Teaching Tips

General Tips

“You have only one chance to make a first impression.” So, on the first day of class: Get to class early! Have your name, extension, office room number, written on the board before students arrive. Be sure that students know your name and how and when to contact you before they leave. Start the class on time (this will show that you expect students to arrive on time). - Bill Trusten, USC Staff Member

Try to learn the names of some students and refer to students by name. Students in large classes seem to appreciate an instructor’s attempt to learn some names. If a student brings up a point, ask for the student’s name, and refer to that point or question by his or hers. The effect of personal address carries over to all the students.


Create opportunities for all students to talk in class during the first two weeks. The longer a student goes without speaking in class, the more difficult it will be to speak up. Use small-group or pair work early in the term so that all students can participate in nonthreatening circumstances.


Good teaching is as much about passion as it is about reason. It’s about motivating students not only to learn, but teaching them how to learn, and doing so in a manner that is relevant, meaningful and memorable. It’s about caring for your craft, having a passion for it and conveying that passion to everyone, but mostly importantly to your students.

Faculty Focus on Higher Ed, Richard LeBlanc, Ph.D.
https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/philosophy-of-teaching/good-teaching-the-top-10-requirements/

Give students specific pointers. Frequent, immediate, and specific feedback helps students learn, and most students increase their effort in response to praise and encouragement. Focus your comments on one or two items at a time, helping students see the destination, the path and the next immediate steps. Constructive criticism and evidence of progress will sustain students’ motivation to learn and to persevere.


Use concrete examples, e.g., case studies in my own field, are very useful not only for illustrating abstract concepts but for helping the student remember them. Use lots of them. - Jerry Davison, Center for Excellence in Teaching (CET) Distinguished Fellow & USC Professor of Psychology and Gerontology

“Students often learn more from interacting with other students than from listening to us. One of the best methods of gaining clearer, long-lasting understanding is explaining to someone else.” McKeachie’s Teaching Tips, Svinicki, Maria and Wilbert McKeachie, 14th Ed. Wadsworth Cengage Learning 2014.

“Create a classroom environment that promotes a mastery orientation, focused on the development of understanding and mastery of material and skills, rather than on relative performance to others.” McKeachie’s Teaching Tips, Svinicki, Maria and Wilbert McKeachie, 14th Ed. Wadsworth Cengage Learning 2014.

During the last ten minutes of class, ask students to complete the following or similar statements:

As I understand it the main idea [point or concept] of today’s session was…

A good example of an application of this idea is …
The main point of today’s session was most closely related to the following concepts, processes, events, or things: …


**Get your students to help each other.** When a question is asked, seek the answer from the class rather than always providing the answer. You will find that, if students can answer questions and help each other, you know you are communicating well. This will also help the class to develop a “team spirit”. Remember: you’re all in this together. **Bill Trusten**, USC Staff Member

**After each class jot down some quick notes** on what went well and what could be improved. Refer to your notes the next time you teach that material.

**Academic Integrity**

Discuss standards of academic dishonesty at the beginning of the term. General admonitions to “avoid cheating” are relatively ineffective. Help students distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behavior by giving examples of plagiarism, impermissible collaboration, and other practices. 


"Dishonesty is less likely when students feel that the teacher and other students know them and trust them than in situations where they feel alienated and anonymous.” — McKeachie’s Teaching Tips, Svinicki, Maria and Wilbert McKeachie, 14th Ed. Wadsworth Cengage Learning 2014, p. 97.

**Assignments**

Studies suggest that within a matter of days or weeks, students may forget up to half of the new material they have encounter if they don’t continue to review the material. Tools for Teaching, Barbara Gross Davis, 2nd Ed. Jossey-Bass, 2009. A Wiley Imprint www.Josseybass.com, p. 263

Make tests cumulative. Cumulative tests require students to review material that have already studied, thus reinforcing what they have learned. Cumulative tests also give students the chance to integrate and synthesize course content.


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Consider three questions when creating assignments: what, exactly, are you asking students to do (the "task"); why students have to do it (the "purpose"); and how the work will be evaluated (the "criteria"). Then explain those things to your students. Mary-Ann Winkelmnes, Transparency in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education – UNLV.

