for review. After giving them written feedback, I devoted one lab period to having them present their plans to their peers. The students question the presenter about the protocol and make suggestions for improvements. It provides students with a chance to become familiar with the types of projects that their peers have planned, brings as many minds to the plan as possible, and avoids potential problems with implementation.

Dr. Brenda Manning, *Professor, Education*

Collaborative Test-Taking: I offer this option for one exam during the semester. Students are given options of taking the test individually or with a partner. With a partner, they must discuss the questions, reach consensus on an answer, and turn in one exam. There must be two classrooms in order to implement this technique: one for individual test-takers, and one for partner test-takers.

Dr. Jodi Holschuh, *Assistant Professor, Division of Academic Assistance*

Evaluation: At the mid-term point, students are asked to provide written evaluations and suggest adjustments to the course/syllabus. Responses are read in class and then negotiations are made for any changes. The students really appreciate efforts to adjust the class to accommodate their needs!

Julie Dangremond Stanton, *Graduate Teaching Assistant, Cellular Biology*

Reducing Test Anxiety: Because all cellular biology examinations are essay-based, I like to give my students practice essay questions at the beginning of each discussion session. It helps students rehearse, review the previous week's material, and reduce test anxiety.

Building Rapport

Dr. William Barstow, *Professor, Botany*

Establishing Rapport with Students: Using a digital camera, I take pictures of students (in laboratory sections) with name on back or holding up card with name. On a separate index card, students list name, hometown, year, etc. I review pictures and index cards before class, then utilize cards/photos to call upon students in class by name. Students realize that they cannot remain anonymous, even in large classes.

Dr. Michele Simpson, *Professor, Division of Academic Assistance*

Student Conferences: I arrive to class early to talk to students as they come in, and send around a sign-up sheet for a 10-minute conference at the beginning of the semester to meet with students. This encourages students to adopt a proactive approach to the course and their education in general.

Dr. Dan Coenen, *Professor, School of Law*

Work with YOUR Personal Style: Give positive reinforcement--often. Wear a cheesehead, preferably while standing on a desk. Communicate sincere enthusiasm for your profession. Using self-deprecating humor can be a useful tool if used sparingly.

Generating Intrinsic Motivation

Dr. Ken Robinson, *Assistant Professor of Strategy and Entrepreneurship, Kennesaw State University*

Team Effort ("Survivor Style"): I encourage confidential peer evaluation scores on group projects. The groups are given the ability to dismiss any group member based on unanimous consensus of other group members. I make it clear at the start of the class anyone who is fired from their group gets an "individual comprehensive final exam" to replace all group work and grades. I further tell them no one has ever passed such an exam and typically fail the class as a result.

Dr. Rodney Mauricio, *Assistant Professor, Genetics*

Chocolate! In a large lecture class, I encourage class participation by rewarding any student who answers one of my questions with a bite-size chocolate bar (Halloween size). Whether they answer correctly or not, whether the question is trivial or not, anyone speaking up gets chocolate.

Cheryl M. McCormick, *Graduate Teaching Assistant, Institute of Ecology*

One Flew Over The...: Humor, wit, and absolute frenzied enthusiasm for your work in general go a *long way* in making a positive (and lasting) impression with your students. When I'm out in the field, I use impromptu props, get waist-deep in the mud, and show fascination with any little thing my students may point out – from the tiniest microinvertebrate to the largest tree. Enthusiasm is contagious!

Encouraging Group Dynamics

Dr. Charles Kutal, *Professor, Chemistry*

Group Collaboration: Using the internet/E-mail server or an announcement board, allow students to post questions or problems for the professor to answer. These news groups help students overcome anxiety associated with large classroom discussion. Encourage study groups by extra credit for group work, then regularly assign group work - possibly assign groups a room on campus to meet.

Carl Burkart, *Graduate Teaching Assistant, History Department*

Invoking Thoughtful Dialog: When reading material(s) that students are likely to have strong opinions about (e.g., book, peer-reviewed articles, commentary, etc), I ask students to write questions about the reading on index cards. I then shuffle the cards and ask students to comment on and answer the questions. This technique is especially successful when the reading is provocative or thought-provoking.