Foster intrinsic motivation by arousing curiosity, providing challenge, and offering choices, and provide extrinsic rewards that contain informative feedback and focus on improvement.” McKeachie’s Teaching Tips, Svinicki, Maria and Wilbert McKeachie, 14th Ed. Wadsworth Cengage Learning 2014.

For homework, ask students to prepare two questions about the reading. During class, students pair off and ask and answer each other’s questions.

Communicating with your Students

Be honest! Don’t try to “bluff” an answer—if you don’t know the answer, admit it. Let students help to answer questions you don’t immediately know the answer to (this gives you time to recall the information). It will also make students feel comfortable about speaking when they don’t know the entire answer. If you cannot answer the question, tell the student you will find the answer and report back at the next class meeting. Be sure to follow through; don’t make promises you don’t keep.—Bill Trusten

Talk about questions students have had in previous terms. Mention specific questions that former student have asked and explain why they are excellent questions. This acknowledgement lets students know that you take their questions seriously and that their questions will contribute to future offerings of the course Tools for Teaching, Barbara Gross Davis, 2nd Ed. Jossey-Bass, 2009. A Wiley Imprint www.Josseybass.com, p. 165.

Interact with students; include opportunities for active learning. Demonstrate from the first class that you are interested in what students are thinking. Include plenty of opportunities for students to ask and answer questions. While a lecture course will provide fewer opportunities for interaction than a discussion course, you will find that students will be able to learn and retain more material if you pause every 15-20 minutes to ask questions or to ask students to apply a theory, solve a problem, or discuss a debated point. –The Teaching Center, Tips for Faculty, Washington University in St. Louis

Course Evaluations

Conduct mid-semester course evaluations to provide your students an opportunity to give you feedback on your course by allowing them to provide a mid-term evaluation of the course. Students appreciate being able to provide feedback that will directly impact their course rather than future courses.

Explain to your students the importance of the year-end course evaluations. Encourage all students to provide thoughtful responses. Let the students know you value their input on the course and that their insightful comments and reflections will improve your understanding of how the students are learning the material.

Facilitate Deeper Learning

Emphasize the value of review. Studies suggest that within a matter of days or weeks, students may forget up to half of the new material they have encountered if they don’t continue to review the material. To help students retain key concepts, encourage them to develop retrieval cues (such as mnemonic or visual images). In class, reiterate important points throughout the semester. Tools for Teaching, Barbara Gross Davis, 2nd Ed. Jossey-Bass, 2009. A Wiley Imprint www.Josseybass.com, p. 263.

Encourage students to review their exam and look at the questions they missed to see if there’s a pattern. Ask them to write brief descriptions of how they studied and, based on that information, have them consider if there are changes that might better prepare them for the next exam. Maryellen Weimer, Faculty Focus, Getting More Out of Exam Debriefs, Oct. 19 2016. http://www.facultyfocus.com/free-reports/

Grading


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**Honing the Craft**

**Reflect on your teaching.** How can you positively impact student learning in the last few weeks of the semester?

**Get emotionally ready for each class.** Set aside time right before you teach to focus your mind on your goals for that day and to look forward to teaching-to interacting with students, helping them learn the day’s material, and responding to the questions and ideas that they bring to class. –The Teaching Center, *Tips for Faculty*, Washington University in St. Louis

**Inclusive Classroom**

**To reduce racism in college classrooms,** Harper and Davis recommend, “Recognizing one’s implicit biases is a crucial first step.” *Project Implicit* at Harvard University offers free online tests that help reveal how we have been socialized to view people from racial backgrounds that are different from our own (see https://implicit.harvard.edu). Take a moment to find out how this might be impacting your teaching. Shaun R. Harper, Ph.D. and Charles H.F. Davis. "Eight Actions to Reduce Racism in College Classrooms" *Academe* Vol. 102 Iss. 6 (2016). Available at: https://www.aaup.org/article/eight-actions-reduce-racism-college-classrooms#.WlgRsIWKdB4

**Lectures**

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When lecturing, clearly lay out the motivation for your choice of topics at the beginning and at the end of each lecture segment. It is far easier to retain interest in a topic when its context within a broader course outline or syllabus is clear at all times. –Gene Bickers, CET Distinguished Fellow & Professor of Physics

**Understanding your Students**


**Additional Resources**

Dornsife Ph.D. Academy webpage on teaching - https://dornsife.usc.edu/phd-academy/teaching/

**References**
